

**Origins of the  
Sisters of St. Joseph:  
A Call to Apostolic Mysticism  
Third Edition**

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## Contents

Introduction	1
1. Political and Religious Climate in 17 <sup>th</sup> Century France	3
2. Foundational Documents	15
3. Handwritten Manuscripts Compared to Four Written Constitutions	43
4. Monastic and Apostolic Influences on the Concept of Membership	52
5. Monastic and Apostolic Influences on the Concept of Prayer	62
6. Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Schedules and Cloister	73
7. Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Apostolic Activity and Mobility	82
8. Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Relationship to the Church	90
Appendix A: Foundations, Founders and Titles	101
Appendix B: Works and Perceptions of Membership	104
Appendix C: Relationships with Civil Society	110
Appendix D: Information About Vows	115

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## Introduction

The history of these pages began with my presence on two research teams for the American Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In 1969, the first research team went to France to do research work with Marius Nepper, SJ., who had found documents that he called *Primitive Constitutions*. Why go to France? Because that is where the Sisters of St. Joseph originated.

Many questions arose as the first research team worked with the data. A basic question was how the early communities actually lived out the data that was found. Responding accurately to that question required additional research. That research would be done by a second research team. The members of this team went to France to research archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph. That second research team was given the task of locating early archival documents *prior* to the French Revolution.

That second effort located archival documents found in 67 different foundations. Those documents were eventually brought to the USA and are now housed in the library at Avila University in Kansas City, Missouri.

Needless to say, in this process over a period of years doing research and consultations, our horizons were widened. While religious communities in the United States were living into what was called *new*, the spirit of the original documents provided a guide and grounding for the *new* that is still in process.

This book is the result of years of reflection on how the Spirit has helped integrate our archival past with our living experience in this century. From the beginning until this day, Sisters of St. Joseph have had many names. What has been a constant is loving God and neighbor *without distinction*. In other words,

for Sisters of St. Joseph and communities of St. Joseph, there can be *no distinction between loving God and loving others*. It can be said that this is a summary of the whole book that follows!

All life and grounding spirituality can be referred to as *apostolic mysticism* grounded in one great mystery of Divine Love. The influence of the First Epistle of John, beloved apostle, has clearly influenced this spirituality of unity.

The actual integration of meanings drawn from the archival documents is my own interpretation. As the reader will see, I have categorized and thematized the archival documents. Monastic and apostolic influences on the origins of the community of St. Joseph, the development of meanings of community, vowed life, prayer, mission, authority and structures are the topics I have used for integration of the material.

What has become increasingly clear to me is that the spirit of love which inspired our beginning continues to be the grounding force for moving ever forward and inward into the great love of God and all without distinction. My hope is that the reader will also sense the inspiration of the founders that continues to be manifest in the unfolding diversity and unity of the communities of St Joseph today.

Consuela De Biase, CSJ 2014

## Chapter One

### Political and Religious Climate in 17C France

France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a mix of political turmoil and increasing poverty. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Edict of Nantes (1598) ended wars of religion but remnants of religious differences continued through 1685 and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Four years of civil war occurred between 1648 and 1652. During that time there was additional taxation, increased poverty, and the death of approximately 1,000,000 people. It was 1653 when the last region of France was conquered by Mazarin's armies.

While the state may have been victorious by 1653, the country was in ruins. In 1662 an edict was issued by the King. The edict stated that every town and large village had to establish a general hospital to house beggars and to educate them in piety. Between 1750 and 1789 South East France was characterized by an intense mobility, rootlessness, and a very restless France. The general situation meant that natives of South East France led a migrant existence.<sup>1</sup>

As late as 1876, conditions of poverty were still widespread. Historians note that the butcher came through town once a week but usually had only three customers. Most people did not eat meat more than two or three times a year. The food of the Messieurs was characterized by the fact that their food was purchased.<sup>2</sup>

The religious history of France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century was influenced by the Council of Trent which met in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1545-1563). The Council of Trent had three sessions in an interval of 18 years. In the third session of that

Council, strict cloister was expected and enforced on all female religious. Women who had simple or private vows and no cloister were now obliged to make solemn vows. By 1566, this automatically included living a cloistered life, which was what the Council of Trent imposed. However, the Council of Trent's rulings were not accepted by all bishops present at that Council. Some French bishops were among those who did not put the Council of Trent's rulings into effect in their respective diocese.

Church and civil opposition to the groups of women who were not cloistered focused mainly on issues of a dowry and the lack of cloister. Until the time of Trent, it seems that simple vows could be reversed or changed without a lot of cumbersome processes. Ownership of property as well as other monetary accumulation and distribution was still possible for women. In other words, women with simple vows could retrieve dowries, return home from vowed life if they wished, request another dowry from their family if and when they chose to marry. These choices were usually freely made as personal desire dictated. The majority of women who entered cloistered communities were generally upper class women and frequently of noble origin. Women who entered the non-cloistered groups were generally from lower classes.

When Angela Merici was forming her group who would be called Ursulines, she tried to obtain a papal document that guaranteed the members of her community the right to have the dowry from their family just as if they were marrying. Groups like the Daughters of Charity and the Daughters of St. Joseph posed less of a threat regarding dowry. The members of these communities were usually not from the upper classes. In addition, these women would be leading a more mobile life than the norm of cloister could permit. Most often, the women engaged in some form of domestic service and were paid for it. Thus, dowry payments from their families would not be as much an issue as it would be for women of the wealthier class, whose dowries were significant and would support them.

It is into this milieu in France that the Sisters of St. Joseph will eventually emerge. The Sisters of St. Joseph will be “the first feminine congregation without cloister to take permanent vows and obtain ecclesiastical approval.”<sup>3</sup> The early Associates or Sisters of St. Joseph were generally from the poorer class. However, archival data reveals there were still some significant lawsuits involving payments of dowry. In other words, there were also some upper class women in the group.

Documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> century reveal the existence of many female groups that are now called “active religious.” In the relatively small city of Le Puy, there were at least nineteen different groups of such “active religious” who received official church approval. These included some well-known groups like Carmelites, Dominicans, Daughters of St. Joseph, Notre Dames, Franciscans, Ursulines, Visitandines and Capuchins. A more complete list of active groups in Le Puy and the year each group received official church approval has been documented.<sup>4</sup>

Of these many groups some were semi-cloistered. Others who began without any regulation of strict cloister were forced into it by church mandate. As stated earlier, the Council of Trent wished all religious women to be cloistered, but some of Trent’s desired reforms received an uneven acceptance in France. Therefore, a bishop in one locale might strictly enforce the Trent reform of cloister while other bishops simply ignored that restriction. These latter bishops continued to approve religious groups who were not cloistered.

When one considers the relatively small size of the city of Le Puy, and the simple services that were given by women religious, the multitudes of foundations and their continued existence are astounding. Prior to the French Revolution, there were 52 houses of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the small diocese of Le Puy. Twenty five of these houses were in one very small section of Le Puy. The services these women were giving must have been needed or they would not have stayed in the diocese. When their services are examined today, the service may seem somewhat

unimportant. Yet in the very same region, there were frequently many different congregations, with many structures and different inspirations engaged in similar works.

As late as 1574, there were still more than 400 different congregations of active women religious in France. The climate at this time in French history was not one that would welcome such works and yet the groups continued to thrive. Several groups of women were devoted to the same works of mercy as the Associates or Sisters of St. Joseph. These groups had many similarities in overall structure and expectations of members.

One of the groups was called the Béates. In 1673, in the city of Le Puy, there were 70 women who belonged to this group. These women devoted themselves to the sanctification of women and girls. On Sundays and holy days, the Béates would go out into the countryside instructing girls and young women in catechism. They also taught girls and young women how to say their prayers, receive the sacraments and how to work together while sanctifying that work through pious exercises. Some people called these holy women “ Jesuitesses.” The popular title probably came from the works of mercy that these women did after a Jesuit mission inspired them to do so. They were condemned in 1631 because they wished to live religious life, pronounced vows to their superior who was a female and would go everywhere to work for the salvation of others. This meant that they disregarded cloister.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the French Revolution, Bishop Béthune of Le Puy invited a group of active women religious to come to Le Puy. This group, the *Filles de l'Instruction*, came from many regions to be trained in Le Puy. There were many groups of such daughters, including those who had houses in Clermont, Lyons, Vienne, Valence, Vivier and Rodez.

At this time in history, the structures of such apostolic groups resembled

each other. The structures briefly outlined in the *Primitive Constitutions* of the Sisters of St. Joseph were quite similar to that of the Béates' group in particular. For example, the Béates had two types of membership. One type was called *Dames de l'instruction*. These women lived in a community. A second type were called the *Béates*. These women were not strictly part of the congregation or group who lived in community but they were related to the same superior general. These women lived individually in the hamlets and villages of Velay.<sup>5</sup>

The *Primitive Constitutions* of the Sisters of St. Joseph have a similar structure outlined in the membership section. Archival data lists actual accounts of such dependencies or relationships to a general Superior. Such dependencies can be found in archival data provided by Preaux, filiales of St. Cyr, St. Jeure d'Ay, Lemps, Le Monestier and Columbière-le-Cardinal. Similar data indicates this was also true at Davezieux, St. Jacques d'Atticieux and Talencieux. Villevoce had only one dependent community. In a later section on membership, these relationships will be described in greater detail.

A startling connection exists between *les dames de la Miséricorde* and the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Confraternity of Mercy (*les dames de la Miséricorde*) existed since 1516. This existence was apart from the Sisters of St. Joseph. At the same time, the constitutions of the Sisters of St. Joseph indicate that such confraternities of mercy were established as a work of each house of Sisters of St. Joseph if such a confraternity did not exist in the area. An interesting point of history is that when the confraternity of mercy was established before Sisters of St. Joseph in particular areas, the Confraternity of Mercy became the nucleus of the eventual community of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

An example of the interchange between the Confraternity of Mercy and Sisters of St. Joseph is evident in 1664 in Sauxilanges. Archival data reveals that Jesuits were preaching a mission here which emphasized care for the sick and needy. When the mission ended, women of the town presented themselves to the

Jesuit missionaries. These women agreed to take on the work for the sick and needy under the title *Dames de la Miséricorde*. These women received a donation for a hospital which was notarized and witnessed to by the Jesuit Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ, founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In time the Sisters of St. Joseph were established in the hospital. The sisters left that hospital in 1691. Then the Confraternity of Mercy resumed care for those served by the hospital.

The history and interdependence of the two groups was similar in the city of Gap. In 1637, the Confraternity of Mercy was established in Gap to meet twice weekly. In groups of two or three, members would visit the sick, distribute alms, collect food, and perform other works of mercy. Each Sunday after mass, they would remain at the church door and find out the needs of the community. The early constitution of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Gap describes the same activity. Once again one group of women who were doing such works of mercy eventually formed the nucleus of the first Sisters of St. Joseph here. These women later took charge of the hospital in Gap.

In St. Amant-Roche Savine, a memoir written in 1890, indicates that the Bishop of Clermond established a Confraternity of the Daughters of Mercy like the one at Chaise-Dieu in 1666. These followed the thoughts of Jean Pierre Médaille and were called the Community of St. Joseph. (Documents in the archives of St. Georges l'Agricol indicate similar connections among groups of various names).

The religious climate of mid-17<sup>th</sup> century France did not make it easy for the birth of actively apostolic groups of women. Because the atmosphere was less than welcoming for such groups of mercy, titles and names were used rather loosely for the groups. Generic terms used today for groups may be a similar phenomenon. For example a woman named Marie Poussepin wished to be a *Fille de l'Instruction*. In 1696, she opened a school. In 1697, she wished to also be a *Fille de St. Vincent*. Then she opened a hospital.

In other words, names and categories had much more flexibility than our proper names do today. Given 17<sup>th</sup> century France and all that was occurring there, we might say the French had a propensity to get their way in spite of the many legal prohibitions to such independent works of mercy.

### **Multiple Origins of the Sisters of St. Joseph?**

There is a well-known myth which is widely accepted about the foundation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. That myth or story begins with Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ. Jean Pierre made missionary journeys in central France. On one of these journeys he encountered women who wished to give themselves entirely to God. These women were not called to enter a monastic way of life with its demand of cloister, solemn vows and dowry.

Médaille conceived a “little design” which was distinguished from the popular “Great Design” for communities composed by Francis De Sales. Médaille’s “little design” could accommodate the pious women who did not feel called to monastic life. This was in 1646. These women were the first Sisters of St. Joseph. The Bishop of Le Puy, Henri de Maupas, gave the group official approval so they could work throughout his diocese.

This group rapidly grew in number and spread throughout the Auvergne area and many neighboring areas. The foundations were many! (These multiple foundations are listed in the Appendix of this book). While this is a very straightforward story of foundations, it is not historically verifiable!

Recent research has uncovered data that suggests other possibilities. First, the word *foundation* is used in various ways in the documents dealing with the Sisters of St. Joseph. Foundation can refer to monetary or physical donations made to further the works of mercy performed by the sisters or associates. Foundation can also refer to a date on which an act of association was made. Foundation can

also refer to the date on which *Lettres Patentes* were received. These many and varied meanings of *foundation* make it difficult to actually claim a particular foundation date for the origin of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Documents in the archives of Bordeaux also raise issues about a 1646 date of origin. The archives of Bordeaux state that “Soeurs de St. Joseph, dites soeurs hospitalières, fondée en 1628 pour le gouvernement des filles orphelines....Soeurs de St. Joseph de la Trinité cree...qui avaient reçu dans sa maison des filles orphelines.”<sup>7</sup> Both the spirituality and the work of the hospital group in 1628 suggest these women were Sisters of St. Joseph. However, since the name of a place often became the label of the workers, no proof or disproof can conclusively be made regarding the precise date of origin.

Archives reveal that Cardinal de Sourdis gave approval to the Sisters of St. Joseph in Bordeaux. Cardinal de Sourdis was the uncle of Armand de Béthune who studied under the cardinal. Armand de Béthune would be a future Bishop of Le Puy. If the Sisters of St. Joseph mentioned in the Bordeaux documents had no connection to other Sisters of St. Joseph, why would this reference be preserved?

Thus, there remains an ambiguity about the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In towns like Rodez, “*Les Filles de l’Union Chrétienne*” was the nucleus out of which Sisters of St. Joseph were formed. To this day there are groups such as “*Les Soeurs de Notre Dame de Chambriac*” who claim Médaille as their founder. They have used and still use his constitutions which are also the same constitutions used by the Sisters of St. Joseph. These Sisters of Notre Dame belong to the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph in France, while preserving their original name.

In conclusion, there is an ambiguity about the whole history of origin and development. In spite of archival access today, the entire history with its many communities remains hidden. Groups were often named by the place or institution

in which they ministered. Thus, there can be different names for groups using the same Constitutions and having the same founding spirit.

While myths of founding with approximate dates will continue, it is necessary to say that the whole of the founding history is not accessible or able to be critically documented. In spite of that, the worldwide existence of the Sisters of St. Joseph says that something about the group was needed and appreciated in 17<sup>th</sup> century France. The group continued to spread and that remains true today.

### **Church Approval: Sisters of St. Joseph**

Before the French revolution, there was no practical distinction between church and state even though there were some controversies between church and state. These Gallican controversies usually depended on whether the King and Bishop of the place were on a friendly basis. For any group to enjoy status as a legal entity, *Lettres Patentes* had to be granted to the group. This was true whether the group seeking legal status was religious or lay. It was a somewhat complicated procedure to obtain these *Lettres Patentes*. Once a religious or lay group had the status of legal entity, that group was exempt from taxation.

Only five groups of Sisters of St. Joseph had such letters. These groups were the communities at le Puy and St. Didier (1674), Tence (1687), St. Amant Roche-Savine (1758), and Monistrol (1784). The community at Satillieu (1776) may also have had this status as a legal entity. The list may be incomplete because an institution with which Sisters of St. Joseph were associated might have had such *Lettres Patentes* and it is not clear whether the community was included in an institution's status.<sup>8</sup>

What is known is that any community in France which did not have such approval was not protected by law. That meant that the community could not purchase, sell, inherit or have any rights of legal status. However, a group

that did not have this approval maintained individual ownership and maintained all rights as citizens. Groups which did not have such approval could still mutually donate their goods to each other and share their goods in common. These rights belonged to any group once they took an “Act of Association.”

Frequently the local priest allowed a purchase to be made in his name since the group could not purchase, sell or inherit properties. As late as 1729, a priest or curé might have his will contested in court if his beneficiaries, namely Sisters of St. Joseph, did not have the legal status granted by *Lettres Patentes*.

With or without legal status, approval for groups such as the Sisters of St. Joseph depended on the goodwill of the local bishop. Usefulness of groups like Sisters of St. Joseph seems to have been a major factor in their favor. For Sisters of St. Joseph, approval by Bishop Henri de Maupas (1651) showed the priority of service that contributed to his approval. “Desirous of advancing the glory of God and the salvation of souls and engaging in charitable works in our diocese, having learned that some good widows and single women wish to consecrate themselves to these praiseworthy works...,” he approved of them.

