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Most Reverend Direction of the Leopoldine Foundation

I am now on the point of leaving Arbre Croche, to go to a place assigned to me by Providence and by my superiors, where I should endeavor, with God's help, to establish a new mission for the conversion of the people there. There certainly will be many difficulties with this undertaking. Probably not all, perhaps not even many of those Indians will be converted to our holy religion, especially immediately from the beginning, nevertheless, it is worth the effort of going there, if only to save some few from eternal perdition who would not be saved if no priest would have gone there. And perhaps many, who at first are great enemies of religion, will become good Christians after some years, just as very frequently was the case at Arbre Croche, and now nearly all the Indians are converted; among them are many who at first gave little hope for conversion and who now are exemplary Christians! Perhaps the same will be repeated also in the new mission at Grand River, which God may grant!

Before I leave Arbre Croche I must make another report to the Most Rev. Direction concerning this mission. Toward the end of July, I again undertook a mission journey. In a neighboring location of Arbre Croche, which is rather large and entirely converted, the Indians have built a neat small church, which on this mission journey, on August 1, I blessed to God under the name of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and said the first mass therein. Then I continued my journey and visited Manistie, where I found everything in the nicest order. The local Indians remain steadfast in prayer and in the faithful performance of all Christian duties. The Indians of Manistie are all Christians, with the exception of one single old man, who till now has not yet been converted.

Some time ago a young Indian girl came from the north to Manistie with the intention of leaving forever her home and her pagan parents and to spend her life in Manistie, to be also a Christian like the Indians of that place. I baptized this chosen soul on August 6. From there I went to Little Detroit.

On my first visit, in the month of May of the current year, I recommended to the Indians there to erect a small chapel, and on this second visit I had the consolation of actually finding a small chapel of tree bark, which I blessed to God on August 9 under the name of St. Vincent de Paul, founder of the Mission Congregation. I also blessed there a small cemetery for the burial of Christians, as I have done previously in all outlying mission places. On August 12 I baptized there 3 Indians. At my departure from Little Detroit I gave the local Christians a letter of recommendation to the missionary at Green Bay in which I beg him to take over the spiritual care of these Christians, and also try to convert the other Indians of this location, because it is closer and more convenient to come there from Green Bay than from

Arbre Croche. At the time when I first promised these Indians to visit them, there was as yet no missionary at Green Bay.

On my return journey I landed on Beaver Island, however I found only a few Indians present on the island, most of them have left for Canada to receive their annual presents from the English government. I found their chapel only half finished. I questioned the few Christians whom I found there at the time about the reason for this delay, and they told me that the pagans of this island are still so hostile towards the religion that every time the Christians began to erect their chapel they pulled out the poles from the ground and overthrew them. Finally they succeeded once in building half the chapel. However, the pagans threatened them with burning it down as soon as it will be finished. That is why they have no desire to finish it, but are rather resolved to move to Arbre Croche in order to avoid the persecutions of these stubborn pagans. I approved of this intention of theirs, and let those who were absent at this visit of mine be told that I wish very much they would all come to Arbre Croche where they will be able to follow their religion without hindrance.

This was the situation of the mission on Beaver Island on my last visit. Now I do not know what the Christians there will do, whether they will remain on Beaver Island, or move to Arbre Croche.

I now hurried to return home, because I surmised that during my absence my successor may already have arrived at Arbre

Croche, and in my surmise I was not mistaken. The Rev. F. Simon Saenderl, priest of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer, and superior of the Redemptorists in America, besides two lay brothers from the same congregation, and the third is already here for the past 10 months, came to Arbre Croche on August 6 from Green Bay where he spent the last winter. Several more members of this venerable and zealous congregation are to come to Arbre Croche, as they say, and it is proposed to establish here the center of their missions. I now leave the mission of Arbre Croche peacefully and confidently, for I see it in the hands of pious and zealous priests who will give fatherly care to the newly converted Indians.

I enclose here my little map of a part of Michigan on which are shown the various outlying missions which I usually visited.

The first of these outlying missions, according to time, is called La Grande Traverse, south of Arbre Croche. It is still weak and numbers only 19 Christian souls. The Christians there do not all live in the same location, but somewhat distant from one another, they therefore have no chapel. But on my last visit in the past month, they have firmly promised me to move together, in one location, and then they will easily have a small chapel. There are very many pagans there, but they are very stubborn and very much opposed to religion. Perhaps my successor will succeed in converting more of them than I could.

The second is Beaver Island, west from Arbre Croche; it is considerable and numbers 55 Christians, of whom some have already moved to Arbre Croche, and perhaps all will move here soon. I intended to dedicate the chapel there to God under the name of St. Francis Xavier, if it could have been realized.

The third is Manistie, farther towards the northwest from Beaver Island; it numbers 33 Christians who have a neat little church of the Mother of God.

Finally, the fourth is Little Detroit with 26 Christians and a chapel of St. Vincent de Paul.

This is the situation of the outlying mission stations of Arbre Croche.

