

# Inter – Ursuline



May-August 2022

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*Bulletin of the Ursulines  
of the Roman Union  
Via Nomentana, 236  
00162 Roma*

TEL 06-86-22-181

Website:

[ursulines-roman-union.org](http://ursulines-roman-union.org)



## GREECE

### 350 ANNIVERSARY OF URSULINE PRESENCE IN GREECE



*On 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022, a celebration took place in Greece for the anniversary of more than 350 years since the foundation of the first Ursuline schools in Greece. The educational community of Ursulines as well as members of the Lasallian family, were there. You will find here extracts from the speeches of Sr Susan Flood, Prioress General, and of Br Claude Reinhardt, fsc, Assistant to the Provincial Visitor of the District of France.*

Dear friends, invited guests, students and parents,

Dear friends of the Ursuline Sisters and past-students of the Ursuline schools in Maroussi and Psychico,

Dear brothers, and members of the Lasallian family,

Madame President, Ms Katerina Sakellaropoulou,

Brother Claude, Mrs Kanellopoulou,

Dear Sr Agni,

**T**hank you for the welcome that you have offered to me and to Sr Neusimar and Sr Marie-Therese. It is a privilege for me to be with you today as together we celebrate 350 years of Ursuline presence in Greece. I cannot help but think of the many, many sisters who have contributed to the Ursuline story throughout this long period of time. As you know the earliest part of the Greek Ursuline story was lived on the islands of Naxos and Tinos. Between 1670 and 1856, the Ursuline presence in Naxos continued in the midst of many difficulties. The courage of these Greek women was extraordinary. The first French Ursulines did not arrive until 1857, in order to develop opportunities for education for young women. Now is not the time to retell that long story. It is time, rather, to celebrate what we have inherited from them – the spirit and tradition which we all value so much.

**H**ere in Athens, the Ursuline story is much shorter ... 75 years, in fact. The first sisters came from many parts of the Ursuline world, and as Greek women joined the community they gave a wonderful Greek flavor to our Institute. The culture of the community and the schools was therefore rich and vibrant. This international nature of the communities has, I am sure, continued to shape the nature of the educational enterprise in these schools until today.

**A**s Ursulines, we are used to thinking of long histories. Our foundress, St Angela Merici, established the Company of St Ursula in Brescia, Italy in 1535. The early members of this Company were younger and older women, educated and uneducated women, women from all the strata of society. Angela was not a teacher, she did not establish schools. Her primary purpose was to provide an opportunity for women to support each other to grow in their relationship with God, to be committed together for this purpose, and in support for their varied ‘good works’, their service within their society. However, she saw the central importance of supporting the growth of younger women, of empowering them. She saw their need for companionship as they deepened their spirituality, and grew in their understanding of what and how God was calling them to be in their world. For her, deeply respectful relationships underpinned everything.

Angela's focus was always on the person, on care for the well-being of each person in their individuality, and in the context of their unique relationship with God. Above all, Angela's basic commitment was to the following of Jesus, and to living according to the Gospel.

The Ursuline tradition of education developed as the congregation spread throughout France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was during this time that Ursulines adapted Angela's charism to the needs and circumstances of their times. They established schools, particularly for girls, and at the same time developed an educational philosophy, or approach, which has endured until today.

It is in France that the parallel paths of the Lasallian brothers and the Ursuline Sisters begin. When in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Rheims, Jean Baptist de la Salle established his community of brothers committed to education of the sons of artisans and the poor, Ursuline sisters were already educating girls in monasteries across the length and breadth of France. It would be interesting to know what contacts there might have been between the Lasallian brothers and the Ursuline sisters during those years in France.



In my own experience, I know that in Australia there have been strong links between the two congregations. When I was a student in an Ursuline College in Sydney, my brother received his secondary education at a neighbouring De La Salle College. And Ursuline Sisters and De La Salle brothers worked very closely together when our two schools merged to become a new co-educational school in Armidale, a rural city in Australia. So this link that we are forging together here in Athens is not without precedent.

St Angela was a wise woman of great openness and realism. She understood that over time the circumstances of life and history change. Her own life experience taught her that life is not static. The advice that she gave to the leaders of the young Company continues to influence us today. In particular she tells us:

*'If, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or to do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice'* (St Angela, Last Legacy)

...

