



STE ANNE D'AURAY - MORBIHAN

A PILGRIMAGE

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Pilgrimage: a journey in faith in search of wholeness

Sacred places

Pilgrimage places are associated with holy people, with saints, with the presence of relics, and as the location of visions or healing events. The holy place is a geographical location where the membrane between this world and beyond is especially thin.

What is it that makes a place sacred or holy? We imagine space as something that surrounds us, through which we walk as we make our way through life. Space is given, we do not make it. By itself it is emptiness, no more meaningful than the emptiness and void of Genesis 1:1; 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a formless void ... and God's spirit hovered over the water.'

Place gives us a sense of identity. ... In normal everyday activities, we fill places with activity suitable to that place's character. ... a garden or a church, a mountain or a forest are places whose sacredness is recognised by groups who pray there. Because of the special nature of a place, people view it as their sacred place, not as mere formless space.

The Spirit is Everywhere

All of the cosmos is sacred and holy. Tradition reminds us that some places are set apart and holy because of particular events. Moses' burning bush and the site of Jacob's dream are biblical examples of places held to be holy because of the experiences of Moses and Jacob. God already dwells there. 'Surely God is in this place.' Gen 28: 16- 19.

God created the universe and God has given us the earth. God calls us to walk as pilgrims and to recognise a network of sacred places that reveal all the earth as Beth El, 'The Place of God.'

Sacred spaces are passageways or thresholds which help us to look at life differently. They provide an environment for openness to the divine.

What is a pilgrimage?

A pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place for religious motives. In life, our existence seems to prompt questions as to who we are, where we come from and where we are going to. So the very act of pilgrimage echoes questions that come to us from that deeper journey of the heart. What is the reason for my being? It is not a coincidence that many who go on pilgrimage are at a critical stage of life - transition from teenage years to adulthood, a mid-life point or at the start of retirement.

Becoming a Pilgrim

There is a pilgrim in each and every one of us which is awakened gradually. The disposition to pilgrimage expresses itself from the moment of birth, through the different stages of life, venturing out and settling down, to the moment of death and rebirth. These pilgrimages take us along many pathways: the home, parish and area where we grow up; the roads, the city streets, the seas and skies we travel through and the places we visit, all make us pilgrims to one place or another.

Pilgrimage is not just travel to any place but to a place which in itself is seen to have significance. It is a journey to a holy place. But what is 'holy'? The experience of many pilgrims might be one of disappointment with the holy place itself. The pressing crowds and often the commercial exploitation of the pilgrim seem to many to take away from any sense of the holy. Yet, despite these external dimensions, a deep fascination with many of the holy places remains. Although arriving at the destination is not without significance, the act of travelling is also part of the experience.

For the Christian, pilgrimage acts as a symbol for the Christian life. The people of God are sometimes described as a pilgrim people travelling to a destination that is beyond this world. The Christian life also comprises an individual pilgrimage. There are significant moments or places along the way, vantage points from which the journey can be surveyed. Its end is to be with Christ, to be changed and to be more like him. Pilgrims are often seeking to make progress in their broader Christian life by undertaking a journey. They are attempting to understand and advance their Christian life by symbolising the whole Christian pilgrimage in a single communal event.

The town of Ste Anne d'Auray *a place of pilgrimage*

Ste Anne d'Auray is a village three miles from the town of Auray (6,500 inhabitants), in the diocese of Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany. It is famous for its pilgrimages or *pardons*, in honour of St Anne. In the early days of Christianity in Brittany, the people dedicated a chapel to St Anne. This first chapel was destroyed about the end of the seventh century, but the memory of it was kept alive by tradition, and the village was still called "Keranna", i.e. "Village of Anne". More than nine centuries later, at the beginning of the seventeenth century (1624-25), St Anne is said to have appeared several times to a simple and pious villager, Yves Nicolazic and commanded him to rebuild the ancient chapel. A statue of St Anne was found near the site of the apparition. The apparitions became so frequent, and in front of so many witnesses that the bishop of Vannes inquired into the matter. He gave permission for the building of a chapel in which the miraculous statue was enshrined. Anne of Austria and Louis XIII enriched the sanctuary with many gifts. In the meanwhile pilgrimages had already begun and became more numerous year by year. Even the French Revolution did not put a stop to them. During the Revolution the chapel was plundered, the Carmelites who served it were driven out, and the miraculous statue of St Anne was burned at Vannes in 1793. The building of the present basilica began in 1866.

Until Lourdes grew in popularity Ste Anne d'Auray was the most favoured place of pilgrimage in France and continues to attract numerous pilgrims.

Mary Gray, a feminist theologian makes an interesting observation in her book 'The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope', *'...the wisdom of Jesus is not only that of an individual, but is rooted in the wisdom of the whole messianic community. Jesus learned from his mother, just as she had learned from her mother, the St. Anne of tradition. From her, and the faithful women who gathered around him as he died, as well as from the apostles, he learned the expectations of the Messiah and messianic community. We are now trying to recover the symbolic imagery of women as bearers of wisdom, in a culture where*

models of spirituality are, with a few exceptions, male.'

