



The **Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur California Province Archives** includes a treasure trove of letters written shortly after the **1906 earthquake** that destroyed a large portion of San Francisco and effected many other Bay Area communities. The Sisters of Notre Dame had a school/convent in the San Francisco Mission District that was dynamited to prevent the spread of fire. Other Bay Area schools and convents were located in Alameda, Santa Clara, Saratoga and San Jose and also suffered from loss of property, but thankfully, as in San Francisco, no loss of life.

Following is a letter written (April 27, 1906) by **Sr. Stanislaus of St. Joseph** in Santa Clara to the Mother Superior who was in Rome at the time of the quake and anxious to hear news. The letter details the destruction, fear, confusion, God's provision and moving forward with life.

You'll find a transcribed version at the end.

For information about additional 1906 earthquake letters, contact California Province Archivist, Kathleen O'Connor at occonork@sndden.org. Kathleen is in the office on Mondays and Tuesdays.

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J M J Santa Clara - Apr. 27 - 06.

Dear beloved Sister Superior -

It is nine days since since the greatest earthquake in the history of Cal. shook this part of the Coast. I have gone through more experiences in three days, than ordinarily one would imagine could be possible in a century. How true it is, we live only in the present moment. Everything came so suddenly. After our terrible shake we went out into the yard, the sisters fearing to enter even to get a little food or gather blankets together, for fear of another shake. Our house shifted one inch on its foundation and all the chimneys were a heap on the ground, plaster all over, and immense presses lying flat as well as the statues which were prostrate and broken in the sanctuary. None of us were hurt while thousands, we were told were killed outside. I will not stop to write all that we did between then and the present time or or I should never finish. To add to the catastrophe, which I wrenched all the water pipes, a falling building caused a dreaded fire to burst forth some 2 miles away from the Mission and south of Market St. and the helpless firemen could only stand and look in dismay. One after another, hundreds of large buildings were blasted with dynamite, the only hope of staying the fire. The object

of this was to keep as much as possible
 the fire in a low heap and as concentrated
 as possible. It did keep it from travelling
 faster than it, did but it did not check
 the flames which licked up as if they
 were chips, the immense buildings you
 have seen so often. St Ignatius, St Boniface
 St Mary hospital, St Francis hotel, Emporium, Banks
 - everything that once went to make up
 the one gay city - is now a desert of ashes
 and crumbling ruins except the scattered
 houses south and west of our dear
 Mission Convent which is included in
 the holocaust. The Cathedral steeple was
 burning but through desperate efforts of some
 good priests it was extinguished and
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 was saved also but only by a gigantic fight
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 we watched and hoped and prayed, but
 it made its way steadily towards us
 until Thursday P.M. when we also were
 forced to vacate and seek refuge with good
 Franciscan Sisters on the hill who spent
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 roof to keep it cool. I feel so bad
 for our poor dear Sister Superior, I am
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 saved more but the sisters were dazed

3

and fearful, and relied upon the assurance of Pastor and Officers that the fire would not reach us, and even if we had hauled out anything where could we put it? No one knew where the fire would stop, the streets were alive with people hurrying in all directions and it was impossible to get vehicles to convey even necessaries. A Jesuit told us he offered a man \$20 to take a load for him but was refused. Our Convent did not burn till Thursday between 5 and 6 P.M. Sister Superior gave into the keeping of a kind man some sacred vessels, vestments etc - but all the rest of our furniture etc is burned. God gave and He has taken it away and we can only bless and embrace His adorable will. The people have received a heavy temporal chastisement but the spiritual profit is already perceptible. God was so careful of us. We have lost our house and are afflicted with the afflicted. But we have suffered comparatively little. It was pitiable to see poor people carrying bundles they knew not where. Sick or dying had to move out as best they could. People who were wealthy yesterday were pushed aside to make way for the sisters and money. Poor sick mothers and new born babes are lying on a dusty mattress on the roadsides and no one seems to

think of it, while countless times persons have run to take our bundles from us and we have not had to walk a block. We are sheltered and have good food. I am ashamed to lie on a bed or eat when I think of what I have seen, and I have seen comparatively little, as we left before the hardships began. However I think the poor people have plenty to eat and cold drinks through the generosity of their charitable neighbors, every train brings in provisions. Can we ever thank God enough? or prove our fidelity to Him hereafter, or complain of anything again? Experience has been our teacher.

I was one of those destined for Watsonville but on reaching San Jose we learned it had been partially burned, so Sr. Superior sent me to this little Paradise and am helping wherever I can. Painting and music will be things of the past and the future, I think ^{for a time.} We must begin all over again as in early days. Santa Clara looks quite solid except the chapel which must be braced up, I suppose temporarily, as these shocks are likely to loosen bricks, and California people have lost confidence in brick or high buildings. I am sure dear Sister Superior if you had felt it you would not have any more brick but strong two story frame buildings and ceilings not too high and every joining bound with iron braces and girders. May God preserve us from

a repetition of what has ⁵ past. I stayed two days
in San Jose. They had a worse shock
there than in San F. but were preserved from
fire. The buildings are all standing and
the sisters house is all safe as well as
the low building called the grammar school.
But the girls' dormitories, chapel, parlors
etc. look unsafe. I do not know what
the official examiners have said of it.

Many parts are undamaged but I do not
think any of them could withstand another
shaking. The boys' school is being used for a
dormitory for the boarders but the girls are
satisfied with anything so long as they are
in a piece of ~~school~~ school. School is going on
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our poor dear Sister Superiora J. Teresa, I do
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same circumstances. I am sure all of
us are only too willing to do whatever
we can to lighten the trials under which
you and all our dear Superiors are placed.

With love and prayerful sympathy,
In Jesus and Mary
Your grateful and obedient child

Transcription, paragraphs added for readability

April 27, 1906, Santa Clara, written by Sr. Stanislaus of St. Joseph

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bundles they knew not where. Sick or dying had to move out as best they could. People who were wealthy yesterday were pushed aside to make way for the Sisters and whenever we went were offered food and money. Poor sick mothers and newborn babies are lying on a dusty mattress on the roadsides and no one seems to think of it, while countless times persons have run to take our bundles from us and we have not had to walk a block. We are sheltered and have good food. I am ashamed to lie on a bed or eat when I think of what I have seen, and I have seen comparatively little, as we left before the hardships began. However I think the poor people have plenty to eat and cold drinks through the generosity of their charitable neighbors. Every train brings in provisions.

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With love and prayerful sympathy
In Jesus and Mary
Your grateful and obedient child,

Sr. Stanislaus St. J., S.N.D.