In her Last Legacy St Angela also speaks of her confidence that *'God will never abandon the Company, because, if God planted it in the first place, who is there that can uproot it?'* The spirit, the charism, the unique gift of St Angela and the Ursulines has been deeply planted in Greek soil, and in the life of these two schools. Through this spirit, the Good News of Jesus has been shared in this place. We Ursulines are confident that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will continue to be alive and to bear fruit, now and in the future, as the Lasallian brothers and their colleagues continue their work in these schools and with these students.

**Sr Susan Flood osu**

Speech by Frère Claude Reinhardt, FSC, Auxiliary Visitor for Greece

Dear Sister Susan, Prioress General of the Ursulines,  
Dear Sister Neusimar, General Councillor,  
Dear Sister Marie-Thérèse, Provincial of France/  
Belgium/Spain,  
Dear Sister Agnes,  
Dear friends of the Ursuline family,  
Dear Brothers, dear Lasallians and members of the  
Lasallian family, Ladies and gentlemen,



It is a great pleasure for me personally and for all the Lasallians to participate today in this celebration that commemorates the anniversary of the birth of a presence as intense and fruitful as that of the Ursulines in Greece. It is a family celebration, a joyful anniversary, bringing together two families, spiritual and educational. The Brothers and Sisters in France and other countries join with us today in thought and prayer. On this day we commemorate a rich past while preparing for the future, that is, the continuation of the educational mission that as Christians we can offer to a country, to its families, to those who have entrusted us with the education of their children.

During the last few years, the collaboration between the two families (Lasallians and Ursulines) has become closer, more intense and richer. The General Directors have cooperated in an excellent way, with the support and assistance of the Ursuline Sisters in charge, especially of Sr. Marie-Thérèse, and of the representative of the Lasallian Educational Mission in Greece, Mrs. Stavroula Kanellopoulou, I thank them both.

If the reduction in the number of religious (men and women) and other institutional issues concerning the future has accelerated this approach, the reasons that have led us towards one another are deeper: they are spiritual and missionary. We cannot allow a dynamic educational presence to be lost in your beautiful country. Our pedagogical principles, so relevant, are grounded in the Gospel and call us to set an example by serving children. These principles constitute and mobilize a community dedicated to serving children and young people, in order to help them to progress in their lives and to learn that God loves them all!

Angela Merici and Jean-Baptiste La Salle, in different contexts, were pioneers in the “art” of giving to people, adults and young people. Like other founders of Orders, were influenced both by the Gospel of Christ and by the needs of society and their fellow beings.

Angela and the early women of her Company served all forms of poverty, but not occasionally and in isolation. She urged her Sisters to live in union and in communion with each other “insiems”, together!

Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, a priest and theologian in Rheims, found the poor and uneducated children. He also gathered companions and founded a new community of teachers, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, with the aim of educating and training the sons of the artisans and the poor of his time. The women who joined Angela will serve people through a company, and the first teachers, who met de La Salle, will work as a community, united and committed, to educate and train children and young people. Our two Founders remind us that all things are possible in education if there is a living and united community, made up of sisters and brothers – lay and



consecrated – in the service of teaching, humanistic and Christian education of those entrusted to their care.

For centuries, the Ursuline Sisters and the Brothers of the Christian Schools have been providing quality education, creating and animating communities in which collaboration and the concept of a common mission are fundamental.

Today, the lay principals and teachers of our schools accept this precious heritage and work to make it grow and bear fruit for the glory of God and fraternal service to young people.

Our years of working closely together in our two Ursuline schools have enabled us to get to know each other better, to appreciate each other, and to build on our many commonalities as well as the vital strength of our pedagogical plans, which are grounded in the living tradition of our Founders.

...

Thank you for your trust and I wish everyone a beautiful and joyful celebration!

**Brother Claude Reinhardt, FSC**



## SYNODAL PROCESS

*You will find below three experiences of our involvement as Ursulines in the current Synodal Process.*

### Indonesia

#### THE URSULINE SISTERS OF ST URSULA JAKARTA PARTICIPATED IN THE SYNOD

Christina Ayda, OSU



The journey to the World Synod of Bishops in October 2023 will actually start from people in small groups or communities, both active and passive in church life. The Ursuline Sisters of St Ursula in the Archdiocese of Jakarta are involved in the continuity of this synod. This Synod has the theme : **For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission**

**U**rsulines and many other Jakarta Catholics generally do not recognize and understand the purpose of the synod because the previous synods had not invited all the people. While the meaning of the synod is to walk together, so in the same sense, this time the synod of the Archdiocese of Jakarta (KAJ) needs to hear and accept input, suggestions, responses from all its people. Each input will be reprocessed by the KAJ synod team. Then it will be perfected with all dioceses (Bishop Conference in Indonesia = KWI) so that the results of this KWI synod will be presented at the 2023 synod.