Thus the pre-Reformation Trinitarian motifs of *St. Anne - Mary - Jesus*, (in Dutch known as *Anna-te-Drieen*, in Brittany popularized through the cult of *St. Anne* mingled with Celtic traditions), begins to restore this tradition. ... Recovering the role of women as bearers of wisdom is part of the recovery of the whole community's call to be wisdom communities.

The History of FCJs at Ste Anne d'Auray (Excerpts from early Annals)

The FCJ s came to Ste Anne d'Auray in 1825 and began life in a little house in the courtyard of the church, comprising one room at ground level and an attic. The accommodation was so cramped that Our Venerable Mother and her companions had to receive people in the sacristy of the church. Many were deeply impressed by their life of poverty and mortification, noticing, among other privations, that they ate very little meat and never drank wine.

When we were offered this house it was on the understanding that we would have to build, at our own expense, a house and chapel to meet our needs. Somebody, having learnt of this condition gave the necessary money for the building. Reverend Father Leleu of the Company of Jesus, who lived in the Jesuit House nearby, on crossing the property, had a presentiment about its future. "It seems to me", he said "that Our Divine Lord would be very happy here!" Later he used to recall his presentiment and he always spoke of it feelingly and with tears in his eyes.

In **1826** a house and chapel were built on the property. It was built according to Father Leleu's plan and he followed the work with interest. In the meantime our Sisters gave lessons to the village girls. Marie Madeleine made several visits during this time and made an eight days retreat before her departure for Rome.

When Bishop Garnier came to bless the newly completed chapel on the 17th January **1827**, he said in his discourse that the members of the society are called to carry on the work of the apostles. The creation of the garden and the clearing of the land was well organised. They began with a kitchen garden; later woodland was

planted and several fields. In time the simple garden was transformed into a magnificent park. The kitchen garden and meadow with their well laid out paths abounded in fruit trees, shrubs and flowers. At the bottom of the meadow flowed a little river crossed by three little bridges given the names of the Holy Angels, St Anne and St John. It is interesting to note that they owe their names to Father Ferdinand Jeantier SJ, a much loved protégé of Marie Madeleine, who was a frequent visitor. A lake called Genesareth on the outskirts of the little wood completed the idyllic scene.

Marie Madeleine wished to begin the work of retreats. Half of one of the floors of the house was divided into small rooms to accommodate those making retreats. The Sisters received much spiritual help from the Jesuit Fathers.

Marie Madeleine made several visits to St Anne's during these early years; at times spending some months there. In **1833** we have a first mention of St Anne's becoming a novitiate receiving several young aspirants. The first clothing ceremony took place on 26th November **1833** and Marie Madeleine had the joy of giving the habit to nine new novices. From this time on St Anne's was in effect the Mother House.

During these early years Marie Madeleine sent the sick of the Society to St Anne's either to recuperate in the good air or to die surrounded by loving care. The sisters' confessor asked her why she sent terminally sick sisters to St Anne's. Having been assured by the confessor that they died holy deaths, with a smile, Marie Madeleine replied "if that is so, it is all the more reason to continue the practice".

By **1863** the Novitiate had grown in numbers: thirty nine aspirants entered the Society; thirty one postulants received the habit and thirty novices pronounced their vows. Indeed over the following years several ceremonies of clothing and profession are recorded, sometimes as many as two or three ceremonies in any one year.

1864 marks a very significant development in the story of St Anne's. Mother Josephine Petit considered that the school building was inadequate and at once plans for another very large class room were put in hand. Encouraged by the advice of interested parties she resolved to use the boarders' house, which was part of the property

when the convent was founded, and to resume the work of retreats for individuals. The time was favourable: the railway now made access easier and quicker and increased the number of people, from all parts flocking to St Anne's. A comprehensive building plan was undertaken. When completed the whole site could be compared to a fortified village with its four substantial buildings. In the centre is Our Lady's boarding school occupying the original house. On either side of the hall door are the retreat house and St Joseph's boarding school and next to St Anne's school the laundry and other offices. In front of St Joseph's is a well hewn out of the rock, renowned for its excellent spring water

There was a steady increase in the number of boarders and day pupils and one hundred and twenty five poor children were also receiving education. There were, in addition, evening classes for a large number of the girls from the village.

1866 saw the refurbishment and enlargement of the Chapel and on 13th June there was a solemn blessing by the Jesuit superior of the Seminary. On 12th July the Blessed Sacrament was placed once more in the Chapel which as the Jesuit superior reminded the sisters held many memories of our Foundress and of the first Faithful Companions of Jesus. When the Bishop of Vannes visited the Convent in August he paid glowing tribute to the apostolic work of the sisters: from such a small beginning so much had been achieved by their zeal and devotedness, working only for the glory of God; *'from this small centre good is spreading not only to the village, to the towns but to the neighbouring provinces'*, and much more in the same strain. We read in the annals of this period of the frequent visits of the Bishop who greatly appreciated what was being achieved .