Besides these, the mission parish church of Arbre Croche, which was dedicated to God under the name of St. Peter by my predecessor, Father Dejean, has three affiliates, one of the Mother of God, the other of St. Paul, both dedicated by my predecessor, and the third of St. Ignatius, which, as I remarked above, I dedicated on August 1.

Only a few more remarks on the customs of the Indians in the mission district of Arbre Croche. The mode of life of the converted Indians of this mission resembles very much the mode of life of the whites, especially in this particular parish village. In it there are already 36 completed houses; though only of wood, they are nevertheless very solid and very habitable; and many

others are already begun, but not yet entirely completed. The parish village will soon number 50 houses. The Indians in the affiliated villages are already beginning to build good habitable houses in place of their miserable huts.

All the Indians of Arbre Croche carry on agriculture; however, the soil is not very good in this region; it is too sandy. They cultivate only corn, which, (for the lack of grinding mills,) they grind themselves and cook into a mash; then potatoes and all kinds of legumes as well as a kind of pumpkins which are very palatable. They also have many pigs and much fowl in all villages, and in some villages also cows and horses, but they use the latter only for riding because they still have no roads good enough to be able to make use of wagons. Their fields, which they always lay out in the forests, are still too new, and too little cleaned out of tree trunks to be able to plow them. However, this will soon be possible.

Since not a single white person is settled in the entire mission, they therefore have no craftsmen as yet among them. They themselves make their simple clothing and shoes. The Indian women are very skilled at that. They also tan the hides of deer and stags which their husbands kill in hunting, and make shoes out of them for themselves. The converted Indians take more to agriculture than the pagans, but they still go hunting from time to time

in order to have footwear.

One of their most excellent means of livelihood is sugar, which, in the month of March, they get from the sap of the sugar tree, and boil. Though not entirely white, this sugar is, however, almost as palatable as white sugar. Each Indian family, if it is somewhat industrious, produces about 1000 pounds a year of this sugar, which they then sell at Michilli Mackinac from 5 to 6 dollars per hundredweight.

Fishing is also one of their means of livelihood. Lake Michigan is very rich in fish, that is why all the Indians of this mission district are settled on this lake; not a single one lives in the interior of the country.

The religion of the pagan Indians of this country is a mixture of superstitious customs and sacrifices. They are real idolaters, but have no real idol priests appointed exclusively for that; however, in all pagan villages there is one or more who sing, (or rather shriek,) at their sacrifices, and beat a drum that resounds far and wide. When they kill a bear, or catch a very big fish, they cook or fry it whole and offer it, with much shrieking and noise, now to the spirit who lives under the earth, now to the one who lives in the air, (as they say,) and eat the sacrificial repast in common, whereby they also usually drink to excess, if only it is possible for them to get whisky. When someone becomes sick, the sacrificial singer is called; he does his conjuring and shrieking over him, and then an offering must be given.

For this kind of a sacrifice dogs are usually butchered and consumed in feasting. At their sacrifices they have bags full of superstitious trash.

I have burned a large quantity of similar articles which the converted Indians brought to me. Some have also small household idols, and in many villages one finds a human head cut out of wood, stuck on the end of a long pole planted in the middle of the village. This idol, which they invoke in all kinds of needs, is draped entirely with pieces of cloth.

In regard to future life, the pagans of this country have various opinions. I have found many there who believe that the soul dies with the body, that therefore after death of the body all is at an end. Others believe that after death their souls will go towards the sunrise, to a pleasant place, where, without any discrimination as to whether one has lived here a good or bad life, they all will enjoy all kinds of sensuous pleasures. Again others believe in some kind of transmigration of souls. I know an old pagan who stubbornly insists: he had already lived once, and this to be his second life. When a pagan dies here, his relatives lay a tobacco pipe, smoking tobacco, a knife, food and the like, in his coffin, and from time to time they place food on the graves so that the dead may come at night and eat.

At their marriages they have no ceremonies and customs whatever, except that they give bed covers and clothing to each other. Their marriages are also entirely without rules. Some men have only one wife, others two, three or four wives at the same time. There are also women who have two men. They stay together as long as they please. When they no longer want to live together they separate and marry again elsewhere.

The temperament of the Ottawa Indians is, in general, naturally good and mild, but they are very much inclined to drunkenness, and in drunkenness they quarrel and strike one another, whereby frequent murders occur. The local merchants, who themselves have no religion, try as much as they can to keep them in paganism, in order to be able to cheat them easier in their drunkenness. For they know very well that the converted Indians renounce drinking entirely.

The Indians of the new mission to be established at Grand River are from this same Ottawa tribe. I therefore presume that they are of about the same temperament, and perhaps have the same customs and mode of life as the Ottawa Indians of Arbre Croche. But if I should come across some differences and deviations, I shall not fail, after getting complete information, to communicate them to the Most Reverend Direction.

Frederic Baraga,
Missionary.

Arbre Croche, August 25, 1833.

(Copy)

Editor's note:

At the beginning of the letter the following note appears:
"Word for word copy of the brotherly letter of August 25, 1833."