The successor to Henri de Maupas was Armand de Béthune, his nephew. Bishop de Béthune also approved the existence of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Bishop de Béthune emphasized the community aspect and religious nature of their life. “The zeal which the congregation of widows and young women, who have been established in our present city and other places in our diocese for about 15 years, is manifest. In order to draw into their company those of their sex who, for lack of means, cannot enter the monasteries, but who are able to have no less of the religious life than cloistered religious, they may live together as a community...” (1665).

By 1684, there is historical evidence that the people of Chomelix request *Lettres Patentes* for the Sisters of St. Joseph. Why was this request made? “They

are respected as true religious of the church of God.” “Delibération de la communauté habitants de Chomelix” (1684).

The Sisters of St. Joseph seemed to be combating some effects of the Huegenots by using instruction as a tool for unification. Louis XIV emphasized their work and his approval of it. He stated that the Sisters of St. Joseph were “a congregation founded for all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.” *Primitive Constitutions* referred to a primary work as “instruction de jeunes filles” (*Lettres Patentes, 1674*).

The tenuous notice of their social and ecclesiastical position as well as the authentic inspiration of their origins brought the Sisters of St. Joseph close to their neighbors. That neighbor included local clergy as well as all the people they served. The Sisters of St. Joseph had inauspicious beginnings. There was an ordinary composition of membership. This ordinary membership gave them strength, rootedness and marked them with a particular ability to move and to adapt. They had a keen sense of what needed to be done in human situations. All of these characteristics may help to explain why there was such a growth in the number of communities.

### **Chapter One Resources**

1. Hufton, Oliver. *The Poor of 18th Century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 72.
2. Robert Forster and Patricia Ranum, *Rural Society in France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977) 147.

3. Chalendar, Marie. *La Promotion de la femme a l'Apostolat* (Paris: Editions Alsatis, 1950).
4. Boudon-Lashermes, *La Vie d'Autrefois au Puy* (Paris, 1947). Béates (1655); Carmelites (1610-1620); Soeurs de St. Charles (1632). This group had annual renewal of vows as late as 1913; Les Clarisses (1632); Dominicaines (1606); Dames de l'Enfant Jésus (1606); Dames de l'Instruction (1606); Filles de Saint Joseph (1650); Notre Dame (1650); Soeurs de la Pénitence ou de Ste. Madeleine (1650); Religieuses de la Presentation (1650); Françaises (1650); Soeurs de la Mère Agnès (1650); Ursulines (1610); Visitandines (1631); Augustines (1631);  
  
Capuchines (1609); Chartreux (1627); Filles de la croix (1672).
5. Molette, Charles. *Guides des Sources de l'Histoire des Congrégations Femines Françaises de Vie Active* (Editions de Paris, 1974) 34.
6. Boudon-Lashermes, 131.
7. Archives of Bordeaux, 1895 (H 186.52).
8. Therese Vacher, CSJ. *La Vie des Soeurs de Saint Joseph, le Dynamisme Fondamental*. The contents of this unpublished Doctoral Dissertation was orally presented at a meeting of the Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph.

## Chapter Two

### Foundational Documents

There are five major resources that provide information about the early Sisters of St. Joseph. It has already been stated that the precise history of origins of the Sisters of St. Joseph is complex as well as partial. However, there is much information that is available and verifiable in the five sources discussed in this chapter. Each resource informs us about certain elements and guides for the lives of the early communities.

**First**, there are a number of *Primitive Constitutions*. The term *Primitive Constitutions* refers to a *compilation of thirteen handwritten manuscripts* dated by researchers and archivists. Careful study reveals that these manuscripts were written between 1661 and 1730. The manuscripts differ in form and occasionally in content.

What does this imply? It suggests that these constitutions were for different communities who lived the rule in slightly different ways. The handwritten documents that were compiled and called the *Primitive Constitutions* came from:

LePuy: A, B, C,D

Saint Didier: one

Boisset: one

Lyons: one

Clermont-Ferrand: one

The Boisset *Primitive Constitutions* are the property of the Le Puy archives. The Lyons archives contain not only the Lyons manuscripts but also the manuscripts of Apinac, Bas en Basset and two different manuscripts from St. Hilaire. French and American researchers have studied and compiled these manuscripts. While there are minute differences in what is included in the manuscripts, the collection as a whole are commonly referred to as *Primitive Constitutions*.

**Second**, there are foundational resources called the *Règlements*. The *Règlements* are a *compilation of manuscripts* which rarely differ in content or form. The compiled manuscripts are from the foundations of Apinac, Bas, Boisset (two), Montferrand and St. Hilaire. The *Règlements* seems to have been used prior to the constitutions and also simultaneously with the constitutions. The *Règlements* are shorter, less organized and less juridical. Some of the *Règlements* seem to be nothing more than guidelines for those who held a special position. An example of this are the guidelines for someone who is a pharmacist.

Neither the *Primitive Constitutions* nor these *Règlements* were known to us until the 1950's. It was in the decade of the 1950's when the documents were rediscovered at a variety of locations in France. The mandate of Vatican Council II for religious to study the spirit of their origins gave these documents a new importance. Eventually the American Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph would form a team to study these formerly unknown treasures.

**Third**, a set of sources useful for assessing the spirituality of the early foundations are the *Maxims of Perfection*. The *Maxims of Perfection* are the sole work published by the founder, Jean Pierre Médaille, SJ. The only existing copy is dated 1672. That copy is in the Jesuit archives in Toulouse. It is of note that the preface to the maxims states that the maxims were written for “all Christians aspiring to great virtue.” They are clearly not intended only for sisters.

The intent of the *Maxims* is referred to many times by the founder in both the *Constitutions* and *Règlements*. About 100 of the maxims found their way into early documents. However the actual *Maxims* book was only discovered in 1908 in a secondhand bookstall on the Seine border in Paris. This book of maxims was edited and reprinted in 1938 by Cavallera in *Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique*. In addition to the 100 maxims, there are practices or “exercises” for ‘stripping self’ in the imitating of Jesus Christ. These particular practices or exercises are written in the form of colloquies. They follow the pattern of all four weeks of *The Exercises of Ignatius*.

A **Fourth** resource is the *Eucharistic Letter (La Lettre Eucharistique)*. This is the only document that contains the signature of Médaille, the founder. The letter exists in manuscript form in the Lyons archives. It contains the foundational inspiration of the founder and the same spirit and spirituality found in the other documents. The *Eucharistic Letter* is addressed to “*ma chère Soeur*.” The letter seems to have been meant for one sister. The conjecture is that this sister is probably one who worked closely with Médaille, our founder.

The **Fifth** and final foundational resource is an abundance of archival data from 67 French communities. In 1980, the United States Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph sent a team of researchers to France. The task was to collect and organize “pertinent data about our pre-revolutionary foundations.” Researchers on the team were to gather pertinent data by visiting mother houses in France, by researching departmental and Congregational archives and relevant Jesuit archives that provided data about our founder. The task included researching additional relevant data provided by any other site. We made copies of any data pertinent to our task.

There were 67 folders of data that were relevant to our task. Some selected content from these folders will be noted in the Appendix. What follows on the successive pages of this chapter is a comparison of some early *Constitutions*.

Explicit parts of these *Constitutions* will be placed side by side so that the reader can more easily see some of the similarities and differences.

### Comparison of Early Constitutions

**1693B (Vienne)**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

*Preface*

historical development and approbation of congregation

*Letters Patent*

canonical approval of  
H. de Maupas

*Letters Patent*

approval by Archbishop of Vienne for the establishment of Sisters of St. Joseph in the city of Vienne and in his diocese

*Approval and confirmation-* Archbishop of Vienne for the approval of the Constitutions and the printed Constitutions (Nov. 24, 1693)

***Constitutions*** (manuscripts)

Divided into **6 parts:**

1. Nature of the Congregation

**1693B**

**1694**

(Same)

**1730**

(Same)

**1788**

2. End of the Congregation
3. Qualities Required for those to be received
4. Rules for officers and Rules common to all sisters
5. Spiritual Exercises
6. Means appropriate for the maintenance and growth of the congregation

(Note that in all of these early documents, the nature of the congregation is spelled out in great detail. Some elements of that detail are listed below).

Origin and name of the Congregation

- assembly of widows and *filles*
- living in same house
- few in number
- given to their own perfection and service of the neighbor
- following these constitutions

The name:

Congregation of St. Joseph (serving neighbor with the same diligence, charity, and cordiality as Joseph served Jesus and Mary)

1693B

1694

1730

1788

(Same)

(Same)

-consecrated to the Trinity under the protection of Jesus, Mary, Joseph  
 (NOT in *Prim. C*)  
 -imitating and following customs, spirit and life of the Visitations

*Vows*

*Vows*

*Vows*

*Vows*

-two-year novitiate  
 -then three *simple* vows *Simple (crossed out)*  
 along with a protestation to profess in all things and everywhere profound humility and cordial charity and mercy toward every kind of neighbor  
 -simple vows observed as if they were solemn vows  
 -no longer valid once a person has left the Congregation  
 -dispensation guidelines are torn out  
 -guidelines for a sister leaving  
 -lock up sister to have her come to her senses

Simple

Simple- but observed with as much fidelity as if they were solemn vows

-validity clause and dispensation guidelines are crossed out

Dispensed by Bishop- but not taken lightly

-guidelines for leaving? (Missing pp. 11-34 which

In case a sister leaves furtively, the Bishop has her brought back and locked in for several days during which all will be done to encourage the resumption of duties

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

(The locking up was **not**  
in *Prim C*)

Ch. III *Cloister*

*Cloister*

*Cloister*

*Cloister*

-No strict cloister in order (Pages missing)  
to serve the neighbor and  
visit the sick poor.

(Same)

-cloistered living quarters  
-need Superior's  
(feminine) permission to  
leave the house

-each sister must have her  
own bed

-no layperson can enter  
living quarters without  
permission of superiors  
(masculine)

-a living area for women  
who come to make retreat  
with the sisters (Retreat  
meant instruction in virtue  
in *Prim C*)

-living area was also for  
those of the Confraternity  
of Mercy (**not** in *Prim C*)

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

-mentions living in  
*Maisons de Pénitentes*  
(**not** in *Prim C*)

Ch. IV *Sisters' Dress*

*Sisters' Dress*

*Sisters' Dress*

*Sisters' Dress*

-still dressed like widows (Pages missing)  
but widows' dress has  
changed

(**N.b.** dress is *less spelled*  
*out* in the *Prim C*)

-still is widow's garb which  
evidently changes-

-The sisters' help-the (Pages missing)  
employees, servants-will  
be dressed in the same  
manner except the  
material will be coarser  
and the help don't wear  
the crucifix (**not** in *Prim*  
*C*)

(Same)

-sisters never take off  
habit unless sick or getting  
up in the middle of night  
at which time they can put  
on a bathrobe (**not** in *Prim*  
*C*)

Ch. V *Office and Prayers* (Pages missing)

*V. Office and Prayers* *V. Office and Prayers*

-no obligation to say or  
chant the Office; it takes  
too much time to sing (**not**  
in *Prim C*)

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

-if there is a chapel in the house they can chant the Office of Blessed Virgin on feasts and Sundays

(not in *Prim C*)

-orphans and penitents can chant Office with the sisters (not in *Prim C*)

-join parish Vespers if there is no chapel in the house

-they will have vocal prayer and meditation

-other prayers are prescribed in the fifth part of these constitutions

Ch. VI Superiors (masc.) (Pages missing) of the Congregation

VI. Superiors (masc) of the Congregation

-the Bishop of the diocese in which they find themselves is the recognized legitimate Superior

-Authority of the Bishop

-can visit any time

-can change rules

-sees that constitutions are observed

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

-can change superiors and sisters from one house to another

-can depose and name another superior (fem.)  
(**not** in *Prim C*)

-Sisters have recourse to the *Père Spirituel* in all temporal and spiritual matters

-bishops should have paternal love and care for the Congregation just as Francis de Sales did for the Visitations (**not** in *Prim C*)

(P. 26 of this document implies the Congregation was established to revive the spirit of the Visitations) (**not** in *Prim C*)

Ch. VIII *The Spiritual Father* (Pages missing)

*The Spiritual Father*

(*Spiritual Father* is **not** in *Prim C*)

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

- He is named by the Bishop to represent him
- Bishop can name one or several, depending on number or distance of the houses
- can be secular priest or regular priest
- authorized as Vicar General of the Bishop
- visits houses once a year with the Sisters' Confessor
- listens to them privately about what they have to say for the good of the house OR congregation
- gathers sisters together in Chapter where he instructs and corrects them for their *reformation and perfection*
  
- he looks at their financial books and signs them if he approves
  
- he can make Rules, but **not** unless they are in agreement with the Bishop or with the Constitutions
- presides over elections in absence of the Bishop

1693B

1694

1730

1788

(Same)

(Same)

-is a recourse in all spiritual  
and temporal matters

**Ch. VIII** *The Sisters*  
“*Agréées*”

*VIII.* (1st page missing)  
*VIII.* begins with dress

*VIII.* The Sisters  
(Same as 1693)

(Note that *agrégée* is an organizational term used for smaller groups related to a larger group. It is NOT a class of membership distinct from sisters).

-poor and peasant women in  
the villages called to live

“apart” from the world (**not** in *Prim C*)

-*agrégées* are poor women  
in the country

(**not** as spelled out in *Prim C*)

-are small communities of three or four  
in villages

-*agrégées* are those who  
depend on the nearest

house of Srs. of St Joseph

-are dressed like the sisters  
except not in black

and they wear a smaller  
crucifix

-before being received, they  
live in an *agrégée* house for  
three months trial period

-have a 2 yr. Novitiate

-take 3 simple vows: poverty,  
chastity, obedience

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

(Vows are valid as long as they live in *agrégée* house)

-observe rules in *Constitutions*

-receive communion on feasts and Sundays

-do not say *Office of the Holy Spirit* or *Blessed Virgin*

-do not say litanies of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and all the saints  
(**Unless** they know how to read)

-do spiritual reading if one of them knows how to read to others

-are under authority of the Superior of the district

IX. Humility and rank  
(**not** in *Prim C*)

IX. (Same)

IX. (Same)

-importance of humility  
humility

-interior humility

-awareness of their sins

-exterior humility

-in works and actions

-Superior of the house is first in rank

-Assistant of the house is second in rank

**1693B**

-others rank in order of profession

**Part II** The End of the Congregation and Means to Arrive at this End

Ch 1 The End for which the Congregation was established

**TWO** ends (*Prim C* has **one** end since love of God-neighbor is one love)

1. Perfection and sanctification of members through practice of all the virtues
2. Help in service of the dear neighbors through spiritual and corporal works of mercy

**Ch. II** Means to arrive at Perfection

-observe vows and Rules prescribed in the Constitutions

(Imitate)

-God: *be holy as I am holy*

**1694**

(Same)

**Part II** The End of the Congregation

(Same)

(Same)

(Same)

**1730**

(Same)

**Part II**  
(Same Title)

End of the Congregation is to unite in one body those not called to a cloistered vocation but who wish to *live apart from the world.*

II. Means to achieve end #1

(Same)

**1788**

**Part II**

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

-Jesus: *be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*  
-desire perfection through the practice of all the Virtues- particularly humility and charity

-remember that the Congregation is consecrated to the Holy Trinity

-Father: example of perfection

-Son: emptying humility

-Holy Spirit: love

-Jesus: zeal for *the glory of his Father* and salvation of souls

-Mary: faithful to grace and only acts when moved by the Spirit and *not* one's own inclinations

-Joseph: loving manner, union and friendship among themselves; imitate him inside *and* outside house

**Ch. III** Services which the sisters must render to the neighbor

(Same)

III. Services the sisters render to the neighbor

(The Conf. of Mercy in this context is **unlike** the *Prim C*)

-(sisters) not only concerned about their *own* perfection,

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

but are consecrated  
to the Service of the  
Neighbor

-therefore embrace all  
exercises of charity and mercy

-servicing the poor in  
*hospitals*

-directing Houses of Refuge

-care of houses of  
poor orphans

-have schools for the  
instruction and education  
of young women in places  
where established religious  
are not already doing this

-visit sick and *prisoners* (*prisoners crossed out*)  
*daily*

-praying for them

-exhorting them to Penance

-giving them needed medicine

-give alms from their own  
goods or what they have asked  
(begged?) of others (alms asked (begged?)  
from others is  
**crossed out**)

-pharmacy in their houses to  
dispense drugs to the sick poor  
(Medicine given only  
if it is by doctor's orders)

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

-take care of young women who  
have no one to guide them or who,  
in need, run the risk of losing  
their honor

- try to house these women  
or get them work
- for those who have fallen,  
try to lead them to conversion
- those given to Vice, lock  
them in houses of refuge or  
have them expelled

Careful care of young women  
who begin to keep company with men

- instill in them the fear of evil  
and teach them modesty and the  
other virtues
- therefore these women will work  
with the sisters- learning tasks proper  
to honorable Christian women

-Establish confraternities of mercy  
where they do not exist

-The confraternities will  
consist of married and  
unmarried women and  
widows in order to visit  
and help the sick or poor  
in their parishes

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

(more detailed and expanded than the *Prim C*)

-Establish special meetings on Sundays and feasts where widows can be with widows, unmarried women with unmarried women- not only treating the works of mercy, but also their own particular directions, the manner in which each must live in order to be saved, and for the greater glory of God and the salvation of their family and of the neighbor

-Rules for the Confraternity- given by the Bishop

-to animate their zeal

-to meditate on last judgment and Jesus saying to them:

*Come blessed of my Father...*

*When I was hungry*

*you gave me to eat;*

*thirsty and you gave*

*me to drink...*

Ch. IV Charity Among Themselves

(**more detail** than in *Prim. C*)

**1693B**

**1694**

(Same)

**1730**

(Same)

**1788**

- Not only charity to strangers, but also among themselves since they are united not only by the same faith, but more so by the same profession and manner of living and are united in a single body in the same Congregation, so as to be of one heart and soul like the first Christians

-In order to do this, they will follow all the Rules prescribed in this chapter and in the following two chapters.