**S**tarting from the opening mass on October 17, 2021 the synod began to be introduced as widely as possible. Priests, religious and parishioners listened carefully and carried out the synod. An e-book explaining the synod, themes and various guides is also provided. There are three activities; online surveys, spiritual writings, and spiritual conversations.

**F**illing out online surveys is done through Google forms on smartphones or laptops. Spiritual writing is a spiritual experience. Spiritual conversations are carried out in environmental groups or communities. The guiding questions are given in four sub-themes: Synodality in the Church, Catholics Involved and Having a Voice in the Community, Church Missionary Work, Interfaith and Cross-Church Dialogue.

**T**he Ursuline Sisters of St Ursula Jakarta have conducted online surveys and spiritual conversations. For spiritual conversation activities, it was carried out twice and required preparation. The sisters were given various sharing questions first, the sisters shared their opinions and experiences of faith. Then the results of sharing in spiritual conversations were sent to the synod team.

The various sharing and opinions of the sisters are:

### **Synodality in the Church**

**S**The parish and the community in general get along and are happy. Pay attention to the weak and marginalized. Conflicts within the community still occur and some can be resolved, some cannot. On various occasions clericalism still occurs, but lessens.

### **Catholics Engage and Have a Voice in the Community**

**C**The sisters get on well with their neighbours by attending various events. The sisters also teach students leadership, cadre training, understanding social realities, human rights cases, the law on social harassment, and so on. This is done to increase sensitivity, think critically and speak the truth.

### **Church Missionary Work**

**C**In carrying out the mission of the church, the sisters take an active role like other Catholics. The sisters interact with those who need help, listen, understand their distress and then help find opportunities for independence. At school, the sisters also accompany in counselling guidance, provide support, enthusiasm, and raise students' self-confidence, especially those who have difficulty to learn.



## Interfaith and Inter-Church Dialogue

We relate to and accept everyone. One of the experiences when volunteering at the Serviam Vaccine Center, the sisters met many volunteers and vaccine recipients without knowing their religion. They greet each other and work well together.

Our school is open to all religions, the experience of interacting with people of different religions will make them respect and respect each other as human beings.



*Sisters answering questions via the Google form.*

## France/Belgium/Spain

### SYNODAL PROCESS IN TOURS, ORLEANS AND IN FRANCE

*This is the first news from Ursulines of the dioceses of Tours and Orléans, at the local and national levels (France)*



*"To promote a vast process of consultation", with the aim of inviting "the Church, the People of God" to "walk together, gathering in assembly and through the active participation of all its members".*

**I**n Tours, ambassadors were appointed, part of the various groups composing the diocese. They were given the task at the opening celebration to coordinate reflection teams either in a sector of the diocese, or in a congregation, or in a charitable, spiritual or formation service.

A leaflet listing 6 questions was made available to all those who wished to participate.

*When we say "Church" who do we mean? To whom do we not listen? How are we active in mission in today's society and world? How do we encourage everyone's participation? How can we review our practices as a team and in co-responsibility (discernment, reflection, decision)? How do we react to the report on sexual abuse in the Church of France?*

Some of the Ursulines of Tours participated in one or more groups:

- A morning with men and women religious, in groups according to the question chosen, after a time of common prayer and the witness of a person who has experienced synodality.



- A parish group of "Lectio Divina" who took time to reflect on the 3rd question "mission" after sharing and praying on Jn 15 (The vine and the branches).

### **In the Diocese of Orléans**

Two questions are proposed for an exchange in groups of 6 to 8 people of different origin, who do not all know each other, and who may have a different point of view and sensibilities.

- **Question 1:** *How do I view the current reality of the functioning of the Church, if possible on the basis of experience lived in the Church or in other institutions? What would I like to confirm, improve, change?*
- **Question 2:** *What new insights, what new perspectives, what dreams, do I have for the Church of the 3rd millennium?*
- **All groups must report their contribution to the diocese.**

The Ursulines in Beaugency who animate the "Maison de la Parole" (Spiritual Center for formation and encounter, especially with the Scriptures) have set up or participated in several groups.