The annalist records that on the eve of the Ascension 1866 a new bell was christened Marie Ann Josephine. The youngest children were the godmothers! Again the ceremony was presided over by the Jesuit superior. On the Feast of the Assumption at the suggestion of one of the Jesuits who supplied a cross and a magnificent banner St Anne's had their first ever procession in honour of Our Lady. Nearby, on March 7th to commemorate the discovery of the miraculous statue of St Anne there was a procession of many thousands of Bretons in their distinctive and colourful costumes who passed by the thorn bush marking the place where St Anne first appeared to Nicolazie.

On September 29th for the first time in our newly enlarged chapel there was a Ceremony when three postulants received the habit and one novice pronounced her vows.

Meanwhile war had broken out between France and Prussia. After the French defeat at Sedan the Prussians surrounded and besieged Paris during the terrible winter of 1870-1871. The Parisians suffered starvation and disease. The only effect of the war on St Anne's was the arrival of the entire Paris novitiate numbering twenty nine who were accompanied by members of the Paris community, followed in the succeeding week by other sisters and some children. The community now numbered seventy four. The fine building put up in the preceding year offered very comfortable accommodation to the displaced sisters. The annalist does not record at what date the refugees were able to return to Paris after the Treaty of Frankfurt.

1871 saw the number of boarders increase to ninety five. An important day in the calendar was the annual prize-giving usually presided over by the Bishop and his retinue of ecclesiastics of whom twenty were present at the 1871 event.

On December 15th thousands of pilgrims from all parts of Brittany came to the shrine of St Anne to pray for the pressing needs of the times and to fulfil a vow made by seven hundred Breton sailors whose lives had been spared during the war through the intercession of St Anne. It was a wonderful sight to see the beautiful and distinctive Breton costumes, as the pilgrims, in spite of the rain, knelt before the shrine to receive the Apostolic Benediction.

By **1873** the novitiate numbered forty one. Many Jesuits including Père Georgelin, Père Foucault and Père Jeantier visited St Anne's during the course of the years and spoke feelingly of their memories of Marie Madeleine.

The 19th March was a special day of celebration each year for the feast of Mother Josephine Petit. Greetings and gifts poured in from all the houses.

The annalist records the great devotion of the children to Marie Madeleine. They treasured little things which had belonged to her; they prayed to her, read her life and showed great interest in her

cause. She was remembered especially on April 5th and it is recorded that in 1873 a special month was set aside in her honour. They offered Mother Josephine their donation of 250 francs towards the cost of the Cause. St Anne's was so dear to Marie Madeleine. It was to St Anne's that she entrusted her precious writings and it was in 1874 the sisters felt so privileged to be asked to copy them. This work was completed in three months. At the end of the retreat given by Father Georgelin, Father Appolinaire came to work for the Cause. In his address he put Marie Madeleine by the side of Our Lord and Our Lady offering her as a model. After his magnificent eulogy he broke down in tears and was unable to continue. A welcome visitor in December was Father Jeantier who spoke with great affection of Marie Madeleine through whose intercession he had received great graces. Before his morning meditation he prayed to her calling her 'my good mother'.

The end of the year saw the church of St Anne elevated to the status of a lesser Basilica by decree of the Sovereign Pontiff. The gilded statue of St Anne overlooked the countryside facing towards our novitiate. The names of the community and the names of all the houses of the Society and our petitions especially for the intentions of Mother Josephine Petit and for the Cause of our Foundress were placed in the statue.

In **1875** there was a very welcome visit from Father Xavier of the Immaculate Conception, a discalced Carmelite and a nephew of Marie Madeleine.

In April **1876** we acquired a new property named Keranne, the House of Anne, for the use of our chaplain. We also acquired a field on which was built a well appointed school for the local poor children.

Through the years the children were successful in the public examinations, many receiving distinction in the brevet superieure. During the holidays of 1876 the chapel built by Marie Madeleine became a refectory and a dormitory. There was great rejoicing on September 28th when the Blessed Sacrament was installed in our new chapel. The beautiful floral arrangements included the transformation of the entrance gate into an Arc de Triomphe. In the centre was the name of Jesus surrounded by the coat of arms of Leo X111 and that of the bishop of Vannes. A long procession led by the

Bishop and a great number of ecclesiastics followed by the community and the white robed children and a large number of parents, entered the new chapel. In his allocution the bishop praised the FCJs who had come to this corner of Brittany over fifty years before. Who would have thought that they could have achieved so much. The lovely chapel was enhanced by the beautiful stained glass windows the gift of the FCJ houses.

Another phase in Mother Josephine's building plans saw the erection of a new building connecting the Sacred Heart house to St Joseph's and St Mary's, which gave two fine dormitories, a linen room, a well lit common room, linking it with a corridor to the novitiate giving the novices direct access to the superior general. In addition another parlour was added with a vestibule and a glass canopy to shelter visitors. On June 4th a large statue of the Sacred Heart was erected in our grounds

All this time the school for the poor children continued to flourish and by the end of 1882 numbered ninety.