-Remember Jesus' words:

*Love one another as*

*I have loved you.*

-Have this love not only in their hearts, but also in exterior works

-ardent zeal for the advancement of others; great joy to see them growing in virtue;

-pray for one another

-prefer comfort of others to their own

-never a sharp word, complaint, or groaning among themselves, no sign or manner of coldness

**1693B**

**1694**

(Same)

**1730**

(Same)

**1788**

-if a Sister offends another, she should, in humility, go to that Sister and ask forgiveness  
-avoid particular or sensual friendships;  
-neither should they outwardly embrace one another, or kiss or make eye or facial gestures, or touch, which profanes the sanctity of their state and the purity of their friendship. They may, however, modestly kiss strangers, (unknown?) and sisters or those whom they haven't seen for a long time

**Ch. V Care for Sick and Dying (Same)**  
Sisters

**Ch. V-VI Care for the sick, dying and burial**  
(Only the title changes)

-when a sister is sick, call the Doctor  
-also call the Confessor  
-when a Sister is in danger of death, the superior will assign Sisters to take care of her day and night and see to it that she receives the Sacraments  
-at time of her death, all will be around her bed praying for God's mercy for her

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

**Ch. VI** Charity to Deceased Sisters (Same)

(Same)

-wash deceased and dress her in black, put her in a coffin, her hands joined and holding the crucifix hanging from her neck

-Then put her in the chapel or a room, leaving coffin open if judged appropriate

-Superior gathers Sisters around the coffin and they say *Matins* and *Lauds* from the *Office of the Dead* or the *Rosary for the dead*,

-sisters say a *De Profundis* on each large bead, and

*Eternal rest grant unto her oh Lord* on the small beads.

-All the while the body is shown, one or two Sisters will pray for the deceased

-At time of burial, four Sisters will carry the deceased to the grave and the others- two by two- follow, each with a candle

**1693B**

**1694**

(Same)

**1730**

(Same)

**1788**

-the Superior will have a solemn mass said (if possible), or at least a low mass on the day of death, on one month and one year anniversaries

-on these days the Sisters will receive Communion and will say the Rosary or *Office of the Dead*

-our Sisters will always be buried from the Chapel of the House in which they died. If there is no Chapel, they will be buried from the Parish Church.

-After the death of the Sister, the Superior will give notice to all the Houses of the Congregation in all Dioceses; in each house, the Rosary or the *Office of the Dead* will be recited; a mass of the dead will be said at which all the Sisters will receive communion

-after the Sister's death, the superior will mark in the House Book the day, hour, year, name of the deceased, her age, and length of time in the Congregation, as well as other qualities

**1693B**

**1694**

(Same)

**Part III** The Manner of Receiving Sisters (called Sisters) and the qualities necessary to be Received into the Congregation

**Ch. 1** The Reception of Novices (Same)

-The choice of persons is of utmost importance to the advancement in Perfection of the entire Congregation

-need for prudence of Superiors (male and female) and Sisters

-need to observe the following Rules:

-when a widow *fille* requests to be received, she is examined concerning her religion, parents, age, temperament, habits, health, energy, what she can do, motives for entering

-told she can't be received if she doesn't have the necessary qualities

-told if she does have qualities (for reception as novice)

**1730**

**1788**

**Part III** The Manner of Receiving sisters (soeurs) and the requisite qualities in those entering the Congregation

**Ch. 1** Reception of

Novices

(Same)

**1693B**

**Ch. II.** Qualities required of novices who will be received

**Ch. III.** The Novitiate and Formation of Novices

-establishes a two-year novitiate as *minimum* time

**Ch. IV** Sisters' Profession of Vows

**Ch. V** The Vow of Obedience

**Ch. VI** The Vow of Chastity

**Ch. VII** The Vow of Poverty

**Part IV**-Specific Rules for the Officers, for their election and common rules for all the Sisters

**Ch. I.** Rules for the Prioress (Superior)  
(See **XVII**, p 163, regarding the keeping of contracts and important papers)

**1694**

(Same)

**1730**

**II.** Necessary Qualities of those who will be received  
**(Omits possible exemptions by the Bishop as found in 1693A and 1693B)**

**IV.** Profession of Vows

**VI.** The vow of chastity

**VII.** The vow of poverty

**Part IV** Specific rules for the

**1788**

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

**XVIII**, p. 164, Dress and hair styles

**XXI**, p. 166, Superior has a seal

**Ch. II.** Rules for the Assistant

(See p. 171-inventory book

and the lists kept by the temporal assistant)

**Ch. III.** Rules for the

Coadjutrice who will be

Mistress of Novices

**Ch. IV.** Rules for the Bursar

VII, p.189-90 about lawsuits

X, p.191-mentions a servant

XIII, p.193-inventory of dowries

**Ch. V** Rules for the Admonitrix

**Ch. VI.** Rules for the Councillors

**Ch. VII.** Rules for the One

who cares for the poor

V, pp 204-05, Book for

receipts of loans of furniture and

provisions destined for the poor

**VIII**, p.207-*associées* here are the  
ladies of mercy

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

**Ch. VIII.** Rules for the Directress (Same)  
of Mercy

**II. and III.,** p. 211-giving

Spiritual instruction to the Confraternity

**VIII.** Rules for the Directress of  
the Confraternities of Mercy

**Ch. IX.** Rules for the Portress

**Ch. X.** Rules for other officers

**Ch. XI.** Nomination of Officers

-note about Bishop's part,

especially having Sisters

come from other houses

**Ch. XII.** Election of the Superior

**Ch. XIII.** Rules common to all (Same)  
Sisters

**XIII.** General Rules for all  
Sisters

**XVI,** p. 256-sisters going from  
one diocese to another with  
permission of their Bishop

**Part V** Spiritual Exercises (Same)  
which the Sisters should practice

(Same)

**Ch. 1.** Yearly Exercises (Same)  
p. 265-66- Directed retreat  
(also directed by Superior **(fem.)**)

I. Annual-ask for a saint  
as protector for the year  
-make directed retreat from  
a spiritual director or superior

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

(Same)

(Same)

**Ch. II.** Monthly Exercises

**Ch. III.** Weekly Exercises

**Ch. IV.** Daily Exercises

**Ch. V.** Horarium

**Part VI.** Appropriate Means  
of maintaining the Congregation

**VI.** Means to promote the  
continuance of the  
Congregation

**Ch. 1.** Means of only receiving  
subjects into the Congregation

**I.** Means of receiving only good  
Good Subjects

**Ch. II.** Means of destroying  
ambition or office- seeking

**II.** Means of doing away with  
office seeking or  
campaigning

**Ch. III.** Means of avoiding a  
poor choice of Superiors

**III.** Means of not choosing  
bad Superiors

**Ch. IV.** Means of preventing  
Superior's bad use of authority

**IV.** Means of preventing abuse  
of superior's authority

**Ch. V.** Means of avoiding the  
Superior's negligence in watching  
over and correcting the sisters

**V.** Means of having Superior  
be serious in her duties  
(correction of the sisters)

**Ch. VI.** Conferences

(Same)

**1693B**

**1694**

**1730**

**1788**

**Ch. VII** Chapter of Faults

(Same)

(Same)

The appendix will provide some additional detail about some of the content of these various constitutions. The following chapters will integrate and comment upon some similarities and differences in the evolving life of the Sisters of St. Joseph that are revealed in the five resources identified at the beginning of this chapter

## Chapter Three

### **Handwritten Manuscripts Compared to Four Written *Constitutions***

The prior chapter compared the **printed** *Constitutions* dated 1693B, 1694, 1730 and 1788. Those editions do **not** have a one to one correspondence with the handwritten manuscripts of different congregations which have been compiled and called *Primitive Constitutions*. Thus *Primitive Constitutions* are not one work as today's *Constitutions* are. The compilation of several handwritten manuscripts from different foundations, the so called *Primitive Constitutions*, cannot be read in the same way that an integrated work called *Constitution* is read and interpreted today.

A brief comparison of the content and form of the handwritten manuscripts will be presented in the following pages and indicated as *Prim C or PC*.. Any comments in ( ) refer to the printed *Constitutions*, which do not appear until later and are designated in this work as 1693B, 1694, 1730 and 1788.

A brief chart comparison will introduce some of the differences between the earliest handwritten manuscripts which were accessible and the later printed editions of *Constitutions*. The content and form of the *Primitive Constitutions (Prim. C or PC)* will be presented with some notations and implications of how this document differs from later printed editions.

#### **Primitive Constitutions (PC)**

**Title Page** at the beginning

## Content (PC)

-prayer to the two Trinities

**Title:** *des filles de Saint-Joseph*

(*Soeurs*)

## Divisions

1st part: *traitera (expliquera)*

5th part: *de leurs exercices (+spirituels)*

PC + *Customs Book* will be added

Not mentioned)

## Part I

**Title:** *petite Congrégation*

(*des soeurs de Saint-Joseph*)

**Par. #1** PC+*la bonté divine*

PC + *les exercices de  
miséricorde* (+ list is missing)

PC + means *pour le salut et la  
perfection au public*

(missing)

All + *suivant et observant toutes*

*les Règles* (not in PC: *qui leur sont  
présrites*)

**Par. #2** *Elle sera divisée pow pouvoir  
être plus utile au public...3 sorte  
d'associations... + list (missing)*

## Form

omitted in all printed versions

(1693B, 1694, 1730,1788)

No chapter divisions in Part I (*Prim. C*)

Included in the *nature of the*

*Congregation* are the origin, name

vows. cloister habit, office, prayer, *la*

Superiors (bishops), Spiritual

Father, *Agrégées*, humility, rank

(These topics become 9 chapters

in later printed works)

(Form gives a different meaning

to content, e.g., extrinsic material

is included in *nature of*

*Congregation*)

**Content (PC)**

*charité cordiale*

*(charité et cordialité)*

(nb. fidelity to a spirit, to law!)

a relationship)

*...de professeur ce qu'elle  
the*

*connaître être plus agréable à Dieu*

*en toutes sortes de perfection*

*intérieure et extérieure et en toute*

*sorte d'exercice de zèle pour le bien*

*des âmes et le soulagement des*

*nécessiteux*

*(...par une pratique continuelle de toute  
ce qu'elles connaîtront être plus parfait  
et plus agréable à sa très sainté volonté,  
ainsi que le faisaient Jésus, Marie et Joseph  
tandis qu'il ont été sur la terre)*

+ addition of Visitation and influence of Francis de Sales

**Form**

What is intrinsic in all is fidelity to rule

(Later, fidelity will be to letter of the

(In Later editions, chapters on nature of

Congregation and other topics can make it seem that all items are of equal importance, which is not the case.)

*(Vow chapter: 2 yr. Novitiate; Vows are perpetual and to be observed as if they were solemn; dispensation details; legal obligations and financial arrangements; part of dowry is returned).*

The **entire rest of the chapter** is omitted from all other **printed versions**. This includes sharing the house with other women, e.g., *perdues*, *miséricordes*, those who want to come for instruction in virtue as well as *agrégées*; (*agrégées* here are other houses)...*dans les villes et villages circonvoisins* The chapter says that *agrégées* have a vow of stability, no money, no intention of marrying, and habit (for *agrégées*?). Vows, humility, novitiate, and cloister are also topics that are included in this same chapter.

## Content (PC)

## Form

### Part II

Par. #1: unity between nature and purpose  
(missing)

(Later editions will divide the one chapter of **Part II** into 6 chapters).

*“la fin”* The end of the Congregation  
To unite in one body-associées, agrégées,  
*les âmes les plus saints que Dieu a dans  
le monde, qui n’ont point de quoi entrer  
en religion ou qui n’y sont pas appelees  
et de perfectionner de plus les dites dames  
dans l’exercice du saint Service de Dieu*

(Later versions state *two ends* of the Congregation in Ch. 1.)

*(“les personnes qui ne sont pas appellées  
au Cloître et qui veulent vivre retirées du  
Monde, travailler sérieusement à leur  
perfection...”)*

*(Abrégé de la fin)* is inserted after the specific expressions of personal perfection. The later form makes it look like it is possible to **split love of God from love of neighbor!**

#2 *“par le zèle des mêmes âmes elle  
prétend pourvoir à toutes les nécessités  
spirituelles et temporelles du cher  
prochain”*

N.b. *abrégé* includes ministry

*(“...et secourir le prochain dans toutes les  
nécessités Spirituelles et temporelles; d’où  
il s’enfuit qu’il y a deux fins principales”)*

## Content

The first part, to attain this end:  
General means: die to self, live for  
God alone, etc.

all the spiritual and temporal  
works of mercy are expected of members.

Education

## Part III

**title: title:** *des qualités requises aux  
personnes qui voudrant être agrégées  
à cette petite Congrégation de Saint- Joseph*

*(...de la Manière de recevoir les Soeurs,  
et des qualités requises pour être  
reçues dans la Congrégation)*

Note the shift in emphasis from  
person to Congregation and authority.

*Agrégées- hors de la maison”*

## Form

(Later editions have Ch. 2 state  
General means as observing vows.  
rules, constitutions but little  
mention of love or works as an  
expression of love. Service to  
neighbor is necessary but it is  
separate from their salvation or  
perfection)

(Later editions say only works of  
*charité et miséricorde*)

(This becomes “*école*” later; also  
they beg for prisoners or sick)

(Later editions use scripture which  
is not used in *Prim C*).

## Content

## Form

### Part IV

*Règles de la Supérieure*

(Printed has *Des Règles de la Prieuré*)

Superior should exemplify great charity  
toward every kind of neighbor (missing later)

style of correction: loving and maternal (missing later)

(Later, chapter of faults is included under role description; also the superior keeps all important papers).

The changes in form and structure of the printed *Constitutions* are as important as changes in content. At first glance, it seems minor that the dedication to the two trinities has become blurred. Yet the founder refers to this as the *abrégée de la fin*, a way of keeping in view the end or purpose of the congregation.

The later form simply says “Practice what is according to the divine will, as did Jesus, Mary and Joseph.” This is laudable but it is also a diversion of the founder’s purpose.

Another seemingly simple change in printed editions was the addition of chapter headings in the section on Nature and Purpose. The change had far-reaching consequences. Instead of rank, habit, etc., being simple words in a context that showed perspective, they are now headings as are nature and purpose. With the passage of time, this led to the acceptance of rank, habit and vows as being just as important as the nature and purpose of the congregation.

Change in terminology, again seemingly minor at first glance, reveals an attitudinal change. The use of solemn in the vow section, the emphasis on the legal

aspect of the vows and dismissal, the more frequent use of words like cloister and prioress, all led to a more monastic interpretation of women's religious life. This trend was clearly **not** present in the original *or Primitive Constitutions*.

By far the most dramatic change in terms of consequence is the substitution of *les fins* for *la fin double*. With the substitution it becomes possible to think of personal perfection apart from the "glory of God and the salvation and perfection of the neighbor." The internal unity of the *Primitive Constitutions* was lost. The presence of such remarks as "Recall that in the superior or in the poor you are to recognize and serve Jesus Christ" were applied to a type of obedience rather than being a reminder of what should not be separated.

Other expressions such as recalling the presence of God before, during and after recreation, became easily useless and discarded in renewal efforts. The mystical dimensions of the *Primitive Constitutions* were lost. The variety of expressions in the early constitution was an effort to draw sisters into the life of the Trinity, the Trinity communicating itself while drawing them closer to God, each other and all others. Such interpretations were later lost or dismissed.

Once the mystical was missed, the more rational and rather masculine mode of interpretation prevailed. Key concepts such as *anéantissement* were dismissed as impossible or simply as poor theology. The mystical experience and expression that evokes the image of a Son who always seeks the glory and will of the Father, the Son infinitely bound by love but infinitely free, was glossed over.

Obedience to the rule which was once obedience to a relationship became a measuring rod for personal holiness. Fidelity to the persons of the Trinity was replaced by fidelity to a list of do's and don'ts. It became easier to rely on human efforts than on God's love and grace. Success in works became synonymous with success in ministry. Self emptying love of the Son as a motive for service was lost in the increased legalization.