In April, they participated in the animation of a day for the consecrated persons of the diocese: "What if we dreamed together of the Church? » :

After reading chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles, each group of 5 or 6 consecrated persons answered the questions proposed by the diocese.

One of our sisters also participated in a big meeting to prepare, from the contributions of all the small groups that have already taken place in the diocese of Orleans, *a pre-synthesis of the "dreams" of the Catholics of the diocese:*

Pauline, a young woman in her thirties, made the hundred people present work together with a "method of collective intelligence". By taking time for reading, listening, debating, interspersed with times of silence, we identified a dozen topics such as:

*Unity/ the question of the vocabulary used in the Church/ clericalism/ welcome/ fraternity... each person, young or old, was invited to vote freely on these subjects by placing the 10 post-its that we had in hand on this or that subject; we could put several on the same subject!*

It was a beautiful meeting of listening, of sharing responsibility, in truth and in freedom.

Until the end of April, groups continue to meet and make their contribution, leaving the organizers of this diocesan stage a lot of work for "the final bouquet" that will give new ways of collaboration to our parishes, movements and services for evangelization! »

### **At the national level:**

A sister of Beaugency, Sr Laure, participated in a national meeting of the Association "Pierre d'Angle" which brings together people living in precarious situations, giving them the opportunity to speak.



We were also able to follow talks in Videoconferencing, by Sr. Nathalie Becquart, Xavierian sister, undersecretary of the synod in Rome, making us more aware that synodality is part of the identity of the Church.

*Here we are before You, Holy Spirit;  
in Your Name, we are gathered.  
You our only counselor, come to us, dwell with us,  
deign to live in our hearts.*

*Teach us towards what goal we should move, show us how we should walk together.*

*“Pray and get others to pray that God not abandon his Church, but reform it as he pleases and as he sees best for us, and more to his honor and glory”.*

St Angela, Counsels 7, 24-26

*Here is another report from the community-unit of the “fraternité du Chemin”, in Malet (France)*  
Sr Françoise Bonnaterre, osu

**H**aving arrived in Malet (Aveyron) at the end of August 2021, we joined in various meetings in order to get to know some of the people and the reality of the diocese. We met with one group in Espalion for the Parish of Saint Bernard d’Olt, of which we are a part. The people present, few in number, but all already committed in the church, were willing to “walk together” and participate in the renewal desired by the Synod. About forty people gave their reactions in a questionnaire distributed in the liaison newspaper or given individually. At the next meeting everyone had to come with a sentence that summed up their opinion. This small group is looking for ways to be open “to the peripheries” and asking itself, not about the past, but about how we could find ways to meet our contemporaries where they are. We are considering the next step: meeting other small groups formed in the diocese to broaden our thinking, and schedule some friendly gatherings open to everyone.

**I**n addition, one of us took part in a meeting on "the government of the Church" where Father Jean-Luc Favre, sj, explained the process that unfolds through the progress of an assembly: building community/ contemplating together/ practicing spiritual conversation.

**S**ome of us had the chance to experience face-to-face or by video, the remarkable day organized by the Centre Sèvres (Paris) with the theme: “Hearing the voice of the poorest in the synodal process”. Sister Laure Blanchon, osu, was one of the linchpins.

We are convinced that everyone is called to enter into a dynamic of conversion, hearing the call to "listen with the ear of the heart" and to "return to the Source".

# SLICES OF HISTORY, PAST AND PRESENT

## England

### THANKSGIVING IN WESTGATE, 1904-2021

On the 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2021, the Ursulines of the English Province gathered to concelebrate a Mass of thanksgiving for the 117 years of prayerful Ursuline presence and dedication to education in Westgate-On-Sea.

After much prayer and reflection, it was decided to bring the communities closer together in London and to move from the Westgate site. We accompany the sisters in these transformations and give thanks for the many good things that have taken place thanks to their contribution.

*“How different it must have been for those first sisters who came in 1904 from Boulogne-sur-Mer. Immediately they began to educate, a process which continues today. A process which will stretch into the future through the legacy given by those holy women, by you my dear sisters and those who have gone before you. On behalf of our Archdiocese I want to express my sincere gratitude for your presence, for your service, for your witness.” – Archbishop John Wilson, Thanksgiving Mass, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2021.*

Many Ursuline convents in England were founded by communities who came from France and Germany seeking refuge from persecution. It was an alarming event in France in 1904 that began the Westgate story.