On May 31st the sisters accompanied in spirit our twelve FCJs leaving for Australia and were delighted to receive the first news of the travellers in June. In November a Prize Draw was held in aid of our mission in Canada, in answer to a request from Bishop Grandin. The draw was organised by St Anne's aided by Paris and Veyrier who supplied attractive prizes. Many tickets were sold and a good sum was made. Missionary bishops and priests found their way to St Anne's and the community were delighted to receive first hand news of ours in Canada and Australia, among whom were numbered sisters from St Anne's. 1883 saw the departure from St Anne's of five of their number for the FCJ foundation in Grandin, Canada.

In **1888** it was clear that Mother Josephine's health was failing. She died on 11th December aged 76. She was mourned by all the Society. She was especially loved by the children of St Anne's who erected a fine stone cross on her modest tomb. She had worked tirelessly for the Society. On her death Marie Madeleine had opened seventeen houses. Mother Josephine in her life time had opened a further seventeen and entered the missionary territories in Canada and Australia. For the thirty years of her generalate her 'home' was St Anne's which she dearly loved.

On the 16th July 1889 there were celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the founding of the boarding school. A fine plaque was placed above the entrance commemorating the event.

Marie de Bussy, elected superior general on 13th August, also made her base in St Anne's and came to love its peace and happy atmosphere.

In **1890** a telephone was installed at St Anne's, a gift from the children. At this time a glass passage was constructed to enable the sisters to go from one end of the building to the other without going outside. So St Anne's was at its peak with 100 boarders, a large community and a flourishing novitiate and school for the poor children.

There was great joy on October 5th 1895 when Marie Madeleine's grandniece received the habit.

1896 saw the outbreak of scarlatina which claimed the life of ten year old Henriette de Bussy whose grave lies close to that of her great aunt Marie de Bussy.

In June **1897** the children gave a gift of a fountain, facing St Joseph's building.

In the summer of **1903** to our great dismay we learnt of the imminent danger to the religious of Catholic Brittany, owing to the anti-religious laws, some religious having to leave their convents to seek accommodation elsewhere or to return to their families. Fervent prayers were offered for the safety for St Anne's boarding school and novitiate. The boarders begged their parents to allow them to follow the nuns into exile. The clothing and profession ceremony on 29th July was a very low key affair with no music and no white dresses. In October there was great mourning among the children of the poor school over the death of Mother Philomena Le Port aged 47 who for many years had been in charge of their school. She was greatly loved. There is a lovely little story of how during her illness a poor little girl came to the convent each day to bring her an apple. There was a heartfelt outpouring of sorrow among the children during her funeral.

1905 saw the clouds begin to gather over St Anne's. February 21st was the day fixed to celebrate the entry of the new bishop into his diocese. It was also to be the day when the government was descending on St Anne's Basilica to make an inventory of its contents. 20,000 Bretons gathered to defend their basilica, armed, angry and threatening, singing their procession hymns and a resounding credo. The government officials were forced to retreat. The bishop's entry was deferred to 13 March when he came by night to St Anne's. On Easter Sunday a novice pronounced her vows. Alas it was to be a long time before another ceremony was to take place in our chapel.

During mass on February 2nd **1906** a sympathy telegram was received by the superior who at first did not understand its import. On coming out of the chapel she received a list of prohibitions which confirmed the sad reality: our property of St Anne's was to be closed down the following September. On 4th the children were made aware of the situation, to their great sorrow. They were relieved when they were told that we were asking for an exemption and, if granted, they would be able to return as usual in October. After 74 days of fervent and anguished prayer the exemption we asked for, supported by many friends, was refused. On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross the boarding school and novitiate were emptied. 80 former pupils came as usual in November to make their retreat. We do not know the actual date of the departure of the sisters. They were full of trust in God. The final words of the 1906 annals are '*Laus Deo Semper*'.

1919 saw the return of the sisters; an advance party of four came to oversee the repair work on the community house, the only part of the property they were allowed to occupy. Their luggage had not yet arrived. Their daily schedule and hardships are worth recording. They found themselves without a stove or any kitchen utensils, without bedding and other necessities. The warm weather enabled them to light a fire in the courtyard to heat their soup. A kind neighbour gave them their daily lunch, part of which they kept for their supper. They didn't possess a clock so the call was made at daybreak. They attended mass at the basilica and stayed for the masses that followed. At 8am they returned carrying hot coffee supplied by a kind friend. Any free time after finishing the housework was given to making mattresses. After lunch at 11.30 with the customary reading they cleared a way to our once magnificent

woodland, now completely overgrown; not a single fruit tree remained in our orchard; the pines, a protected species, were very overgrown; the walls were covered with moss. In the cemetery the crosses were overturned. They set to gathering wood which they left at the Chapel door while they made the Way of the Cross and the examen. At sunset they repaired to the Basilica for an hour's prayer. At 7pm the Angelus bell called them to supper.