Apostolic life with the implication of prophetic preaching and living out of prayer life ceased to be connected to ministry as an expression of that apostolic life. It became easy to separate individual pursuit of perfection from the perfection of the neighbor. The focus of the *Primitive Constitutions* on personal holiness as an indispensable means of working for the glory of God and the salvation of others was no longer a unity. It became possible to live one's life of holiness without it affecting either "my" apostolate or the life of others. The mysticism of unity of love of God and love of neighbor at the heart of the *charism* of the congregation was broken.

The structure of the *Primitive Constitutions* revolved around the apostolic nature of the congregation and the virtues the apostle must acquire. The accent is on the apostle and mission as expressions of holiness. Later the unity focus would give way to making the structure of the congregation or the works of the congregation and the legalities of rule as primary.

The emphasis in the *Primitive Constitutions* was clearly the primacy of the interior law of love. That emphasis makes the subtitle *Congregation of the great love of God* comprehensible. In time, the greater legality led to the centrality of the Paschal mystery of love getting lost or at least changed in meaning.

Médaille's reflection to "Love what the world hates. Hate what the world loves. Be crucified to the world and may the world be crucified to you," was dismissed instead of being reinterpreted. The dismissal came from a perspective that judged Médaille's spirituality to be influenced by Augustinian pessimism and out of context rather. This interpretation meant that the loving spirituality at the heart of our life and work was lost for a time. With that loss came the loss of the transformative nature of the Paschal mystery.

As the *Primitive Constitution* was eventually replaced by printed versions, the restructured and reprinted versions slowly evolved into a more rigid

uniformity. The clear unity of loving God and neighbor as one love was replaced with a twofold and separated interpretation. It seemed as if one could love God and love neighbor as two separated expressions of holiness.

In conclusion, it can be said that once there were printed documents, the printed texts emphasized a more legal understanding of the vocation of this congregation. The congregation became seen more as an institution than as a community of love grounded in Trinitarian love. The one end of the congregation envisioned by the founder became two ends. However, as time passed, a renewed vision closer to the original vision of the founder would once again appear.

The research into the spirit of early documents contributed to that renewed vision. The successive chapters will provide further information and reflection about that renewed vision grounding renewal.

## Chapter Four

### Monastic and Apostolic Influences on the Concept of Membership

When considering the different lifestyles of religious life, the terms *monastic* and *apostolic* are used to describe differences in various elements that are part of the lifestyle. There are similar elements as well but the emphasis and interpretation of the elements vary.

A monastic lifestyle has its activities centered around formal prayer times. Formal prayer at set times is primary for this expression of religious life. There is a set schedule for the day, a routine established in the order of the day and adherence to the schedule and daily regularity is central. Monastic life includes a separation from others assured by cloister. The *being apart from* is for the sake of being *more* a part of God's transforming intent for the world and its people.

Solitude and peace along with stability of heart and of place is the hoped for result. Prayer is the apostolic work that is central to this way of life. Physical presence is essential for any sense of community, that is, minds and hearts united in faith. The role of silence in maintaining a sense of prayerfulness throughout the day is important. Each particular monastic community will have some degree of diversity in how these elements are lived out.

Active apostolic communities place a different emphasis on components of their lifestyle. Active service for others is primary and other elements of prayer, community and perhaps silence are organized around the call to serve as Christ

serves. Flexibility is the rule and change is the norm for active apostolic religious. Service of others is the means to finding, being with and serving God.

Mobility and availability require that some elements of cloister exist in a limited way. The prayer of the apostle will be formative of community but community is not limited to physical presence. Unity of mind and heart, a corporate sense of the whole is a deeper reality that may include physical presence. However, the reality of communion in the Lord is larger and deeper than just external or physical presence. Community for active apostolic religious is affected and somewhat formed through the service to which the community is called.

Jean Pierre Médaille, the founder, made it clear that the Congregation of St. Joseph was an active apostolic community. The patronage of St. Joseph contained the meaning of the call to serve. The *Primitive Constitutions* made that service element very clear.

*It will have the name Congregation of St. Joseph, a venerable name which will recall to mind that the sisters should be present to and serve the dear neighbor with the same care that this glorious saint had in serving the Virgin Mary and the Savior Jesus.*

In the *Règlements*, a slightly different reason is given for the name of Saint Joseph.

*It will bear the name of St. Joseph since it will especially live and imitate this great saint in his hidden life and will be under his protection and safeguard.*

In some places, it is not clear if the *Règlements* and the *Primitive Constitutions* were the same document. It is also not clear if these documents

were written for *the same group* of women. What is clear is that Médaille saw no dichotomy between love of God and love of neighbor. The graciousness given to love is one call and not able to be separated into two loves, love for God and love for neighbor.

In other words, there are not two calls and two loves. Personal holiness and communion with God is the source for service of others and service of others enhances intimacy with God. This is the mysticism to which the members of the Congregation of Saint Joseph are called. The living out of the name of the congregation, St. Joseph, implies a mysticism of communion that incorporates service into the great love of God. This grounding spirituality can be called an apostolic mysticism.

There were many titles or names by which the members of the Congregation of St. Joseph were known. Various areas of France had different titles or names for the members. A partial list of the names include the following:

*Filles dévotes* (Montregarel, St. Jeures)

*Dames de Plauzat* (Plauzat)

*Filles rubanières* (Riotard)

*Filles de l'union de Saint Geniez and Filles régentes de la ville de Saint Geniez* (Rodez)

*Soeurs de l'Union de Travail et de la Croix* (Rodez)

*Congrégation de filles et soeurs de Saint Joseph* (St. Just Malmont)

*Compagnie de Saint Joseph, Société de Saint Joseph* (St. Romain-en-Jarrest)

*Filles* (St. Romain Lachaim)

*Honnêtes filles* (St. Romain les Atheux)

*Soeurs hospitalières de St. Victor, de St. Sauveur...*

*Soeurs hospitalières sous le vocable de St. Joseph* (Satillieu)

*Filles séculières agrégées par ensemble sous la confrérie de St. Joseph* (Sauxillanges)

There are many other names which are listed in the **Appendix** of this work. What the exhaustive list indicates is that contemporaries of the Sisters of St. Joseph had a variety of perceptions of and names for the early sisters. It is interesting to note that these early Sisters of St. Joseph were not given the title of *religieuses*.

The absence of that title is significant. It indicates that this group, wherever they served, was not connected to the cloistered, monastic communities of the day. There seems to have been care taken to avoid the title of *religieuses*, a title that had some restrictions when a group was apostolically oriented. There is a distinct preference for titles like *filles* or *confrérie*, both titles for non-cloistered groups. The apostolic group was known by work done, by the parish to which the group belonged, or sometimes by the name of the town. Thus, there are the variety of names that the prior page indicates.

The basic *vocable* was subordinated to other connections. In fact, to this day, there is a group called *les Soeurs de Notre Dame de Chambriac* which has the same constitutions as Sisters of St. Joseph and belongs to the French Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph but does not share the name Sisters of St. Joseph!

There was much diversity among the early groups. The *Primitive Constitutions* illustrate the types of associations that can carry out service effectively.

*In order to serve people more effectively, the congregation will be divided into three types of associations:*

*the first will be demoiselles de service, that is, women who have sufficient income for their own support and can devote themselves completely to works of charity.*

*the second will consist of demoiselles de travail. They will compensate for their lack of temporal goods by earnest labor.*

*the third will be composed of widows and women of the poorer class....*

*Besides the sisters in the above mentioned houses who will form the main body of our new congregation, there may also be other agrégées who, in various areas of the neighboring towns will engage in the same exercises as the sisters, insofar as it is feasible; this will provide a place of spiritual strength for many single women who have no intention of marrying, or lack the means of entering religion (cloister).*

It is clear from the very structure of the congregation that active apostolic service was the determining influence and core of the groups. It is also clear that the intent of the founder was not to found a monastic group. From the early documents, it is clear that the term *member* included a variety of people. The variety of people included *noble women who are kept in the world against their will by rank or obligations*.

The sisters are to live *in the manner of religious*, but the title *religious* is never used. The title *religious* creeps into a description only in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. At this time the term *agrégée* is used with multiple meanings. Initially, the term was an organizational one that meant a community was in relationship to a larger entity. Today it would mean that particular communities are related to a motherhouse. By 1836, in Lyons, the *agrégée* is the servant of the local *Curé*, lives with the sisters and observes their rule as far as her duties will allow.

The *Primitive Constitutions* name qualities for the members of the community or those who are to be considered for membership.

*The Sisters of St. Joseph should have qualities not found in too many people. Since it will be a community without cloister and since the people who compose it will not be withdrawn from the rest of society, one must require of them*

*extraordinary qualities of body and spirit, qualities not found in those who enter religion.*

The *Constitutions* list *external qualities* that could be beneficial to apostolic activity in the midst of others. The list includes the following:

- good family background
- no scandal connected with their behavior
- good health, at least no contagious disease or serious handicap
- good common sense
- good intellect
- openness to God and desire for union with God
- if advanced in age, they must be very virtuous

The *Constitutions* then list interior qualities that are congruent with the end of the congregation. These interior qualities include:

- interior peace, moderation in everything
- being pure in heart and body
- charity among themselves and with every kind of neighbor
- an attraction for holiness
- simplicity balanced with prudence
- abandonment to the providence of God
- profound humility
- great love of God expressed in deeds
- zeal for the greater glory of God and the salvation and perfection of the neighbor

Both interiorly and exteriorly, the sisters are to manifest *la fin*, love of God and neighbor. They are to cultivate what leads to the fulfillment of the end of the congregation of great love. An abundance of archival data speaks about some of

the personal qualities people saw manifested which illustrates how different groups were living the end of the congregation.

*They edify the whole city by their own personal life, as well as by inspiring other women ...*(Aubernas).

*They have great mutual love and acceptance... They share titles... dress, goods, debts...*(Craponne).

Death notices in St. Amont-Roche-Savine lists the *virtues* of sisters who have died. These lists include many virtues like the following: *patience, zeal, love for the poor, resignation to the will of God, lively faith, gentleness, service to priests hiding during the revolution and great courage during persecution.*

In a municipal letter found at St. Georges L'Agricol, it is stated that the *sisters have a great influence on public opinion.* (See the **Appendix** for additional information). From the many testimonies in the archives, it seems obvious that the virtuous qualities listed in the *Constitutions* were put into practice. The sisters are involved with others in service. People are affected for the better by the deeds and lives of the sisters. Documents clearly indicate that sisters are known and respected by their contemporaries.

The qualities desired in members are clearly set forth in the *Constitutions.* At the same time, it is significant that there is little mention of **vows.**

Médaille states that the nature of our Institute is a secret association of three persons living together... bound by secret vows. However, the nature of secrecy is not clear. It is possible that literally the vows were secret. But it is just as possible that secret meant no official record existed.

*Secret* could also mean the record was *never recorded* in Parliament. *Secret*

could also mean that *only the local church* had approved of the group. In fact, even the official *Act of Approval* (1651) made particularly for the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy makes no mention of vows!

In the *Primitive Constitutions*, there is a simple mention of vows. *After their novitiate, they will make three simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.*” In the same constitutions there is a reference that *their chastity should be angelic... their poverty should entail a complete stripping of self... their obedience should be prompt...*

These *Primitive Constitutions* also have a formula for vows included, so obviously vows were taken. The later **printed** *Constitutions* have included overwhelming detail about the vows. These later constitutions give a very rigorous interpretation of vows and clearly stress the legal aspects of each vow.

Historical documents suggest there were various interpretations of the binding nature of vows depending upon the house in which one lived. Those who lived in country houses had vows which terminated when they departed from the particular house. This was true for city houses with the exception that ecclesiastical approval was needed for termination of vows.

What must be remembered is that each house of the congregation was autonomous. Therefore, when a sister left the house, she left the congregation unless she was transferred to a different house.

In 1563, the Council of Trent decided that women living in communities *without* cloister and solemn vows had to choose between making solemn vows and accepting cloister or else ending their vocation by staying with a community that would be dissolved. In 1584, the same mandate was given to men’s communities, with the exception of the Jesuits.

Although simple vows were considered binding before God, they had no juridical effect in church or state. In contrast, solemn vows were recognized both by civil authority and by Church authority. If a person with solemn vows left the convent or monastery, that person was legally a fugitive from civil law. In practice, the major difference was that simple vows could be dispensed. Solemn vows could not be so easily dispensed.

Archival material contains ample data which refers to the sisters' acts of profession of simple vows. There is one document in the archives at Lyons that formally requests the Pope to grant the Sisters of St. Joseph permission to take solemn vows but not to be cloistered. If the request was not going to be granted, the sisters requested that dispensation from simple vows be more difficult to obtain. There is no record of a reply from the Pope nor is there record of any further request. Thus, the sisters continued to make simple vows.

A simple vow of poverty was a bit more complicated than the simple vows of obedience and chastity. With the vow of poverty, there was the problem of transfer of goods. Archival data is consistent in showing that the sisters made a disposition of their goods at the time of their entrance. Their testaments and acts of association were at times contested legally. The available documentation shows that these acts were honored by civil authority, at least until the time of the Revolution.

Archival data presents an interesting picture of how these simple vows were actually lived. Some of the houses such as Aurec, Chevrières, St. Pierre du Champ, St. Sigolène and some others contain very explicit mention that the sisters took simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. However the actual acts of profession are missing. Thus, it is impossible to draw a detailed picture.

There are archival examples of diverse perspectives regarding simple vows. Satillieu (1662) records a dispensation from the simple vows of a Sister Courbis

that is signed by the canon of the cathedral of Le Puy. The canon has signed it because the bishop who approved the establishment of the group was in Vienne. Rodez says that “even without a vow of obedience, one obeys promptly and as cordially as if one had vowed it” (1682).

Bas-en-Basset states “they are a simple association of devout women” (1714). Jonzieux mentions that the group “lived together for years without either a contract or vows.” A document from St. Just Malmont quotes a request from a sister to the civil government. The sister is trying to repossess her house. She states, “I passed my youth, without taking any vows or following any monastic rule. We did wear a costume which we abandoned when the law required” (1793). (There are many other examples in the **Appendix**).

What can be concluded from the variety of archival data? It is certainly safe to conclude that the early sisters did not have solemn vows. In some cases, it is clear that they did not take simple vows.

In conclusion, it is evident that there was great flexibility in this matter. It is still obscure why vows were or were not taken. What is clear is that sisters enjoyed membership with or without vows. What mattered was engagement in apostolic works. What also mattered was operating as an apostolic community that lived within the civil and ecclesiastical laws of that historical period.

## Chapter Five

### Monastic and Apostolic Influences on the Concept of Prayer

The variety of documents for the Sisters of St. Joseph includes both formal and informal prayer practices. There are daily, weekly, monthly and annual prayer and pious practices expected of the members.

The *Primitive Constitutions* state that *They will recite the office of the Blessed Virgin only on Sundays and feast days*. Other practices include the reception of Communion on Sundays, holidays and Thursdays. On both Sundays and Thursdays the sacrament of reconciliation may be celebrated.

Monthly practices include an overview of the month, choice of a patron saint to be a guide, reception of Communion on the first day of the month so that the month may be spent in a fruitful manner. Annual practices include making a one week retreat, celebrating a triduum in honor of the Immaculate Conception, celebrating a triduum in honor of the feast of St. Joseph, making a weekly preparation for major feasts of the year, doing a special prayerful preparation during Holy Week and reciting extra prayers before Pentecost to prepare themselves for the coming of the Spirit.

In general, daily common practices included reciting the *Little Office of the Holy Spirit*, litanies of the holy name of Jesus, litany of the Virgin Mary, litany of St. Joseph, assisting at daily mass, doing spiritual reading, praying the rosary, making both a particular and general Examen and saying other daily prayers.

The novice director *will gently lead sisters to love the holy exercise of meditation which is proper to their Institute and very necessary in every action of their lives.* This practice was meant to encourage an interior life that would support and ground apostolic service.

The *Eucharistic Letter* indicated the relationship between service and living an interior life. The *Eucharistic Letter* states that sisters *will serve in spirit and in truth. Serving in spirit means living an interior life. Serving in truth means rendering a variety of services consonant with your sex, age and condition.*

The Règlements state the following. *They will live a life consecrated to the pure and perfect love of God. Their constant concern should be to have living in them the very life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph-and lead their neighbor to also imitate this life-to live the total double union of themselves with God and with every sort of neighbor.*

It is important to note that recitation of the *Divine Office* was not included in the *horarium* or daily schedule. The Sisters of St. Joseph practiced both the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The house, the prayer forms and the schedule or *horarium* could not be replicas of their monastic counterparts. For monastic communities, the hours spent in recitation of the *Divine Office* and the house structure that included choir stalls for recitation or singing of the *Divine Office* were basic to the monastic style of life. It would be impossible for Sisters of St. Joseph to recite all the hours at the proper times in choir stalls. Why? Given the hours spent in apostolic service, the number in a house indicating the house was small and the fact that many sisters were illiterate made a monastic lifestyle unworkable.