The Combes Law which suppressed all the religious teaching congregations in France led to a sad and painful departure from Boulogne for the Ursuline Sisters in August 1904. As the sisters boarded their boat to Margate, a cry of “Vivent les Soeurs” rang out from a group of former parents, pupils and friends that had come to say their goodbyes. A 22-year exile was to begin for this small group of French Ursulines - the true founders of the Westgate convent.

In Westgate, the Ursulines settled as best they could but were reluctant to build anything permanent as they were hoping for a short stay in England. They rented four houses in Adrian Square where the best room was reserved for the chapel; other rooms were used as dormitories and classrooms, and the sisters shared the smallest rooms. After a couple of years, it was clear that their exile was to be longer than hoped and they needed to look for a bigger property. Hatton House had recently been built; it was near the sea, surrounded by sheep grazing in fields and with extensive grounds. It immediately caught the eye of the sisters. Priced at £8,000 (a great deal of money in 1906) two beneficiaries provided the funds and the Ursulines were able to realise their dream of owning this beautiful property, with its spacious lawns and tree-lined avenues. It is still as beautiful today as it was then.

One notable part of the garden is the Calvary Walk. Quoting from the early ‘Annales’ of the French nuns, it reads ‘the bushes were filled with nests: thrushes, blackbirds, hedge sparrows and chaffinches were all in their seventh heaven!’ The avian great, great, great grandchildren of these birds are still chirping in the garden today.



The next chapter in the Westgate story came in 1907, when the first stone of the convent was laid and a year later the sisters had their own building. The red brick property conformed to monastic requirements of the time, with separate cells and a community room with French windows opening out onto the lawn.

It is not surprising that although the French sisters had made a home and established a successful school in Westgate, they longed to return to their motherland. However, this was to be delayed by the outbreak of the First World War. When the end of the war was announced in 1918 by the ringing of the bells in nearby Quex Park, it would still take the sisters eight more years to return to home. In 1926, the founding Ursuline Sisters of Westgate departed for France and eight Ursulines from a convent in Bideford, Devon, led by Mother Francis Lemarchand, stepped in to replace them. Over the years, Westgate became a truly English Ursuline house. The site was developed, buildings added, the school extended and the number of Ursulines and students increased.



In 1938 the chapel and cloisters were built. Since its construction, the chapel has been treasured by Ursulines and pupils throughout the decades, for its dignified beauty, its spaciousness and its simple carved statues.

In September 1939 war was declared and due to Westgate's close proximity to the coast it became clear that it was no longer safe, so the school and convent were evacuated to the countryside of Berkshire. A large country house was rented: Rush Court, Wallingford. The community and school stayed there for the remainder of the war. The sisters showed the same courage and determination that their French founders had shown. Both fled for safety, and both remained devoted to continuing Ursuline education, despite the uncertainty and difficulties that lay ahead. As for the land and buildings they had left behind, they were used by the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. In 1945 when war was over, the sisters and students returned to Westgate. The post war years were far from easy, but with the hard work and dedication of the Ursuline sisters, the school went from strength to strength.

As the years passed the school continued to grow and change by responding to the needs of the times. Today it is a successful co-educational school and part of the diocese of Southwark's provision for all children in the area. The Ursuline sisters led the school until 2007. Since then, dedicated lay staff have kept alive the Ursuline teaching tradition; both Ursulines and pupils owe them a great debt of gratitude.

In 1985 a small Care Home was built close to the convent. Lourdes, as it was called, became the home of Sr. Francis Lemarchand, who had arrived in 1926 from Bideford to replace the departing French sisters. Three days after her arrival at Lourdes she said "I am very happy and love this place. It is so wonderfully good of God to have given me for my last few years, this little bit of contemplative life that I have always longed for". A great number of sisters have been cared for in Lourdes for nearly forty years.