Toilet necessities had to be improvised: wash basins were fashioned from the lids of soup tureens set in wood. There was an assortment of little containers without handles which served as water jugs. Our chairs were unsteady and the windows could not be replaced.

In September to our great joy the novitiate reopened in the two big parlours. The little community set about planting vegetables and the farmer planted new fruit trees. By their hard work they were able to sell their produce. They also acquired cows and piglets. On 29th May a fresh contingent of novices arrived with their novice mistress. The burning question at this time was how to recover that part of their property which had been taken over by the Jesuit school. Their Grand Seminary was up for sale and the Jesuits regained possession of it on 29th August. They left our school in bad repair and it was not until November that the sisters could take possession of their property which was in a disgraceful condition. St Joseph's was the least damaged of the houses and the novices took up residence there on December 8th. All during this time Mother Philomena was unable to visit St Anne's because of a serious accident which had befallen her.

In **1921** the annals record that on Holy Thursday they had no communion. It would appear that they were no longer allowed to go to the Basilica for Mass. After a period without Mass a chaplain arrived at the end of May.

On 19th March **1922** the first ceremony of clothing and profession since the return, took place and in June the first procession of the Blessed Sacrament when the Marie Josephine bell pealed out anew. In the summer months the novitiate was reinforced by the arrival of novices from Upton and Turin. The hopes of the community that the boarding school was about to be re-opened were raised when work of redecoration of the school building was undertaken. Their hopes

were dashed when the building was put at the disposal of the chaplain.

In **1925** the novices left St Anne's to the great sorrow of the community.

1926 saw the renewed prayers of the community for the reopening of the school. In October saw the arrival at St Anne's of vans and wagons carrying the contents of Bagatelle Convent in Jersey which had to be stored in St Anne's. The community were very saddened to hear of the unexpected death of Mother Magdalen Harding who had not only worked tirelessly as a member of the community but, as Assistant to the General, was a great support in every crisis. The hopes of the community were not to be realised. In spite of the money spent on repairs the houses remained empty and shabby. The Bishop and the families of Brittany were praying with the sisters that St Anne's would again open its doors to the children but it was not to be. After the novices left, St Anne's was home to the aged and the sick. The bishop called it the novitiate of heaven. The sisters in their simplicity admitted that they found it hard to listen to the accounts of the thriving novitiate in Brussels. Their daily life was a constant struggle against the weather, and the ravages of time which threatened the deserted buildings; against the weeds which invaded the garden and the unfrequented pathways. They also had to struggle against the feeling of inertia, caused by the withdrawal of their apostolates.

When *Bagatelle*, Guernsey, closed Reverend Mother Magdalen Harding had brought to St Anne's some crosses bearing the names of those mothers and sisters who had died at Bagatelle including a cross which was to bear her own name, which she placed around the graves of two Mother Generals. In 1929 the last FCJ to be buried there was Mother Frances Keogh aged 38.

After much soul searching, at Easter, the decision was taken to close St Anne's.

1929 the last year at St Anne's was to prove very difficult for the little community still there. Having no pupils the house was deprived of water, fire or light during the harsh winter. Water had to be

fetches from the pump in all weathers and their only light was supplied by old lamps placed in the Chapel and the Common Room.

Amid an outpouring of grief from the people, and having filled four wagons with their belongings and organised a sale of remaining articles the Faithful Companions of Jesus were ready to leave. It is interesting that the children came with their halfpence to buy books. The annalist notes that they did not look at the title or the author but at the size and the cover! Finally, Mass was celebrated in the Basilica at St Anne's altar, in thanksgiving for the one hundred years of devoted service of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. Many of the congregation were in tears. When all was in readiness the keys were handed over to the Daughters of the Holy Ghost who were replacing us and on the morning of **September 21st 1929** we left St Anne's.

We thank Miriam Maher fcJ for this account

Sisters who died at Ste Anne d'Auray

M. Victoire Moreau	Sept 17 1833
Post. Josephe Baut	August 7 1834
Madeleine Mouilleron (post.)	Sept 25 1837
Sr. Marie Leroux	Jan 17 1839
M. Marie Nollet	Jan 21 1842
Sr. Marie Sotin	May 15 1842
Sr. Madeleine Renaudineau	July 29 1842
Sr. Marianne Leport	Dec 2 1848
M. Celestine Lassimone	Sept 9 1849
Sr. Marguerite Prin	April 15 1855
Sr. Marie Pajot	June 20 1851
Sr. Francoise Dano	June 14 1852
M. M. Louise Joubel	Dec 25 1863
M. Felicite Gassen	Sept 9 1870
Sr. Agatha Beillevire	Oct 23 1872
M. Madeleine Blackledge	Oct 28 1873
M. Julie Cormier	Nov 23 1874
Sr. Marie Burgaud	March 20 1875
M. Clare Murphy	March 22 1875
Sr. Clotilde Crowley	August 13 1882
M. Josephine Gauvry	Feb 26 1885
M. Victoire Bird	April 15 1885
M. Victoire Connolly	June 10 1886