However, it is interesting to note that the rubrics for deportment during the recitation of the *Divine Office* were included in the *Primitive Constitutions*. Sections of the *Primitive Constitutions* clearly substitute the *Little Office of the*

*Holy Spirit* for the hours of the *Divine Office*. By the time the sisters came to the United States, their *Constitutions* explicitly prohibited the recitation of the *Divine Office*! Why was such recitation prohibited? It was prohibited *because it took time away from service of the neighbor*.

What conclusions can be drawn from all of this? First, in the context of his other writings, John Pierre Médaille consistently uses devotions of the day that were drawn from the popular piety of the people instead of from the monastic lifestyle prayer practices. The spirituality reflects the gospel expectation that all Christians were to be perfect. Médaille indicates in his writings that these writings are for all Christians *who aspire to great virtue*.

Second, there were ecclesial pressures of canonical expectations for monastic communities or true religious that could have influenced the forms of prayer expected of apostolic communities. Médaille was well aware that the reality for apostolic communities was not the same reality as that for monastic communities. At the same time, some basics of the spiritual life and its ongoing development would be included in the expectations of Sisters of St. Joseph. It was clearly expected that meditation or mental prayer be an important part of every day. The *Primitive Constitutions* state these as *propre à leur Institut et très nécessaire pour aide toutes les soeurs à la pratique de ce qui est le plus parfait en chaque vertu et en toutes les actions de leur vie*.

Gospel principles were to be the basis of the journey. Médaille used written words but also easy to memorize guides called *Maxims of Perfection* These were intended for all people who desired great virtue. This mode of inculcating gospel spirituality was necessary because the church at this time restricted personal reading of Scripture to clerics only!

Médaille has frequent admonitions to the sisters to live in great peace

and union with God. The sisters were expected to be women of prayer. In using the image of *total double union*, Médaille indicated that prayer was integral to vocation and to the identity of Sisters of St. Joseph.

The process of loving God and loving others was **one process**. The Sisters of St. Joseph did not have two separate calls, that is, one call to holiness and another call to service. There was one process of loving God and loving others. The two were intertwined and not able to be separated. The influence that the *First Letter of John* had on the spirituality of the founder is evident here. That letter makes it very clear that love of God, others and self is all one love grounded within God's love.

The *twofold union* language is a manner of speaking about the one love. The way of achieving this twofold union of God and others was varied. To deepen union, sisters engaged in spiritual exercises and devotional practices of the day as well as additional practices which required considerable spiritual maturity. There was an emphasis on mental prayer and concern for the *Examen*, a reflective means of consciously examining one's efforts to grow in the spiritual life with God's help.

The question has been raised about why popular devotions were used for the formation of the members. Was this simply a convenience because many people would know those prayers and devotions? Or was this a manner of reconciling prayer and spiritual life within an apostolic life? No doubt there are many answers to both of these questions!

The *Primitive Constitutions* note observations about informal prayer and some fruits of a deeply spiritual life. *They should live in perfect interior peace.*

*Primitive Constitutions* emphasize that the life of the sisters should be fashioned on the model of Jesus Christ who was completely given to the will of the Father. A pure and perfect love of God can be accomplished with divine grace. God desires the perfection of a holy life. Members should aspire to this perfection with humility, courage and confidence in the Lord. By the grace of vocation, Christ will lead the members gently and effectively so that they may become all that God hopes and desires for them.

In everything, members will strive to practice what they believe to be more perfect and more agreeable to God. This means that they will fervently give themselves to the exercise of meditation and to the reflective study of the presence of God. *May all see that their life is one of great union with God. Their fidelity to all the movements of grace should be very great.*

Expediency may have played a part in all that was expected of the members. At the same time, all of the practices were consonant with both the nature and end of the congregation. Closeness to the neighbor seems to indicate that the neighbor is part of prayer.

Deliberate ordinariness in this spirituality is a way of being with others. Even the limitations concerning frequency of reception of the Eucharist indicates a oneness with the laity. Some monasteries had a special privilege of more frequent reception of the Eucharist. However the Sisters of St. Joseph did not request this special privilege. They preferred oneness with the laity rather than having any special privilege which would set them apart in this regard.

It should also be pointed out that the lack of frequent reception of the

Eucharist imposed by the church authorities could also have been imposed by whoever the superior or spiritual father was. This century was a time when Jansenism and Jansenistic tendencies affected much of France. For Jansenists, God was a strict and distant God whose holiness ought to be approached only with great fear and unworthiness. Thus, there ought not to be frequent communion.

The sisters were considered to be a *Eucharistic congregation*. What did that mean? Whatever it meant, the meaning did not affect the frequency of reception of the Eucharist. At the same time, the *Primitive Constitutions* make it clear that fervent reception of the Eucharist is a means of arriving at the virtues expected of the sisters. Fervent reception is also a means of maintaining and helping a holy life to grow.

The *Eucharistic Letter* reflects the communion that is the end of the congregation. That letter helps to focus one of the many meanings of Jesus manifest in the Eucharist as the founder interpreted it. *Jesus is here completely emptied of self and should we not also work to establish an Institute with the same characteristic? The purpose of our selfless congregation:... To achieve this total double union of ourselves and the dear neighbor with God - of ourselves and all things- of all things among themselves and with us.*

The *Primitive Constitutions* describe the communion among members who should live as if they had *one heart and one soul*. The charity among the members should be so obvious that all who see them can say that these women do have one heart and one soul.

Médaille reflects that in the Eucharist there is a double movement

experienced by Jesus Christ and by believers. On the one hand there is intimacy with God and with others. On the other hand, there is also sacrifice.

In the *Maxims of Perfection*, Médaille wisely encourages everyone to *live with your Savior on the cross*. Those who are willing to stay on the cross long enough will realize that Calvary is a love affair. Calvary is the place where love is poured out. This ministry is the place where Jesus is most apostolic. While apparently doing nothing but surrendering to the Father's love, he is doing everything that matters most, loving all with and in God.

With that in mind, all are invited to live both the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. In other words, members are to live the paschal mystery daily. In apostolic activity, everyone is to realize that resurrection hope is central to who each is called to be. If God is the main agent in whatever is done, there will not be despair when circumstances seem overwhelming. Living the fullness of the paschal mystery of death and rising leads to the realization that the *characteristic virtue* of the Sisters of St. Joseph is the virtue of **joy**. Joy is the manifestation of the love to which all are called.

Living the reality of Eucharist does not mean one is a victim or that one ought to impose harsh practices on oneself. The paschal mystery does include sacrifice but this assists the members *to profess in everything and everywhere, great joy and gentleness of heart*. It is the grace of God that brings the members to this point of joy and gentleness in every situation.

In the *Eucharistic Letter*, Médaille writes that *our dear Institute should be empty of self and completely filled with Jesus and God, with a*

*fullness I cannot adequately explain.... I can only say that the infinite Being of God seems to vivify the body and causes us to be nourished by the holiness of God...Is not all of this found in a marvelous manner in the holy Eucharist?*

It is this union or communion that is total which suggests the identity of the congregation. The call is for members to become *mystic apostles*. In the daily rhythm of life, members will learn the meanings of both greatness and nothingness. The *Primitive Constitutions* name the same reality stating that *since God wishes us to attain this perfection of life, we shall continually aim toward it with much gentleness, humility, courage and confidence in our Lord, who by the grace of vocation will lead us gently and effectively to everything He desires of us.*

The *Maxims of Perfection* provide detail about the expectations of this great love of God. There is a scriptural orientation to the maxims. Since laity were forbidden to read the scriptures, the maxims provided a way for laity to live the meanings of the scriptures. The maxims can also be looked upon as a school of prayer affecting daily life. Some look upon the maxims as another version of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. However one looks upon the maxims, the ultimate end is to foster living in God, finding God in all things, and serving God and all people with freedom and love. This is also the desired end of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. Note that Médaille found a way to share the *Spiritual Exercises* with anyone who aspired to great virtue.

For contemporary readers, it may be clear that *Maxims of Perfection* were a way of spreading some *New Testament* principles. Recall that the scriptures were restricted for laity and to be read only by clergy. A simple

comparison of a few selected *Maxims of Perfection* with particular scriptural texts will illustrate the relationship.

Maxim One: *Have always in sight the great end of your Christian commitment; see your particular vocation and the movement of divine grace which draws you gently and firmly to live the great virtue; and do nothing which might distance you from -or make you undeserving of-the graces with which God in God's greatness has been favoring you.* A similar concept can be found in many places in the scriptures. One explicit place is Col. 1:9-12. That text states *what we ask God is that through perfect wisdom and spiritual understanding, you should reach the fullest knowledge of God's will. Thus, you will be able to lead the kind of life which the Lord expects of you, a life acceptable to God in all its aspects, showing the results in all the good actions you do and increasing your knowledge of God. You will have in you the strength based on God's glorious power, never to give in...*

Maxim Two: *Take it as a rule of your being, for your virtues and your actions. That you must be made perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect; that is to say, embrace in all things what will bring about the greater glory of God, be more conformable to God's holy will and be more pleasing in God's sight.* Note the similarity of advice that Paul gives in I Thess. 4:1,3: *We urge you and appeal to you in the Lord Jesus to make more and more progress in the kind of life that you are meant to live, the life that God wants.... What God wants is for you to be holy.*

Maxim Five: *Esteem the world and its vanities no more than dung. Let the world be crucified to you and you to the world; that is to say, despise the world which is only illusion and reject its maxims which are full of deceit and impiety.* Among other texts, I Cor. 7:31 states a similar

concept. *Those who have to deal with the world should not become engrossed in it. I say this because the world as we know it is passing away.*

Maxim Six: *Put aside your old self, so that you can put on the new. Eph. 4:23-24 urges believers to be renewed by a spiritual revolution, so that you can put on the new self that has been created in God's image.*

Maxim Seven: *In the manifestation of zeal characteristic of your very humble vocation, imitate the fervor of the most zealous and embrace in desire the salvation and perfection of a whole world....This will bring you to do everything and to undertake everything for the advancement of the glory of God and the salvation of the dear neighbor. Rom. 8:33 reflects that Nothing, therefore, can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or being persecuted. These are the trials through which we triumph through God's power.*

These are but a few examples of similar concepts in maxims and Scriptures. A reader familiar with the *Maxims of Perfection* and the *New Testament* can continue to make many more explicit comparisons. The point of doing this very brief illustration is simply to show that the core of New Testament spirituality is also the core of the maxims. Note that the orientation of the maxims is one of apostolic spirituality of the times. One's personal spirituality is intimately woven into the salvation and perfection of the neighbor with all creation becoming one in God. This mystic-apostle spirituality grounds the journey into God for all those in the community of St. Joseph.

The guidance provided by the maxims and other practices did have results which early archives testify to. Even though archives record little detailed

information about prayer life, the results of a living prayer life can be found. The archival material like Aubenas III clearly states that the sisters *edify the whole city by their personal life*. (See **Appendix** for additional material).

In summary, the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph was directed toward participation as fully as possible in the life of the Trinity who are a communion. Members of the congregation were meant to live the great love of God which included all others as neighbor. The prayer life continued into the active prayer of service and this in turn led back to and nourished formal prayer. The members did not simply recite prayers but were expected to live the paschal mystery and grow into the fullness of life in Christ.

In a century where literacy was rare and people did not have access to scripture, it was necessary for the founder to structure multiple avenues for growth in the spiritual life. This chapter has illustrated some of the ways Médaille accomplished his task. That he did so is verified through the early directives and documents. These make it clear that the purpose of all directives was to foster deep union with God and to live the paschal mystery in, with and through Jesus Christ through whom all is made new.

## Chapter Six

### Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Schedules and Cloister

Both the *Règlements* and the *Primitive Constitutions* indicate that there were expectations regarding weekly monthly and yearly practices. However, the data gathered from the various houses indicates that there was a wide variety in the schedules. The schedules varied in accord with the particular works done by the community as well as by the different tasks the group had.

In Rodez, a sister is told that when whatever she is doing in obedience keeps her from prayer, *she should not worry knowing her work substitutes for her prayer*. These type of comments from the archives indicate a sense the sisters had that the Sabbath was made for them rather than they being made for the Sabbath.

In an attempt to help sanctify even the most ordinary daily action such as getting dressed, there are prayers to be said before or during such action. It should be noted here that similar prayer practices were popular throughout France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One example of many is that of Phillipe d'Angoumois, who advocates similar devotions in his novel *La Florence*. He was one of the founders of the *Companie du Saint Sacrament*.

The *horarium* found in the primitive documents is structured. Considering only this, the reader might assume that early communities actually practiced a monastic *horarium*. However the data that each house provides shows great flexibility and variety in both the form and observance of the *horarium*. A

schedule was present in the houses in a very clear form. However, what was observed and what was not observed did not seem to be a central concern. What is known about the observance is that this earlier flexibility was lost as time passed.

With the passage of time, external structures like a schedule did become more monastic. However, it remained true that any *horarium* was a means and not an end. The intent was the formation of an apostolic person who could live in God's presence and love through relationship with others and God. This was more important than strict observance of any schedule. All was within the great love of God and neighbor as one.

A structured activity called a consciousness *Examen* was meant to ensure that a person's activity flowed from a heart united to Jesus Christ. Like any active Christian, a Sister of St. Joseph must be aware of inner movements of the heart. In all things she must find the blend of mission spontaneity and faith within a stability of heart. The consciousness *Examen* was one means to foster this union.

In the midst of apostolic endeavors, a sister must learn to be centered and focused, or the activity in which she engages is not truly apostolic. The vocation of a Sister of St. Joseph is a call to be a mystic fully involved with work being done and simultaneously being one with God. Work being done and communion with God are not two realities, but one reality. That is the form of mysticism to which a Sister of St. Joseph is called.

Some of the *Maxims of Perfection* show the complementarity between structured practices like the *Examen* and explicit maxims. As has been stated before, these complementary practices are means to the same end. A few examples of maxims that come immediately to mind will illustrate that complementarity.

*Base the whole strength and hope of success in whatever you plan upon a*

*complete mistrust of self, that you should join to a perfect confidence in God alone. Practice such acts of mistrust especially at the beginning of your every action. And, in order to combine prudence with sentiments of a true humility... Expect everything from God in whatever you undertake, nevertheless, be as diligent in carrying out your good works as if all depended on your effort alone and as if God had entrusted their success to your watchfulness alone and to your work.*

*Take care that God alone be the end and the beginning of all your undertakings and that in carrying them out you will never depart from his divine will.*

*In brief, seek in everything you do that God be content and nothing else.*

*Have God alone before your eyes, God's unique contentment and glory and attach no importance to anything else.*

These maxims and many others that the reader can consider are means for living each day in a discerning way. The intent of maxims and *Examen* was to form a heart that could be simultaneously one with God and one with all who were part of one's life. Another way of stating that reality is to say that everyone who lived the maxims is both worldly and otherworldly at the same time.

There are some other dimensions of structure that are apparent in the *Primitive Constitutions*. Silence is usual after apostolic activity. However during recreations sisters should endeavor to *se réjouir le plus gaiment et innocemment qu'elles pourront en Notre Seigneur*.

Penance is one area in which flexibility appears very evident. Penance must never interfere with service of the neighbor. Any penance is to be embraced only *according as their director advises*. At the same time there is to be an interior practice of mortification which is *wholehearted, gentle and courageous*.

All of this appears in our various documents. This indicates that one's

interior life is “scheduled” according to God not according to human time lines and external structures. That emphasis on God’s intent is found in a Maxim which states that holiness grows *by a perfect conformity of our will to the divine will, accompanied with true zeal for the greater glory of God, both within ourselves and within the neighbor.*

The flexibility about so many aspects of religious life included variation in the formation time of novitiate. In Craponne, the novitiate lasted for one year. In Chamelix, the novitiate period lasted for three years. In the house of Boutheon, the time of novitiate varied dependent upon other circumstances.

A similar flexibility is observed in the kinds of works the sisters did. Because of the works being done, there was flexibility in times and forms of prayer. Contemporaries of early sisters as well as sisters themselves have left many examples of such flexibility.

At Villars, 1764, those who are more educated teach class. Others work at making linens. Still others do various forms of handwork. All engage in prayer and in other charitable works.

At St. Didier, our foundation date is listed as 1674 but the *Lettres Patentes* of Bishop De Maupas state that Sisters of St. Joseph were established here in 1659. The discrepancy in dates could be due to the practice that Sisters of St. Joseph moved on when needs ceased or when those needs were taken over by other people. Then if another need arose or if the same need arose later in the same place, sisters might move back again to meet the need.

At Clermont-Ferrand, a *Customs Book* lists annual, monthly, weekly and daily practices in a very detailed manner. What shows flexibility here is that the girls who lived at the Réfuge in Clermont-Ferrand joined the sisters for some activities like adoration, various prayers and other things. This again illustrates that

the schedule of the sisters flowed out of the works that were being done.

For apostolic communities like the Sisters of St. Joseph, apostolic works of the sisters was the major factor affecting the schedule or *horarium* of the day, week, month and year. For monastic communities, the schedule or *horarium* affected which apostolic works might be undertaken.