Like all Ursulines the sisters in England have been discerning their future. After much prayer and reflection, it was decided to bring the communities closer together in London and to close our Westgate home.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2021, the Ursulines of the English Province gathered in the beautiful chapel to welcome Archbishop John Wilson to concelebrate, with ten other priests, a Mass of thanksgiving for the 117 years of prayerful Ursuline presence and dedication to education. During his sermon the Archbishop spoke fondly and with great gratitude to the Ursuline community:



*“Steeped in the witness of these two saints, it is fidelity to Christ and service to the Church’s mission through education, which we celebrate today, in you, and your predecessors, who have sustained the Ursuline presence, here in Westgate for the past 117 years. What an incredible achievement, only possible because of the Lord’s call, the Lord’s choice, that we, that you, bear fruit that will last.”*

His final thoughts were about St Angela

*“When it came to speaking about the Christian life, she was refreshingly straight forward: ‘Strive to be faithful to that which God has called you’, she said. ‘Do now what you wish to have done when your moment comes to die.’ ‘Do something, get moving, risk new things, stick with it, get on your knees, then be ready for big surprises.’ This is timeless good advice for every disciple.”*

We pray that the spirit of St. Angela will continue to live on in the hearts of our many students, past and present, in our staff, in our friends, and all those we have known in the area. We rejoice that the school we are leaving behind will continue to educate young people who will go out into the world with strong Christian principles always conscious of their responsibility to strive for peace, justice and the integrity of creation. May St. Angela continue to inspire all of us, with her love of God, her generous spirit and her kindness.

## **Ireland/Wales and Kenya**

### **AS URSULINES SHIFT PRESENCE IN IRELAND AND KENYA, THEIR LINKS AND LEGACY ENDURE**

*These are extracts of an article issued in Global Sisters Report, written by Sarah Mac Donald, on February 14, 2022*

Events highlighted significant changes for the Ursulines in Ireland: the decision to close the congregation's convent in Blackrock in Cork City, which is linked to their foundation.

The Blackrock convent that is closing was built to provide a modern and more user-friendly environment for an aging community following the sale of the Ursuline’s historic 18th-century convent and former boarding school in 2001. The decision to close this newer facility came as the Ursuline community in the country dropped to just over 50 members.



**B**ut while the Ursulines in Ireland are challenged by a lack of vocations and an aging profile, the community they founded in Kenya is thriving. This was recognized in a March 27, 2021, ceremony when the Ursuline mission in Kenya changed its status and ceased to be part of the community's Ireland-Wales-Kenya province. ...



The Sisters of the Groupement of Kenya

**T**he links between Ireland and Kenya remain strong as there are still one or two sisters in every Irish Ursuline house who spent time on mission there, Barry explained. "There is a strong friendship, connection and interest in Kenya. We supported them through the years with sound formation and by putting in place structures geared towards financial sustainability," she said. The sisters in Kenya are "following the route we would have set out. From the very beginning, there were sisters involved in education and in health care and they have continued that route, by and large. The majority of sisters in Kenya are working in government schools and hospitals and some work for NGOs."

**S**peaking from Kenya, Sr. Teresia Muhuhu, said only one Irish Ursuline remains in Kenya: Sr. Clare Ursula Tobin, who is in her 70s. Tobin runs St Columba's Technical Training College in Kitui County and is involved in succession planning; a Kenyan sister will take responsibility of the college soon...

Among the 40 Kenyan sisters, the oldest is 58 and the youngest is 21. "We have 20 finally professed sisters, and the rest are junior sisters, novices and aspirants"

**T**he mission in Kenya began in October 1957 with the arrival of four Irish Ursulines in Mutune in the Kitui Diocese, about 105 miles southeast of Nairobi. Muhuhu said the first Irish Ursulines quickly got involved in teaching, health care and pastoral ministries. That work continues today through St Ursula's dispensary in Kitale. The Ursulines have also provided health services in Kitui, Lodwar, Kitale and Nairobi.

**T**he Ursuline sisters were invited to work with COGRI, the Children of God Relief Institute in 2012. The Institute runs the Lea Toto community-based project in Nairobi County and Nyumbani Village program in Kitui County. These projects support orphans and vulnerable children, as well as provide HIV care and treatment services for children. "In our ministries we target the marginalized: the poor, the orphaned, women, HIV/AIDS victims," Tobin said. "We attract people from all sectors of society which gives our Ursuline institutions a good 'mix' of economic, tribal and religious groups from all over Kenya," Tobin explained.