Rev. M. Josephine Petit	Dec 11 1888
M. Euphrasie Balthazard	July 26 1889
M. Patrick Reidy	May 2 1889
M. Anna Maria Bigot	July 4 1891
M. Rosalie de Cologan	July 10 1891
M. Therese Dobson	Feb 8 1891
Sr. Felicite Gauthier	Nov 2 1892
M. Marie St. Pierre	Jan 28 1894
Sr. Stanislaus Perroteau	Sept 2 1895
Sr. M. Joseph Bigot	Sept 26 1895
Rev M. Marie de Bussy	March 29 1895
Sr. Elizabeth Baker (nov.)	March 12 1896
M. Agnes Lepany	July 10 1899
Sr. Marie Fablec	Sept 8 1899
Sr. Angela Guegan	March 2 1899
M. M. Eustelle Le Garree	April 23 1902
M. Philomena Leport	Nov 19 1903
Sr. Marie Pottier	Jan 14 1904
Sr. Josephine Lansard	June 29 1904
M. Marie des Agnes Canepa	Aug 3 1904
Sr. M. Cecile Fablee	May 8 1905
M. Anna Hardy	Sept 10 1906
M. Isabelle Rovira	Oct 24 1906
M. Victoire Ferrier	Nov 18 1906
Sr. Marianne Humery	Oct 28 1925
Sr. Francoise Fourrage	July 18 1926
Sr. Agnes Herve	Aug 18 1927
M. Cecile Dore	Feb 6 1929
M. Frances Keogh	July 28 1929

*Brief lives of our **three early superiors general** are given here. Each was associated in some way with Ste Anne d'Auray and two, M. Josephine Petit and M. Marie de Bussy, are buried here. (M. Zoë Girod is buried in Upton Hall cemetery where Marie Madeleine was buried for close on eighty years.) We extend thanks to Miriam Maher for these accounts. Miriam has based her work on that of Thérèse de Rancé fcJ and Breda O'Farrell fcJ.*

Mother Josephine Petit Second Superior General 1858-1888

Louise Petit was born in Abbeville about forty kilometres from Amiens where in 1822 aged ten she first met Marie Madeleine. In 1824 Nantes was founded and Louise became its first boarder where she was joined by Marie de Bussy who was to succeed her as superior general in 1888. The house was in a dilapidated state and they suffered many privations but, years later, Louise was to recall that Marie Madeleine surrounded them with the most meticulous and delicate care. It is interesting to note that under the same roof were to be found our first three superior generals.

Louise left school in 1829 and entered the novitiate within the next couple of years. In 1832 after her profession aged twenty she was sent to Carouge first as class mistress, and, at the age of twenty three, as superior and mistress of novices. In 1837 at twenty four hours notice she was chosen to accompany Marie Madeleine on her historical and critical visit to Rome. Always of a delicate disposition her serious illness in Rome was providential. They were due to leave having been threatened by the Jesuits with great misfortunes if they pursued their quest. They had to delay their departure. Then Pope Gregory asked to see them, without interpreters, and granted them the approval of the Institute.

For the next twenty years Josephine remained at Carouge. It was to Josephine that Marie Madeleine on her death bed instructed that her keys, her papers and documents should be sent. On September 14th 1858 Josephine was elected the second superior general of the society. In 1863 she went to Rome to seek once again the approbation of the Constitutions but without success. It is interesting to note that in 1879 she had parts of the constitutions printed for distribution in the Society.

Josephine's thirty years as superior general were years of demanding work, of struggling to have the Constitutions approved, of extensive travelling, of expansion and consolidation. In her lifetime Marie Madeleine made seventeen foundations. Josephine was to equal that number and to take the Society into mission territories of Canada and Australia. It was her custom to spend time with each group of missionaries before they set sail. It is moving to note that when the

question of a mission to Canada was being considered, out of the eight hundred members of the Society six hundred volunteered.

It was Josephine who introduced the Cause of Marie Madeleine, an initiative which entailed endless research and the gathering of testimonies which have proved a great resource for succeeding generations. It is due to Josephine's devoted work that the virtues of Marie Madeleine were declared heroic.

During Josephine's time as superior general St Anne d'Auray was, in effect, the Mother House, for her, a haven of peace and recuperation. She was much loved by the children. The Bishop of Vannes, Monsignor Becel, was a faithful friend of St Anne's and had a great appreciation of and affection for Mother Josephine. In his eulogy he spoke feelingly of her love of prayer, her delicacy of manner, her humility coupled with gentle firmness, her devotion to duty, her great love for the Society. On her death bed every time the chaplain said they were going to pray for her she added, with effort 'and for the Society'.

Josephine Petit died on 11th December 1888. Her life long friend Marie de Bussy, her assistant and secretary, was at her bedside, 'her shadow' someone once said. Mother Josephine at once protested 'No, my sunshine'!

Josephine is an example to us of a great missionary woman who led the society courageously towards the new horizons Marie Madeleine had dreamed of.