Apostolic communities did have their own interpretation and practice of cloister which differed from the cloister of monastic communities. The *Règlements* state that the sisters *will try to have a small house for this association... In places where there are many called to this new style of life... There can be many small houses, all dependent on one superior (female)*. The sisters are to *keep a type of cloister in their house, which will be inaccessible to men; they will go out only to church, to visit the sick, the hospitals and for other exercises of charity*.

*Primitive Constitutions* state that sisters shall *live in the same house as a type of religious*. In other words, sisters will live in community. They will not live with strict cloister because their lives demand that they perform charitable works. At the same time, their lives will resemble those of the best disciplined “official” religious.

The *Avis*, a document written either by Médaille or Bishop De Maupas states that in the country houses without a former parlor, it would be advisable to have a sort of *grill* in whatever room visitors were generally received. Note that a sort of *grill* is advisable but not demanded.

The *Primitive Constitutions* state that the *ordinary residence of the sisters was a small house or section of the hospital*. There were no cloistered walks, but Médaille does encourage the sisters to go for walks. However they should go in groups of *two or four and avoid places where they are likely to meet too many*

*people. Sisters were encouraged to speak as little as possible in public places and only when necessary in discharging their duties.*

Houses of the sisters were structured for service. Each house was to have a section where goods for the poor were stored, where there could be a sort of pharmacy and a room where young women could come for instruction.

It should be remembered that at this time in history, *cloister* for women was an important symbol both in the church and civil society. Thus a *pseudo-cloister* was necessary for sisters to gain and maintain respectability as women and as religious. More rigid interpretations of cloister appear to be part of the Gallican mind set of the time. This mind set could be one factor that led to ambiguity about cloister in early texts of the congregation.

A number of documents in the archival data indicates that Sisters of St. Joseph were not perceived as a cloistered group. The lifestyle of the group which included simple dress and flexible schedule set them apart from cloistered communities of the time. Some explicit documents that indicate the diversity and flexibility of early Sisters of St. Joseph include the following:

Bas-en-Basset (1714): the document says explicitly that Sisters of St. Joseph were *poor peasant women, neither veiled not cloistered.*

Sauxillanges (1665): They are in no way cloistered and they simply live in the same houses as “*veuves et filles.*” At Sauxillanges, we were called *filles seculières agrégées sous le vocable de la confrérie de St. Joseph.*

Clermont-Ferrand (1775): Here the residence of the sisters was still *an apartment in the hospital not destined for the sick.* The same documents mention that if sisters had to travel to the hospital, probably when assigned there from another place, the hospital board paid for their transportation. This makes it very

clear that strict cloister was not part of the lifestyle of the group.

Apostolic service was primary not only in the view sisters had of themselves but also in how their presence was viewed by the people they were serving. Documents from Bas-en-Basset state that permission to change residence of the sisters was given *in light of the services rendered to the parish by the sisters*. Such movements would not be typical of monastic groups of the time.

Another distinction between monastic groups and apostolic groups like the Sisters of St. Joseph included clothing. A monastic habit was a symbol of a way of life and that one was set apart for the sake of holiness. Early documents of the Sisters of St. Joseph indicate that the sisters were not to be set apart but to be a part of the people.

The Rèlements state that *The vivre et vêtir will be that of upright women and in keeping with religious poverty and their own social condition*. Dress of the sisters was not uniform. Although the dress was not uniform, the *Lettre Eucharistique* makes it clear that dress should be marked by modesty and simplicity. There is a provision made for the dress of differing social classes.

*Primitive Constitutions* are explicit in stating that *Their habits shall be like that of upright widows*. There is no particular reference to social class in this document. Distinctions in dress and life style did occur between sisters in the country and sisters in the city. The manner of dress was not as important as the apostolic relationships their work demanded. The depth of consecrated apostolic duties permitted sisters to divert somewhat from traditional norms of dress. At the same time the sisters should be aware that *They should give edification to all that come in contact with them*.

The later printed *Constitutions* make reference to *l'habit des veuves honnêtes* and state that dress should be simple and modest. Evidently widows still

have more mobility in the social milieu than either their single or married sisters. Wearing widow type dress gave the early sisters greater freedom to engage in active apostolic works.

In the 1694 edition of the *Constitutions*, changes about proper dress begin to emerge. By this time, there is no further mention of widows garb. The fabric is no longer just ordinary material but now it becomes specifically a black wool. The skirt must be full-length and has a train. Thus, the garb of the early sisters has gradually evolved into this more uniform dress.

How did that happen? As early as a conference given to sisters in 1661, Bishop de Maupas states, *Les soeurs des villes porteront une coiffe de toile dessous, et celles des villages ne porteront qu'une coiffe de toile...* Some changes will occur at the request of the sisters.

At Satillieu in 1774, a letter written to male superiors states that *their dress is subject to inconvenience and indecencies and if it pleases you sir (mon Seigneur), allow us to dress like the sisters in Le Puy, which will put an end to these inconveniences and put some uniformity in the way we dress.*

The dress of the sisters, despite the differences mentioned, seemed to be in keeping with their work and apostolic commitments. Wearing the widow's garb gave social maneuverability to women of their era. Sisters would not be set apart while traveling about the cities and villages. Their manner of dress was important only in so far as it facilitated their service of the neighbor.

A more monastic style of dress for apostolic communities did emerge in time. This more monastic style included a long veil and *guimpe* as well as other linens. This was the dress at the time of the Revolution. By 1774, several groups were wearing a *guimpe*. This included sisters at Le Puy, Satillieu, Vienne, Annonay and St. Sauveur. Perhaps by this time the possibility of apostolic

communities being considered monastic was not a very strong one, so some similarities in dress was not an issue.

As late as the 1940s, a married French woman of the middle class was not expected to appear in public without a *coiffe*. On the other hand, a single woman was permitted to go hatless. Single women also wore any crucifix inside their attire. Married women wore any crucifix outside the attire. Tradition closely linked the garb of religious women with that of married women in France. It is interesting to note that the costume or attire of French dolls dressed in regional attire still shows the outer crucifix as a sign of a married woman.

What all of this makes clear is that Sisters of St. Joseph wore what was termed a *habit*. However, this *habit* was closer to the dress of married women in France than it was to any *monastic habit*. What is also clear is that the dress of Sisters of St. Joseph was not ever intended to set them apart from those who were served. The nature of their service affected what was deemed appropriate in context of the vocation to which they were called.

## Chapter Seven

### Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Apostolic Activity and Mobility

In early documents, the attitude toward work and apostolic activity seems to evolve from an apostolic mind set to a more monastic model and then to a model more familiar to us today. The *Règlements* indicate that the sisters should bring *the neighbor to the total double union of themselves with God and union among themselves.... but only in so far as their work and social class permits.*

Sisters will visit the sick as well as perform other works of mercy. However they are to return to *work* between 5 and 6 PM. “Work” meant doing what had to be done in order to have the means to live in community and to practice *all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy*. It is not clear whether this document, the *Règlements*, was replaced by the *Primitive Constitutions* or whether both documents were used simultaneously. The research that the Federation team did regarding early experiences of the communities could not find clear evidence about this issue. Did the communities use both the *Règlements* and the *Primitive Constitutions* or did the communities simply replace the *Règlements* with the *Primitive Constitutions*?

In any case, archival evidence makes it clear that the *Primitive Constitutions* are grounded in apostolic spirituality. The second part of *la fin double* makes it clear that the sisters are to exert zeal in providing for **all** the spiritual and temporal needs of the dear neighbor. The *Primitive Constitutions* also indicate an obvious connection between the sisters’ love of God and their love of others. *They will have particular care for educating young women about*

*to associate with young men... in order to more easily help them practice virtue. To win them over more readily and to lead them to piety, they (sisters) will permit the girls to come work in their house and will even teach them embroidery....*

The structure as well as the expectations of this new congregation is grounded in an apostolic vision. The job description of the various officers reflects this apostolic orientation.

The temporal assistant is concerned with the corporal works of mercy. In the general and particular *Examen*, she will look at how she has done her tasks. The superior is to get feedback about herself and correct what needs correction. This is to assist her so that all she does will be according to the heart of God and in keeping with God's will. The major task of the superior is to assure the spiritual health of the house and that of the Confraternity of Mercy. At the change of each season, in her *considerations*, she is to *examine before God the state of the house*.

The spiritual assistant, who is also the director of novices, is to take care of the spiritual works of mercy within the house. Yet she is also responsible for *helping the neighbor in all the exercises of zeal*. The *Économe* is in charge of the concrete care of goods through which she will *remember to have confidence in a God who provides*.

The *Admonitrice* must first bring any of her complaints to God. The Counselors are *to act only after careful discernment and be sure it is zeal for God's glory that is their motive*. The two people whose job description most manifests unity between love of God and love of neighbor are *L'intendent des pauvres* and the Mistress of the Confraternity of Mercy. It might be suspected that any person whose job is relief of the economically poor would not have *interior concerns* spelled out in her job description. That is not the case for Sisters of St. Joseph. The jobs mentioned here also include the specific expectations that *L'intendent des pauvres* to review the needs brought to her attention at her own

particular *Examen*. She is then to contemplate how she might best respond to the needs of the poor. The Mistress of the Confraternity *will instruct the members according to the light given her by the Holy Spirit*.

Note that all of the preceding officers act for others out of their relationship with God in prayer. All are directed and instructed that *en toutes leurs actions elles chercheront Dieu*. This essential unity of purpose continues to be manifest as all sisters are reminded that *in the superior or in the poor, they are to recognize and serve Jesus Christ*.

It is not only in job descriptions and expectations that unity of prayer and action are spelled out. The variations of schedule also highlight the unity that exists between prayer and action. While the specific time of day is not spelled out in the schedule, the sisters are always to *work in God* with a pure intention. After any work, the sisters are to thank God and give God all the credit. Before meals, before recreation, before going to the parlor, before doing anything, *they will offer this action to God*.

The documents are clear about the ideal of the sisters being contemplatives in action. On the one hand, personal sanctification is not neglected. It is seen as the indispensable means of union with God and union with others. On the other hand serving the neighbor is an integral part of the relationship of intimacy or close familiarity with God. There is no dichotomy between apostolic work and personal holiness.

In other words, there are not two calls, one to personal holiness and another to apostolic action. There is one call to holiness that might be termed a mysticism of service flowing from a **single** end, *the glory of God and the service of the neighbor*. It did not really matter what one did as an apostolic work. Everything was a means of union with God and with others.

Early documents portray a variety of works performed by the Sisters of St. Joseph. In so far as it can be determined from the early texts, the importance of the works seem to be based on the amount of time given to them. The research on 67 foundations prior to the Revolution bears testimony to a basic unity of external works and interior life. The research also points to the fact that work was only limited by *what was possible for our sex*.

The following list is an example of the diversity of works that sisters did, although the list is not an exhaustive one. At Aubenas, sisters staffed the hospital whose work was really caring for locked up beggars. Beggars were locked up so that their medical and physical needs could be tended to. If beggars were left on the streets, what they ate and how they were forced to live were probably detrimental to their well being.

Sisters also instructed women and children. The sisters received remuneration if these works took them away from their usual source of sustenance or if girls and women could afford to pay them. At Bas-en-Bassett, sisters instructed women and girls in the meanings of the Sunday readings. Sisters also decorated altars and cleaned the church here. At Clermont-Ferrand, the girls joined sisters in prayer on feast days. The girls also took part in the adoration sisters celebrated. It is interesting to note that the girls actually led some of the prayers. At Clermont-Ferrand, the sisters would eat only after the girls had finished eating.

At Job, the sisters took in young peasant girls whose farm labor ceased in winter. The sisters instructed the girls to read, to write and to work so they would become industrious Christian women. At Rodez, the purpose of the sisters was to educate educators and to give spiritual help to women. If it was through obedience that a sister was too busy to attend prayers, she was instructed not to worry knowing that her work substituted for her prayer.

At St. Amant-Roche Savine (1784), a *règlement* for a sister pharmacist stated that the sister pharmacist should not travel alone throughout the countryside to distribute medicines. Companions should be assigned to go with her. At St. Georges L'Agricol, the sisters spent most of their time making lace, which was their main source of income.

At Sigolène, the sisters established a school for poor girls *to banish ignorance, vice and begging and encourage 'bonnes moeurs.'* In other words, sisters were to form poor girls in the practice of virtue, teach them Christian doctrine and teach them skills that would enable the girls to earn their own living.

Satillieu archives specify similar works that sisters did. They cared for the church and taught principles of Christian faith. A variety of other works are also listed in these archives. What is significant at this location is that the listed works are to be done only *when no other community in the vicinity is so engaged.*

St. Paulien archives state that the house of the sisters is an *asile à toutes personnes de leur sexe, notamment aux orphelines, tant pour le travail et l'instruction que pour toute sorte d'exercices de piété.* It is not only girls from the town that are cared for but also some girls who come from neighboring parishes. The sisters here have various ministries. One of the ministries is to explain the meaning of whatever the local priest has said in his lenten sermons! In this locale, there is no hospital. Yet *on trouve chez elles dans le besoin, une ressource assurée pour le services des pauvres.*

In one *arrondissement* of the town of Yesingaux, there were 25 houses of Sisters of St. Joseph at the same time. There are lists of the various works that were done by these groups of sisters. At the same time, it should be noted that there is nothing to indicate that *only* Sisters of St. Joseph were doing these works.

The *Primitive Constitutions* state that while sisters composed the body of

the congregation in a particular house, there may be other *agrégées* in various towns and neighboring villages who were engaging in the **same** religious exercises as the sisters. As far as conditions would allow, the sisters and other *agrégées* lived together in groups of two or three and were inseparably attached to the congregation *by a vow of stability*.

The number and kind of vows reflects the diversity of early communities. At Rodez (1682), the vow formula for *Les filles de l'union* includes a *vow of stability*. This group eventually evolved into Sisters of St. Joseph and adopted their *Constitutions*. Once the group became Sisters of St. Joseph, no vow of stability was taken by new members.

At St. Hilaire (1715), a request was made of the Holy See that solemn vows be permitted so that this *institution so holy and useful could be permanent*. A St. Genest Malifaux XVIII document states that the first foundresses were *filles dévotes connues sous le nom de filles rubanières*. In 1733, the women received the habit and *Constitutions* of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In time this group became a dependency of Lyons.

Mobility and service of the neighbor was primary for the Sisters of St. Joseph. Ministry in new places continued to evolve. As it did, in some places like Craponne, the ministry would become more permanent. At this site, the two women who worked here wanted to make a foundation. So they went to be trained and to make the novitiate *par permission de messieurs nos supérieurs*.

In the services of those in need, mobility is needed to respond to what emerges. For Sisters of St. Joseph, mobility for ministry is primary. This is clearly a departure from the vow of stability which was taken by monastic communities. The rapidity with which the new congregation spread, despite unfavorable civil and ecclesiastical circumstances, demonstrates the mobility for ministry that characterized Sisters of St. Joseph from the beginning. Service was primary and

this affected schedule and many other realities.

The lived experience of the Sisters of St. Joseph made no vow of stability but lived what could be loosely called a vow of mobility. In all the archival material collected by the research team from the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, USA, or archives studied by the French Federation, there were no documents found that mentioned any sister taking a vow of stability. All acts of profession, including those of the *agrégées*, mention only three simple vows of poverty chastity and perpetual obedience.

If one thinks only in juridical terms, a vow of stability of place for an active community is an enigma. At the same time if stability is understood as a stability of heart, that is being so deeply rooted in God that one cannot live without that rooting, the picture changes. With that perspective, stability remains a prerequisite for ministry and for growth in the holiness that identifies the call to be a Sister of St. Joseph.

From early history it is clear that active groups of religious women, like the Sisters of St. Joseph, lived out of an inner stability that grounded outward mobility. The diversity of works that outward mobility allowed did have some influence on the emerging role of women in society of the time. *By advancing the idea of public, mobile and diversified roles for women in religion, they helped to lay groundwork for a more modern view of women as a whole* (Liebowitz, p. 147).

Being called to serve the needs of others as those needs arose, the sisters shared in a general mobility in meeting needs. The time was right for this mobility. *Mobility, the uprooting of oneself from one's native parish in order to move elsewhere in search of a means of livelihood, was a common phenomenon in 18<sup>th</sup> century France and explains how many families contrived a viable existence* (Huflon Olwen, *The Poor of 18<sup>th</sup> Century France: 1750-1789*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 67).

Examples of mobility from archival data demonstrate the nature of the mobility of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The archives of Marthes indicate that a sister was sent from Dunières to be superior of the group at Marthes. The archives of St. Just Malmont II (1686) state that the sisters here used the rule of the Sisters of St. Joseph which they got from the Sisters of St. Victor Malescours who were *agrégées of St. Didier*. These same archives indicate that two sisters who were having community difficulties left that community group to go live in Fermniny.

The archives of St. Vallier I (1683) reveal that the Abbot of St. Vallier heard about the Sisters of St. Joseph and requested that they open a hospital. The Bishop of Vienne promised to send some sisters from Vienne. The same archives (IX, 1701) say that the sisters cared for the sick in the hospital and stood at the church door after Sunday mass to ascertain the needs of the people. They did this in accord with *Règlements* that Le Puy provided sisters for St. Vallier from 1683- 1740.