**O**ver the years, those efforts started by the founding sisters have grown. In Kitui, a semi-arid country of the Kamba people, St Angela's secondary School, which began in 1958, is a boarding school that now educates over 600 pupils. With charitable donations from Ireland, the sisters also established St. Columba's Technical Training College, which offers courses on skills such as hairdressing, beauty, therapy, fashion design and garment-making as well as food production.



"In 1957 when they arrived, the need was education. At the time, these missionaries were covering new ground by bringing education to the Kamba people. Today, there is still a need for education. In response to famine, they fed children and people and provided basic needs like clothing. There is still famine and medical needs, but the government is more involved. There are still very many poor people in Kenya."

One Kenyan Ursuline who is a primary school teacher at Forest Primary School in Trans-Nzoia County, "a very poor school," organizes a daily breakfast club that ensures that schoolchildren are fed porridge every morning. This public school is run by the government, while the sister is a staff member employed by the government. The congregation has supported her work building several classes as well as the breakfast program. The breakfast club is funded by donations from Ursuline Associates in Ireland.

"We are trying to answer the needs of the less privileged living in poverty, our sisters continue to work in poor public primary schools and hospitals. In some cases, they are now employed by the government. The sisters working in government schools and hospitals, amid a myriad of challenges, offer their best to the students and patients. These small contributions do make a huge impact. The small mustard seed grows into a big tree."



Sr Christine at «Gospir » primary school

The sisters were also instrumental in setting up schools like Mutito Boys Secondary School, and Mutune Girls Primary School in Kitui. Today these are run by the government, though there is still a close link between the schools and the Ursulines,



St Ursula school at Kitale

with some sisters working as teachers in them. Other schools linked to the Ursulines in Kenya include St. Ursula Primary School, Kitale, Turkana Girls Secondary School, Lodwar, and Forest Primary School in Trans-Nzoia County.

...

In Kenya, the Ursulines' impact in places like Kitale, Nairobi, Kitui and Lodwar in the Turkana desert, is evident in the experiences of people, including teachers, medics and lawyers, who recount that the sisters not only brought education and healing, but also fed and clothed them. In the late 1950s, the Ursulines from Ireland saw protecting and educating women and girls in Kenya as an urgent need.

That emphasis on education was in keeping with the Ursulines' focus in Ireland, where they have been very involved in educating women. "The vast majority would have been involved at one level or another in education ministry or supporting it. We had boarding schools, as well as primary and secondary schools. We moved our secondary schools into the free scheme in the 1960s." ...

The Ursulines also set up St. Angela's College in Sligo, a third-level institution now affiliated with University College Galway, which offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in nursing, health sciences and disability studies, home economics and education. A number of years ago the Ursulines placed their Irish schools under the patronage of the Le Chéile Schools Trust, an umbrella body comprising the schools of 15 religious congregations in Ireland, which safeguards members' ethos and vision of Catholic education.

Mr Barry believes the Ursulines have provided a significant legacy in Ireland, Wales and Kenya. "I think we offered a breadth of opportunity and of vision to women and girls that wouldn't have been available otherwise," she said. "We are living in an era where our whole experience of the Divine and religion is changing. I think religious life is declining in the form that it has had over past centuries, but it will re-emerge in some new, relevant expression. Hopefully, what we are doing now is part of the seeding of what will come next."



Pionneers

## France/Belgium/Spain

### A HISTORY OF BRIDGES.

Claire Marie Vincent, osu

*This story took place in Toulouse in France.*

A story of relationships that were woven almost without my knowledge, of bridges that were built little by little, without a pre-established plan, or a determined programme, or planned organization, simply under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit acts and connects very different people.

This story is of how bridges have been built between Canton, Taipei, Toulouse, Kosice, Cairo, Albania, and now Ukraine. How did these meetings start but with the Ursulines! Incredible but true. The world is small, but God is great!

When I arrived in Toulouse, I had never imagined giving French lessons to foreign students. But Serviam can be exercised in many ways, and why not, by helping foreigners who want to learn French, in particular the young people who are so numerous in "la ville rose" ("the pink city")? Contact was quickly established with all the members of our Fraternity, and everyone now knows them Steven, Guillaume, Rado, John, and Violette! Each week, depending on their availability, they come to us for around one and a half hours of private French lessons. And they do not hesitate to help when the opportunity arises.