Mother Marie de Bussy Third Superior General 1888-1895

Marie de Bussy was born in Nantes in 1813, to Stanislaus-Marie De Bussy and Flore Brouard, the eldest of twelve children, seven of whom survived into adulthood. Her childhood was passed in Nantes where she lived quietly with her parents and her three brothers. From an early age she was a serious and reflective child, with an insight into the things of God, well beyond her years. When she heard the story of Anna and Joachim consecrating Mary to the Lord, she resolved that she too would offer her life to God.

Her first contact with Marie Madeleine was through her aunt, Madame Justine Delaporte, who had a son at St Acheul at the same time as Marie Madeleine. The two widows became friends. Very soon Justine and her daughter Euphrasie asked to be received into the newly formed society. Justine encountered much opposition from her brothers, Monsieur de Bussy and Father Maxine de Bussy SJ on the grounds that her first duty was to her young family. At their insistence Justine left the novitiate and joined the daughters of the Heart of Mary, religious living in the world. Apart from the question of duty it has to be remembered that the Society then lived a sort of underground existence not daring to reveal its name or its Rule. Once Marie Madeleine received the approbation of Leo XIII attitudes changed.

When Justine was in the novitiate Marie Madeleine stayed with the De Bussy family in Nantes for several weeks when Marie was eleven years old. She was revered and loved by all the family. In her testimony Marie wrote "I looked upon her as a saint. And this impression continued to grow and deepen within me." During her stay Marie Madeleine went to see the bishop, Monseigneur de Guèrines who approved of her plans to set up a school in Nantes. The only building she could find was very dilapidated which she furnished as best she could while awaiting something better. In January 1824 Marie became a boarder and formed a lasting friendship with another young girl there, Josephine Petit. Marie Madeleine took the greatest care of the two little girls giving them lessons in religious education and grammar. Josephine was to enter the novitiate on leaving school; Marie had to wait for several years.

In 1834 Marie's mother, Madame de Bussy died a saintly death after a long illness. Marie herself became seriously ill from tuberculosis. Contrary to expectation she recovered. All her life thereafter she was to suffer from delicate health. A year later M. De Bussy was to succumb to a fatal illness. He confided the care of his family to Madame d' Houët. Aged twenty-two, Marie was responsible for keeping the family together and seeing to the education of her brothers. She, too, greatly profited from their education. She had above average intelligence. She wrote and spoke German, Italian, Spanish and English. Before the death of her parents Marie studied Greek with her brother Joseph. However, on being consulted, Doctor

Recamier gave as his opinion “that it is dangerous to encourage women to study because the delicacy of their constitution cannot stand up to the great harm caused by mental fatigue” Marie had to abandon her studies.

The years passed. The children were grown up. Marie felt a strong inclination towards religious life. Her spiritual director Fr Rouysin, discouraged her from entering the Society, as did another Jesuit, Fr Joseph Varin who, as we know, was well known to the Society. After Marie had prayed through the intercession of St Ignatius, Father Varin changed his mind. In 1845 Marie aged thirty two entered the novitiate in Carouge. Her novice mistress was none other than Josephine Petit, her old school friend. Marie received the habit in 1845 and made her vows in 1847. It is interesting to note that Marie is responsible for the traditional evening hymn to Mary, ‘*Bon soir, Bonne Mere.*’

Marie’s health improved during the novitiate but, when in 1854 she came to England to study the language, the English climate did not agree with her because of her disposition to tuberculosis. She was diagnosed as having the disease in both lungs. Was it due to Marie Madeleine’s prayers that she lived to be eighty three years, never sparing herself as her work load became progressively heavier? Marie then went to Carouge and remained there until 1858. When Josephine Petit was elected the second superior general Marie became one of her assistants and her secretary until Josephine’s death in 1888. For over thirty years Marie worked closely with Josephine.

In 1863 Marie accompanied Josephine for an audience with Pope Pius IX seeking approbation for our constitutions, a summary of which Marie had printed, which was to serve as a basis for our 1922 Directory.

Marie, as Secretary General was very busy handling the business of all the new foundations, including the far off houses of Australia and Canada. There was voluminous correspondence to be dealt with. It is impossible to number the letters she sent. Thérèse de Rancé estimated that at least three thousand five hundred letters were exchanged with the superior of Paris! Marie was also a trusted

adviser to Josephine who could rely on her excellent judgment. Interestingly, Marie organised the celebrations of the silver jubilee of Josephine's election known in the Society as the '*Great Fourteenth*'. (14th September 1883.)

From 1888 Josephine's health failed rapidly. For nearly a year Marie dealt with the business. Josephine died on 9th December 1888. She had, to Marie's consternation nominated her as Vicar General. Marie's one desire was to convoke a general chapter as quickly as possible so as to be able to relinquish her burden. In announcing her arrival in Paris for the election, Marie described the Vicar General thus: "She is a poor person, toothless, half blind, bent down, half asthmatic, who puts herself forward as little as possible." To her great distress she was elected the third superior general on 12th August 1889. Six years later Father Stanislaus was to recall at her funeral how after the election '*she sat there motionless, like a statue while the religious were coming one after another to kiss lifeless hand.*' Marie had lived all her life in the shadow of Josephine, so humble that the least sign of honour made her feel sick.