Archives from Sauxillanges I (1665) state that two Sisters of St. Joseph came from Arlanc to run the hospital in Sauxillanges. The archives of Lapte II (1699) say that *there is no community of religious women in Lapte...* Yet the same archives reveal that some women from Lapte were sent to establish the Sisters of St. Joseph in Beauzac. These Lapte women were the first members of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Beauzac.

**The cited archives are a few among many that make it clear the Sisters of St. Joseph did not envision physical stability to be part of their identity. Southeastern France had multiple groups of Sisters of St. Joseph indicating mobility. That mobility continues today as Sisters of St. Joseph can be found in Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, South and North America. That apostolic mobility, demonstrated as part of the charism identity from the beginning, is still present today.**

## Chapter Eight

### Monastic and Apostolic Influences on Relationship to the Church

The Règlements provide for the sisters to have a *Superior (feminine) who is over all. It also names a Mistress and Spiritual Directress and other officers usual in Religion, in so far as is their number and style of life necessitates.* The Sisters of St. Joseph will also have a *Superior (male)*. Who decides who this man shall be? He shall be *some holy man chosen by them after much prayer and fasting* The function of the offices for the Sisters of St. Joseph differs from the offices in monastic communities. For example, monastic communities had an Abbess as superior. She had *jurisdiction* over the clergy in her area at this time. Jurisdiction meant she had the power to name clergy who would serve the community and could cease services of particular clergy for a good reason.

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, the masculine and feminine superior have a role that is primarily spiritual. In time the roles will evolve into a more juridical relationship to the community and to the church. The *Primitive Constitutions* differentiated the roles of the masculine and feminine superiors.

The Superior (feminine) is responsible for the house. She is also responsible for overseeing that the rule is kept and has other daily responsibilities. The authority of the Superior (masculine) is different. *Their Superior (masculine) will be the Bishop or whom ever he deigns to give them. They will also accept from him whatever confessor or director he chooses to assign them.*

In places that sisters serve which are labeled “exempt,” there is a slightly different procedure. In the dioceses on which the sisters “depend,” the sisters will be assigned a confessor and a Superior (masculine) by the diocese. Regardless of the procedures, it is clear how much the groups of sisters depended upon the local official church for their existence and growth.

In the first 10 establishments, by alphabetical listing, the local Curé was the appointed superior (masculine). It was his task to guide the group and to officiate at receptions, professions, and burials. This type of involvement by the local Curé may also have been the responsibility of other local Curés for many or all of the other 57 houses of Sisters of St. Joseph. However more data and study is needed to determine just how widespread the local Curé’s authority was.

The 1693 *Constitutions* give prominence to the Bishop in the dispensing of vows, dismissal from the Congregation and a variety of other juridical aspects. Dependence upon the local Bishop is a characteristic of most of the congregations throughout history. At the present time there are very few United States congregations of Sisters of St. Joseph who are papal congregations. The majority remain diocesan congregations.

In the archival data which follows, it becomes obvious what the relationship was between the sisters and the official church. Official church means the local church. The clergy and bishops were instrumental in almost every external phase of the existence and life of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

It is clear that while the style of life and orientation toward apostolic ministry was revolutionary, this revolutionary lifestyle for women religious had *local church approval*. Universal church approval or official canonical status for apostolic groups like the Sisters of St. Joseph was not given until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before that time, **official** religious groups of women had to have solemn vows and cloister as well as other additional requirements.

At the same time, before the official status of Sisters of St. Joseph, the local church officials and the sisters managed to operate with great freedom within the law. Historical documents affirm that there was elasticity to do what needed to be done while retaining respect for law. This was the norm and not the exception. Interpretation of law was affected by mission. At the same time, early documents have some strict articulations. For example, early documents say to *obey blindly, and if any ambiguity exists about a particular statute, consult the Bishop and obey his interpretation.* (1693 *Constitutions*, part three, chapter 5).

Many of our archives provide the data that has been summarized in this chapter. The following list provides the precise sources for this data.

Bas-en-Basset 1 (1690): Permission to reside in the house and establish a congregation of devout women with the permission of Superiors (masculine) was given by the Curé and the associate priests.

Beaune 1 (1658): This house was associated and established with the consent of the Curé.

Beauzac 1 (1676): This house was established with the authority of Béthune at the request of a local seigneur and Dame de Beauzac.

Beurrière 1 (1674): Establishment here was in a manner similar to that of Beauzac.

Chapelle-en-LaFaye 1: The Superior (feminine) and sisters assembled in chapter to admit a new member... signed by the Curé.

Dunières 1 (1662): Regarding transfer of goods: should the house cease to exist, the belongings go to another establishment within the parish of Dunières.

Marlhes 1 (1651-1664): Agathe Charrain was taken out of Dunières by the Bishop

of Le Puy to be superior of Marlhes.

Monistrol 1 (1668): Chanoine is given the direction of the sisters; Médaille with a sister sign the document; the Bishop gives Médaille 3.000 livres...

Rodez 1 (1682): *Règlement 13, They should have a great dependence on the Bishop, their director. Règlement 22, They will not make any important decision without the advice of their spiritual father.*

Satillieu X (prior to 1683): A sister is sent by the Bishop to St. Saveur to be superior of that group.

St. Didier 111 (1684) Soeur Fayelle, still superior, becomes the *heritière* of Francois Dupin, Curé of Didier, who gives his goods to the group of sisters.

Le Puy XXIV: The Sisters of St. Joseph grew so rapidly that other bishops wanted them in their diocese.

St. Just Malmont 11 (1686): *The rules and statutes of the Sisters of St. Joseph call for a perfect obedience to their director, the Curé...*

Satillieu 111 (1693): The Curé again declares that Sisters of St. Joseph are the same as people in the world and he explains the status of simple vows.

St. Paulien 1 refers to a 1698 document, *ordonnance of Béthune*, which declares that a school must be established in each parish of his diocese.

St. Pierre Duchamp 111a (1707): Antionette Chanbord is sent from Chomelix to form the *agrégées* at St. Pierre, give them the habit and a religious name.

Rotord III (1713): Sisters made profession in the presence of the local Curé who is superior (masculine) of the community.

St. Sigolène 11 (1714): The Bishop examines and approves of a novice and exempts her from one year of her novitiate. She later makes profession in the hands of the Curé of the parish with the approval of the Bishop of Le Puy.

Félines 11 (1716): In case the house ceases to exist, the furnishings go to the local clergy.

St. Martin Aquilieux 1 (1720): The sisters elect their superior with plurality vote in the presence of the Curé and with his approval.

Sauvessanges 1 (1723): In his parish, the Curé has several *filles dévotes* disposed to religious life. He requests permission from the Vicar to give them the habit of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Soeur Agnès Mathieu, Superior of St. Just, comes to govern the group until they are professed. She gives them the habit in 1726. Five days prior, they make a notarized *Contrat de Société*. After 10 1/2 months of novitiate, the Bishop gives Soeur Agnès permission to receive their profession. In 1726, the Curé is superior of the convent. All other acts of profession name the clergy as part of the official registration and not the *Supérieurs*.

St. Just Malmont 11 (1728): The Bishop of Lyons deposes a superior and names her successor. (This Bishop was a character! He was burned in effigy by his parishioners. Then he was eventually set up with contraband by parishioners so that he would be in legal difficulty. This same Bishop was accused of having revived an ancient druid custom as a devotional practice. Finally he wrote to the pope and resigned. However, he also **named his own successor**). For those who are interested, this material can be found in

a notarized letter, written in 1729.

Izieux 1 (1734): The Curé, after having heard the choice of the sisters assembled to elect a Superior (feminine), *appoints her*.

St. Romain en Jarrest VII (1744): The Curé is the *père spirituel*.

St. Romain en Jarrest VIII (1749): The Curé is both the *père spirituel et temporel*.

St. Amant-Roche-Savine 1 (1755): The Bishop sets the financial conditions for entrance: a dowry of 200 livre plus 71 monthly, plus trousseau or 3001 minus trousseau.

St. Amant-Roche-Savine 11 (1762): A Sister of St. Joseph from Valors asks ecclesiastical permission to transfer to St. Amant because of her infirmity. She establishes a new Act of Association and a new dowry to compensate for her infirmity.

Villars 1 (1764): The Curé is still the spiritual and temporal superior.

Satillieu IV (1774): Sisters and the superior of the house request permission of the Bishop of Vicares de Vienne to *se coiffer* in the same manner as the sisters of Le Puy, St. Sauveur, Annonay and Vienne. The reasons for this request is that the sisters share the same end, the same *Institut*, the present habit presents *des inconvenients et indecences* when the are caring for the sick... The habit would also be more uniform.

From these archives, it can be seen that early communities performed their apostolic works in cooperation with the local church authorities. Sometimes that male authority resided in a bishop and at other times, it was the local Curé who worked with the sisters and was the male superior. The archives reveal the

relationships between the community and these male superiors locally.

The apostolic mysticism of the Sisters of St. Joseph was given guidance by the founder. This guidance can be found in each of the primitive documents. Although words never contain the fullness of the reality of spirituality, the founder does give a summary of spirituality in the early documents. That grounding spirituality encourages the community to imitate the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit and the trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

### **God the Father**

*Take it as a general rule for your inner being, for your virtues, and for your actions, that you must be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect; that is to say, embrace in all things what will bring about the greater glory of God, be more conformable to his holy will, and be more pleasing in his sight. (Maxims)*

*In honor of God the Father, they will humbly profess all that they know to be the most perfect and the most agreeable to this dear Father, trying to be perfect as God is perfect. (Règlements)*

*Offer yourself to God the Father protesting in his honor to do always all that you know is most perfect and most pleasing to him, so that you will be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Primitive Constitutions)*

### **God the Son**

*Empty yourself continually in honor of the Incarnate Word who emptied himself with so much love for you (Phil 2:7). Make your commitment to live in the practice of the most sincere, true and profound humility possible to you. Do so on all occasions, to everyone but especially to God from whom must come all the blessings of your Institute. (Maxims)*

*In honor of God the Son, they will constantly seek to be totally empty of self by the profession of the most loving and profound humility and by a continual death to nature, so that they will be true spouses of a savior entirely empty of self. (Règlements)*

*In honor of God the Son who was anéanti himself for us, they ought to be anéanti themselves, surrendering their whole will and for their entire lives, by professing the deepest humility. (Primitive Constitutions)*

### **God the Holy Spirit**

*Live as much as you can in such a way that your life, in honor of the Holy Spirit, may be a continual act of the most pure and perfect love that you are capable of practicing toward God. (Maxims)*

*In honor of God the Holy Spirit, they will profess to practice the most pure and perfect love known to them, and they will recall that their very little Institute has been founded to bring many to a great and true love of God. (Règlements)*

*In honor of God the Holy Spirit who is all love, they should so live that their Congregation may bear the name of the Congregation of the great love of God; and that in all things and everywhere they make profession of the greatest love in daily practice. (Primitive Constitutions)*

### **Jesus**

*Put aside your old self so that you can put on the new (Eph 4:22f) and accordingly lead a life dead to the world and to self-love, a life full of gentleness, humility of heart, to sincerity, modesty, interior and exterior peace and of charity toward the neighbor; in a word a life completely modeled on the holiness and pleasing virtues of Jesus. Thus you can by grace draw many people who will*

*profit by your example and manner of relating. (Maxims)*

*In honor of the savior Jesus, ardently zealous for souls, they, with the help of God, will live and die in an insatiable and indefatigable zeal not so much for the salvation but for the sanctification of souls. (Rèlements)*

*In honor of Jesus, so wholly zealous for the glory of God his Father, and for the salvation of souls, they shall manifest great zeal for the advancement, as far as possible, of the greatest glory of God and the salvation and perfection of their neighbor. (Primitive Constitutions)*

### **Mary**

*Likewise, be very faithful to the graces of the Holy Spirit, listening to him attentively, obeying him promptly and entirely, attributing to him, as is indeed just, the honor resulting from the success of your good actions. (Maxims)*

*In honor of the glorious Virgin Mary, who is completely filled with and obedient to grace, they will live in a very perfect fidelity to all the movements of this same grace that the virgin will obtain for them, if it pleases her. (Rèlements)*

*In honor of the glorious Virgin Mary who was filled to overflowing with all kinds of graces, they shall value fidelity to all the movements of grace, letting themselves be led with great gentleness, humility, and very great obedience to the most adorable Holy Spirit. (Primitive Constitutions)*

### **Joseph**

*Whatever you do for the dear neighbor, do it with the same feeling of devotion and of charity as if you were doing it for the very person of Jesus Christ. (Maxims)*

*In honor of St. Joseph their patriarch, they will be all unity and charity with one another, and toward every kind of neighbor for whom they will try to have a cordial love such as St. Joseph had for his dear spouse and for the savior Jesus. (Règlements)*

*Offer yourself to the Glorious St. Joseph, protesting before him that you will imitate his complete and cordial charity towards Jesus and Mary and that you will try to practice similar charity towards all classes of neighbor. (Primitive Constitutions)*

In summary, the early documents say in many ways that there is one love for God and neighbor. Living in God means living out that love in deeds. Part of living out love means to invite others to do the same. Living in God for others was called “devotion to the two trinities” as our tradition developed.

The term of two trinities was not meant to be taken in a literal manner but was to be interpreted as a symbolic description for the unity of love that was the foundation for all that was done. Today we might refer to the spirituality as an apostolic mysticism. However, any verbal description of the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph will never contain the fullness of the living reality.

So how shall we look at the past when as we live in the present and are hopeful for the future? There are two ways of looking at one’s history, whether personal or corporate. One way is to analyze and dissect the past in an attempt to find answers to any and all present dilemmas. The second way is a more contemplative approach that simply holds up the Spirit’s movement so that we can be renewed in heart and imagination.

The congregation is an orchestration of past, present and future, just as we are. It is never wise to live only or predominantly in one of the three dimensions. To live solely in the past is impossible since it has already passed. To live solely

in the present without past or future is static and boring. To live only in future possibilities gives way to a fantasy life that is ungrounded.

So is there a future that is emerging from past and present? There is a future for those who believe that love of God and neighbor without distinction is a charism shared by many. That charism will continue to be incarnate in the holy ones of history who are the mystic apostles in this age.

The heart of God has a past, a present and an endless future. Entering into that heart is our call. Responding to it will reveal the nature of the hope to which we are called. Within that transformation resides the Spirit's movement of all of us together to imagine and then to provide for how this charism shall be lived into the future.

## **Appendix A: Foundations, Founders and Titles**

### **Foundation at Le Puy: 1644**

Canon Leblanc gathers a group of women together who desire to live in community and to care for the orphans in the hospital whose official name is *Maison de Charité des orphelines de St. Joseph*.

Mme de la Plance **founds** them, which means she gives them money or a **foundation**.

J. P. Médaille provides a rule that constitutes them as a group.

Françoise Eyraud is recognized as the person in charge by the City Council of Le Puy in 1647.

Bishop Henri de Maupas gives the group approval to live and work in his diocese in 1651.

The group of six women **founds** itself, that is, the group *associates* or signs an Act of Association in December, 1651.

Bishop Armand de Béthune re-approves the group's existence in his diocese in 1665.

Louis XIV grants his approval in the *Lettres Patentes* in 1674.

**In Le Puy alone, there are 8 people called founders!**

## Other Foundations and founders

J.P. Médaille is also directly listed in the founding of the *filles de St. Joseph* in a variety of places. This includes the following locations:

Dunières in 1648

Marhles in 1664

St. Romain-Lachalm

Sauxillanges in 1664

Other founders listed for the following communities:

St. Didier- the Baron

St. Just-the first two sisters (novices)

Bas-en-Basset- Bishop Armand de Béthune

## Various Titles for the Members in Different Locations

1664 Sauxillanges 1: *Filles seculières agrégées par ensemble sous la confrérie de St. Joseph*

1672-1791 Izieux II: The Curé says that the register shows the reception of all those *agrégées* under the title Sisters of St.. Joseph.

1685 St. Jeures I: The Curé gives his house *aux soeurs agrégées à la Congrégation de St. Joseph*. Later, this group is simply called Sisters of St. Joseph.

1686 St. Just Malmont II: *Congrégation des Filles et Soeurs de Saint Joseph* Here, the Sisters of St. Victor Malescours are *agrégées* of St. Didier.