Marie's mantra as superior General seems to have been "May the Holy Will of God be done." Once elected no longer did Marie lament her advanced age and failing health, but immediately after her election she set out to visit all the houses with the exception of the foundations in Canada and Australia. Her great desire was to further the Cause of Marie Madeleine. The first session of the Tribunal took place in 1888 in the little chapel at Rue de la Santé in Paris. In her testimony, among other qualities, Marie emphasised that "legitimate family affection was far from dead in Marie Madeleine." She had witnessed the profound grief of Marie Madeleine when her niece, Marthe de Bengy fcJ died prematurely from typhoid fever in 1845, in Nantes. Marie was distressed by the deaths from tuberculosis of young sisters all over the society.

In 1891 Marie suffered a great loss on the death of Stanislaus Lawless her devoted assistant. Henceforth Zoë Girod was to be her support. In October 1893, while dealing with her post Marie suffered a stroke affecting her right hand and leg. In spite of her disability she continued to work for the Society for another seventeen months. In March 1895 her condition worsened and she died on 29th March 1895.

She was buried in St Anne d'Auray in the same vault and under the same granite cross which the grieving boarders had erected to the memory of Josephine. Close by is the grave of her ten-year old niece, Henriette de Bussy.

Mother Zoë Girod Fourth Superior General 1895-1914

On 21st May 1863 Mlle Zoë Girod aged thirty entered the novitiate in Paris. After pronouncing her vows on 2nd February, 1865 Mother Zoë was missioned to the Paris community where she was to spend many years, as mistress of class, general mistress of the students and eventually local superior. As an educator she was held in high esteem. We are told that she had had lessons from distinguished professors from the University of Paris. One pupil wrote '*I have blessed the formation received from this serene and wonderful soul*'. It was the practice in those days for great emphasis to be placed on memorising. Zoë endeavoured also to form her pupils' judgment and in their viva examinations they were often praised for their logical presentations.

During the terrible suffering during the Franco Prussian war, Paris, having sent its children to safety, opened its doors to the wounded soldiers, providing fifteen beds. We are told that Mother Zoë was among the first to nurse the wounded, to watch over them night and day, and lift up their spirits

Mother Zoë, in 1875 helped to gather the testimonies for the Cause of Marie Madeleine and was one of the signatories on the Act of Procuration.

Zoë became superior of the house of Paris after the death of Stanislaus Lawless in 1891 In the Notice of Zoë's death we read *the new superior governed the house of Paris with kindness, prudence and gentleness*.

As Marie de Bussy's worries increased and her health deteriorated she came to rely more and more on Zoë Girod to deal with the French houses in their difficulties. In March 1895 Marie de Bussy died. She had named Zoë Girod as Vicar. On 29th August 1895 Zoë was unanimously elected Superior General.

Like Teresa of Avila, Zoë was to become *this wandering lady* as she visited one community after another on the continent and in England and Ireland.

During Zoë's generalate, work for the Cause went on apace. The 26 volumes of the writings of Marie Madeleine were taken to Rome in 1900. Zoe was one of the signatories to the Act of Procuration.

As Marie de Bussy carried on the expansion work of Marie Madeleine so it was to be the lot of Zoë Girod to experience the persecution of the Church and religious congregations of France. On 2 July 1901 the law condemning all kinds of religious association had been passed. Unlike some other religious Zoë fully understood the danger and at once set about looking for possible places of refuge for the sisters and for the safe keeping of all the papers of the Society. Belgium was to be the answer as well as the Channel Islands which provided refuge for the sisters from St Anne's. Later saw the foundation at La Chassotte, Switzerland. As a direct result of the persecution in 1904, four French houses, Paris, Amiens, Camon and Nice closed at the same time. Mother Magdalen Harding in a letter notes "Our Beloved Mother is as admirable as ever: so calm, so resigned ...". The houses were coveted by the government but Zoë, by her foresight and energetic interventions, was able to keep them all. The novitiate had to be disbanded and re established in Namur. St Anne's was the only house to survive until 1906.

From then onwards one is struck by the fresh vitality of the society as Zoë concentrated on the development of the existing properties. Sedgley Training College was particularly dear to her heart founded by her in 1905

Zoë returned from her travels in 1907 to settle in Uccle. By letter she kept in constant touch with all the houses. She never postponed to the following day an answer which could be given on the same day. Her serenity, her meekness and the tenderness of her heart were apparent to all.

On January 1st 1914 Zoe wrote to her sister Elise Girod, superior of Namur sending good wishes to the community. Elise was suddenly called to her sister's side on the 19th. Having received the pope's

blessing she died towards 5pm. She is buried in Upton close to the tomb of Marie Madeleine.



The Calvaire at Plougastel