1686 St. Julien d'Ance: Soeurs de Monseigneur St. Joseph

1689 St. Hilaire I: Congrégation des filles agrégées sous la vocable de St. Joseph

1689-1701 St. Pierre Duchamp I, II, III There are synonyms used here which are *agrégées, associée* or *filles associées*

1691 Plauzat: Dames de Plauzet

- 1691 St. Andre Chalencon I: Some goods are left to the present members or to the future members, that is, *agrégées*.
- 1698 Beaune I: Agrégées; *Agrégée* meant joined to a group.
- 1700 St. Romain Lachalm I: *Filles agrégées sous le vocable de St. Joseph*
- 1706 St. Romain Lachalm III: *Filles agrégées a St. Didier*
- 1712 Riotord III: *des religieuses agrégées*
- 1721 St. Martin Aquilieux: After several months of probation, a woman is received as *agrégée*; she promises to obey the statutes.
- 1738 St. Romain en Jarrest V, VII, X: *La Société des Filles Dévotes de L'Ordre de St. Joseph*; they were also called *Compagnie de St. Joseph*.
- 1744 St. Romain en Jarrest VH: A woman is received and *agrégée dans leur ordre et société*.
- 1752 St. Romain les Atheux III: *Honnêtes filles*
- 1761 Job II: *Les religieuses de la charité, dites St. Joseph*
- 1776 Satillieu V: *Soeurs Hospitalières sous le vocable St. Joseph*
- 1784 St. Victor Malescours III: *Soeurs Hospitalières de St. Victor*
- 1785 St. Sauveur en Rue: *Soeurs Hospitalières de St. Joseph de St. Sauveur*; See also Le Puy IIb, VI, VII, Chomelix.

At Rodez, the titles included *Filles de l'union chrétienne, filles régentes, Soeurs de l'union de travail et de la croix*.

At Riotord, Marlhes, St. Genest Malifaux, *filles rubanières* as well as *filles dévotes* were the titles that were used.

## Appendix B: Works and Perceptions of Membership

Bordeaux, 1638: The *filles de St. Joseph* are founded to care for orphaned girls.

They are dedicated to the created Trinity of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They are approved by the local Bishop, the Cardinal de Sourdis, Bishop Armand Béthune's uncle under whom he studied.

Gap, 1637: The Confraternity of Mercy meets twice weekly. The members visit the sick distribute alms and remain at the door of the church to find out the needs of the parish. They do this in groups of two or three. The Confraternity of Mercy group forms the nucleus of the *Filles de St. Joseph* who took charge of the hospital here.

In St. Amant-Roche Savine, the Bishop of Clermont established the Confraternity of Mercy like the one established at Chase-Dieu. The group used *the admirable rule given by J.P. Médaille in 1666.*

Yssingaux I, 1657: *When educating youth fell to their lot, they gave themselves to it with admirable zeal. Their time was spent instructing the poorer class, visiting the poor and caring for the sick. The success of these apostolic endeavors was so great that they were wanted by hospital administrators and townspeople alike. When they did not have enough people to continue both education and serving the poor, they abandoned the latter.*

Boisset III, 1660: They decorated altars, cleaned the church and instructed girls. They *bring youth to love and serve God.*

Sauxillanges, 1664: J.P. Médaille and other Jesuits were preaching a mission and

emphasizing care for the sick and the needy. Several women agreed to take on the work. These *Ladies of Mercy* accept a **donation. Accepting a donation means a foundation.** The act is notarized, signed by J.P. Médaille and a hospital is established and so are the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Gap I, 1671: They take in transients for one night at the hospital, unless the transients were physically ill. In that case, transients could stay until well enough to resume travel.

Le Puy, 1673: In this city there are 15 groupings of women dedicated to the sanctification of the members of their sex. They have two forms of membership. The first form are the *Dames de l'instruction* who live a communal life. The second form includes those who live in the small hamlets instructing lace makers *to work together while sanctifying their work through pious exercises.* These country houses depended on the Le Puy house. Their great success and rapid expansion caused the bishops of Lyons, Clermont and Vienne to request their presence. These women, the Sisters of St. Joseph, the *Béates* were known as **Lady Jesuits.**

St. Didier I, 1674: The Baron gave a donation to the Sisters of St. Joseph. These sisters *have been living here for quite a while in a sort of community, observing rules and statutes given them, with a modesty and zeal for the works of charity of which they make profession.*

Sauxillanges I, 1679: *They care for orphans, teach them a skill, have them or others visit the sick poor, establish a pharmacy and distribute medicines.* The donor of the hospital wanted more beds added. The sisters refused because they consider the hospital their home. A dispute ensued and civil authority had to intervene.

Marsillac, 1682: Sisters of work and of the cross are found here. In 1838, they

take the rule of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Le Puy.

Rodez I, 1682: *Règlements for l'Union Chrétien*. Their purpose is to educate educators and to give spiritual help to members of their own sex. They fulfill the duties of the Confraternity of Mercy.

Satillieu X, 1683: The Curé of St. Sauveur praises the superior for giving every example of virtue, piety and devotion. Her loving care and wise counsel made progress in holiness of the new community very observable.

Chomelix, 1684: They care for girls who are orphans. They also care for widows, the financially indigent, both spiritually and materially. Besides this, the Sisters of St. Joseph do *a thousand other good works*.

St. Julien d'Ance, 1686: Four women living together for a long time in a state of devotion... finally take the name of St. Joseph.

St. Just Malmont II, 1686: They *decorate and beautify the church altar, earn their food by the sweat of their brow by making ribbons*. They also instruct young women, visit, console and help the sick and afflicted of their parish. They provide basic elements of reading for young women without any charge. They are *sympathiques à la population* and do much good.

Tence I, 1687: They instruct converts and encourage them in faith and in virtue. They educate young girls who want a strong Christian formation. Their hospital welcomes widows, widowers, male and female orphans, abandoned children and the critically ill who have no one to care for them. These Sisters of St. Joseph are known as both contemplative and active.

St. Georges l'Agricol I, 1687: An Act of Association states that the sisters had been living together for twenty years and now wished to associate under the

name of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

1696: Archives note that a third order Dominican becomes a *fille de l'instruction* and opens a school. Later she wishes to be a *Fille de St. Vincent de Paul* so she opens a hospital in 1697.

Lapte II, 1699: There is no community of religious at Lapte. There are only two simple women established there by the Bishop of Le Puy to teach girls. They are women who make a living by making lace. The bishop says that *They are not of a quality to admit subjects.*

St. Paulien I, 1700: Since no other group was doing this, they served as *maitresses d'école*. They also care for orphans and engage in other pious works which charity and zeal inspire. They care for the sick in various locales of the parish. *They visited the sick, instructed them, saw that they received the sacraments, and bandaged their sores, sometimes even with success.*

St. Pierre Duchamp IIIa, 1707: Three women ages 50, 40 and 46 could not sign their own name on their act of reception.

St. Hilaire II, 1715: They are called St. Joseph Sisters because they imitate his manner of working and earning their living. They instruct young women in piety and good moral conduct. They care for orphans who were in danger because no one was caring for them.

Le Puy XVIII, 1730: They care for orphans and children whose parents cannot provide for them. These children receive extraordinary care and attention, something rarely seen.

1732: The Sisters of Our Lady of Chambriac are founded. A priest gives them

the rule of J.P. Médaille. Today this group belongs to the French Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

St. Andre Chalencon IV, 1741: The *filles associées* are those under a Contract of Association.

Villars, 1764: The most educated taught class. The others did the laundry and handwork. However, all engage together in prayer and charitable works.

St. Amant Roche-Savine III, 1768-1818: The Register of Death lists some virtues of a dead Sister of St. Joseph. The list includes patience, zeal, love for the poor, resignation to God's will, profound humility, love for holy Communion, lively faith, gentleness, service to priests during the Revolution and courage during the persecution.

Craponne X, 1772: They show great mutual acceptance. Each one represents all without distinction... They share titles, dress, goods, and debts... They teach girls to make lace so the girls can be more easily married.

St. Vallier X, 1783: They do hospital work. They also teach girls a skill. In addition, they *sweep the vermin out of the church after the hospital residents attend Mass.*

St. Amant-Roche-Sabine II, 1784: They have established a pharmacy. With her companion, a sister travels through the countryside distributing medicines. Those who can afford the medicine will pay. Poor people are given medicine for free.

Job 1, 1791: They take in young peasant girls, instruct them in reading, writing, and a skill so that these girls can become industrious Christian women.

St. Georges l'Agricol II, 1798: They have a great influence on public opinion.  
Some even have a decent education.

1841: The Sisters of Marie-Joseph split from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyons.  
They joined the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy after Vatican II.

Aubenas III: The sisters ran a hospital here which cared for beggars. They also instructed women and girls, gave religious instruction to female converts and educated both those who could pay and those who could not. They *edify the whole city by their own personal life as well as by inspiring young women.*

St. Genest Malifaux XVIII: The first foundresses were *filles dévotes connues sous le nom de filles rubanières*. **They did not wear a religious costume.** They dressed simply and led a regular edifying life. Towards 1733, they received a habit which resembled that of the Sisters of St. Joseph. From 1830-35, they depended upon the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyons.

## Appendix C: Relationships with Civil Society

St. Jeures II, 1657-1661: Dowries are all given to the superior (female) who makes a pact with the others in the community to care for them in life and in death.

Marlhes I, 1664: The acts of profession are all notarized.

Clermont-Ferrand I, 1666: *Lettres Patentes* give permission to *Bon Pasteur*, the institution run by the sisters. Clermont-Ferrand III records the hiring of one of the sisters by the board of directors. They will pay her benefits and other contractual items. Clermont-Ferrand VIII, 1781, indicates that sisters rented land to the *Bon Pasteur* directors. The cost was 40 L per year. The decision to rent the land was made after the Bishop consulted with them. The six sisters signed the agreement which was binding until a more legal document could be drawn up.

Riotord III, 1670: One sister leaves 60 L to another with the stipulation that the recipient never leave the community. In 1736 at Riotord, S. Marie Chabanacy sues the *haute et Puissante Dame de Montmarin, Abbess de l'Abbe royale de Notre Dame de Clavas* about a field owned by a former superior of the sisters of St. Joseph.

St. Vallier IX, 1672: Financial ties between the hospital and the Lazarists cease. There is too much controversy about local funds being used for those who have come from afar.

Chomelix I, 1684: The townspeople formally request *Lettres Patentes* for the Sisters of St. Joseph who have been there for 22 years.

Satillieu X, 1689: The Duke gives his permission for the sisters to be buried in one of his chapels in the parish church but he retains ownership.

Marsoc II, 1691: An Act of Association gives the signers the right to share their goods, etc. It is not until 1698 that they are called Sisters of St. Joseph.

Satillieu III, 1693: The sisters are not *religious*. Therefore they do not have to pay the tax of religious. They can dispose of their goods as they choose, etc.

Beaune 1, 1698: The dowry ranged from 500 L to 3000 L. This is to be collected in food and in money annually. Le Puy XIX (1745-1781) indicates that the Le Puy house collects the dowry in the name of the Beaune group.

St. Sigolène VI, 1700: A benefactor stipulates that students admitted to the school must be truly poor and must be approved for entrance by the benefactor or by the Curé.

St. Paulien III, 1702: By an Act of Association, this group agrees not to dissolve the group for 50 years. If some members die, the others can associate with another group provided they keep and observe the statutes and rules of *les filles de St. Joseph*.

Rochetaille 1, 1709: A Baron leaves a huge house for the use of the sisters.

Marthes II, 1709 and Marthes III, 1763: The sale of a garden is made to one person and not to the group.

Bas-en-Basset V, 1714: The sisters asked to be exempt from the tax. After the Revolution they are subject to the same taxes as the rest of the laity.

Bas-en-Basset II, 1714: Sisters seek legal authorization to enlarge their house.

Permission is granted because of all the services the sisters render to the parish.

St. Just Malmont II: Several years prior to the revolution, the sisters wish to enlarge their house which entails encroaching on public property. There is violent opposition. The matter is settled because the local Baron supports them. A good segment of the population also supports them because they know *of the good accomplished by these sisters*.

St. Vallier VII: After the Revolution, the sisters are referred to as *a simple association of Christian lay women, dedicated to the church in caring for the sick in the hospital. Therefore they are not responsible to pay the tax.*

Aubenas II, 1720: Departmental archives here indicate that M. Marcel owed the sisters of St. Joseph a dowry of 300 L.

Beaulieu, 1722: A sister is the recipient of a donation. However, she leaves to go establish a hospital in Auvergne. She leaves her goods to the Riotord sisters, named individually.

Champeix I, 1729: If the parents of a sister request dowry restitution, it must be returned unless there is an *Acte d'Ingrès*. When there is such a document the sisters can mutually inherit goods from one another. If they can easily obtain *Lettres Patentes*, they can inherit, pass on goods and have use of money until the group dissolves.

St. Paulien III, 1729: The Curé's will is contested. He left goods to the sisters who did not have *Lettres Patentes*. The settlement states that the will is good because the sisters are *purement laïques, qu'elles ne sont pas mortes civilement, n'ayant pas fait voeux de religion, qu'elles ne sont pas dans une congrégation approuvée par le Pape, n'y par le Roi...*

Dunières V, 1730: In *an Acte d'Ingrès*, a girl asks her father for authorization, for emancipation and for dowry.

St. Vallier X, 1730: The hospital pays for the funeral of one of the sisters.

St. Front I, 1739: The sisters receive a donation of a house from a benefactor.

However they must meet the following conditions:

- paying any future taxes
- having High Masses said for the benefactor
- Her relatives, especially those with the name Marcon, will get preference in entering the community, even if they lack the necessary dowry.
- The benefactor retains use of the kitchen, her bedroom, the cellar, part of the garden, a place to store her wood plus living quarters for her servants.
- The sisters must feed her and care for her throughout her life.
- In case the community ceases to exist, the property is returned to living members of the Marcon family to re-establish the community at another time.

St. Romain en Jarrest VI, 1744: If a sister leaves the community within the two-year period, she can dispose of her goods as *she wills* without the intervention of her father.

Riotord III, 1760: The superior sues the father of one of the sisters for payment of back dowry. The superior wins the case.

St. Amant-Roche-Savine II, 1762: A new Act of Association and a new dowry are given when a sister goes from one house to another.

Villars 1, 1764: If a sister leaves the congregation, her dowry will be returned to

her minus the expenses incurred during her stay.

Félines IV, 1767: Sisters attempt to take legal action to collect a dowry, since their *Lettres Patentés* gave them the right to do so.

St. Julian d'Ance: The Act of Association must be renewed with each new member of the community.

Rodez V, 1779: A woman domestic enters as such. Her father agrees to pay her dowry only if she makes profession.

Sauvessanges 1, 1782: A sister's brother pays the dowry on the day of her profession.

St. Jean d'Aubrigoux I, 1784: The purchase of a house is witnessed by the Curé and the Vicaire and the deed is notarized.

Satillieu VI, 1785: The hospital board will consent that a sister may be changed by her superior but her travel expenses will then be paid for by the congregation. The board agrees to pay for upkeep, give her a week's vacation, etc.

Lupé 1821: At this late date, the sisters still have a gentleman giving them permission to buy a house in his name. In return, they agree to instruct his children and his grandchildren for free.

## Appendix D: Information about Vows

Satillieu II, 1662: Magdalene Courbis is dispensed from her vows by the Canon of the Cathedral of Le Puy so that she may go to Carmel. The Bishop who established this group was in Vienne, so he could not sign the dispensation.

Jonzieux I, 1664: The group lived together for four years without vows or a contract.

Rodez I, 1682: Even without a vow of obedience, one obeys as promptly as if she had vowed it. Rodez VI states that the vow formula for the *filles d l'union* contains the vow of stability.

St. Julien d'Ance, 1686: Four women lived together for very long time. Eventually they took the name of Sisters of St. Joseph.

St. Georges l'Agricol, 1687: Sisters have been living together for 20 years before they take vows as Sisters of St. Joseph.

St. Pierre Duchamp IIb, 1708: An Act of Profession states that the vows were *pauvreté, chastité et obéissance perpetuelle*. Is this a writing error? The spelling used and the grammar, punctuation, etc., varies with the data collected. Of note here is that a similar vow expression was also found at St. Martin d'Aquilieux.

Bas-en-Basset IV, 1714: The sisters established here are only a *simple assembly of devout women*.

St. Hilaire II, 1715: *So that an institution so holy and so useful may be permanent for the glory of God and the good of souls, the Filles de Saint Joseph request approval of the Holy See and request that their vows may henceforth be solemn ones. But if permission is denied, at least the Pope could reserve for himself the right of dispensation from their simple vows.*

This request did NOT include mention of cloister but explicitly listed that cloister would be excluded from their desire!

Chevrières I, 1729-1806: The Curé received the vows of the sisters.

St. Amant Roche-Savine II, 1755-1762: Professions are in the church with a solemn ceremony attended by local *notables* and the ceremony includes an *Acte d'Ingrès* which will be signed by them.

Isieux I, 1766: A sister is received and makes profession even though she does not finish her novitiate.

St. Just Mahnont II, 1767: There is a request for re-possession of the house of Marguerite Gatet. The document states that she passed her youth without taking any vows or following any monastic rule. She says that *we did wear a costume which we abandoned when the law required it.*

Aurec I: This archive mentions that the sisters here took public vows of perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience.



## Research in Process!!!



The picture above shows Connie De Biase in process of doing archival research in France. The papers that the viewer can see reflect one of the civil archives in France whose varied content provided a challenge for doing critical research!

Connie continues to be interested in CSJ history, past and present. She continues to develop these interests in the CSJ charism and invites others to join her in this ongoing journey into meanings.