Through a Jesuit from Toulouse, who put me in contact with the head of "Students for Christ" in Toulouse, a young Chinese, nephew of one of our sisters, a Slovak from Kosice and a young professional Egyptian from Cairo asked me for French lessons. Rado from Slovakia was happy to tell me that he knew of the presence of Ursulines in his town. We really are family!



As for John, the Egyptian, he already has an civil engineering degree, and he wants to work in France. After a few meetings, he was hired in Le Havre by a wind turbine company, and at his request, we are continuing the work by video. He is discovering the world of work, its demands. As he is still in a trial period, he knows that he must progress to be understood and to write correctly. He always asks for news of the sisters.

Almost 5 years ago, an Albanian family who lived through very difficult times arrived in Toulouse with 2 children. A beautiful network of friendship has been created around them through the parish. This family of migrants lives in insecurity until they have official documents.

Recently, a Ukrainian lady who has lived in Toulouse for many years welcomed her Ukrainian friend and her family into her home. Now Olga (11 years old) Ukrainian, who does not speak French at all, is a new student. She is also enrolled at the School Ste Marie des Ursulines. How rich are these encounters, signs of the Spirit who opens us to new life.

## France/Belgium/Spain

### SR MARIE DE L'EUCCHARISTIE SEYNAEVE 1927-2022



*Sr Marie Seynave passed away on 14 March 2022. On this occasion, we pay tribute to the research work she carried out with Sr Luciana Mariani and Elisa Tarolli, and many others. Below you will find her obituary and the testimony of her brother at her funeral.*

Marie Jeanne Seynaeve was born on 9 April 1927 in Belgrade. Her Belgian father was an Ambassador and her mother was French. Marie travelled a lot and attended primary and secondary school in the United States. "At the age of 6, I had already lived in 4 countries and 2 continents," she said. She always had a great sense of internationality, which greatly marked her life and her approach to her responsibilities. At the age of 8, during a race to buy bread for the family, she saw the door of the church ajar, she went in. She said, "the presence of the Lord proved to be pacifying, joyful, attracting and fulfilling".

**I**t was in New Rochelle (USA) that she discovered the Ursulines. The call of the Lord was pressing. She had the opportunity to meet Sr Marie de St Jean Martin, then prioress general, who had had to stay in the United States because of the war. She told her that there was an Ursuline Province of the Roman Union in Belgium, Marie's country, whose novitiate was in Beaugency. She entered there in 1947 and made profession on 12 September 1949 taking the name of Sr. Marie of the Eucharist. She made her final vows in 1952, before beginning university studies in classical Philology at Louvain in Belgium.

**S**r Marie arrived in Mons in 1956 at the "Institut de la Sainte Famille" where she provided various services: secretary, teacher, supervisor, president or member of the school organizing authority, then prioress of the community. One Ursuline, a former pupil, tell us: *"She was one of the Ursulines I knew when I was a boarder at Mons. We called her the Mystic because we sensed without doubt something of her attachment to the Lord... and her character, a bit excessive, opened up to us unknown spiritual horizons. But she had another, more original nickname, linked to her gifts as a maestro and her extra flexible fingers when she conducted the chants at mass: Digitus (taken from the Veni Creator). I knew her when she was teaching religion and responsible for the boarding school, but she also did a lot of administrative work for the school. It was she who taught me how to hold my broom better when cleaning my little room and, later, how to read my first pay slip! »*

**I**n 1976 she was called to Rome as prioress of the Generalate community. It was then that she made her real discovery of St Angela, at the age of 50, during her learning of Italian, by following Sr Luciana's conferences to the tertians. She was following the language for translations she had to do for a EGC. This really gave a Merician orientation to her whole life. She had the joy of collaborating with Sr Luciana Mariani and Elisa Tarolli in historical research on our foundress which resulted in the publication of the large volume "Angela Merici, Contribution towards a biography", a treasure shedding new light on Angela's life and work. This book was a unique work, the result of a long time spent in research in the archives of Brescia and elsewhere.

**H**er knowledge and love of St. Angela led her to different parts of the Institute to make Angela better known, in Brazil, Senegal, South Africa, Greece, etc.

*"It was a great grace," she said, "to approach St. Angela in this way, she who traced out an evangelical path of love and service for us... and to communicate a little of her history and her spirituality to the sisters of the Roman Union and of different Ursuline families, as well as to the laity who collaborate with us."*

**B**ack in Belgium, provincial and prioress, she did not cease deepening her work on Saint Angela and making her known. The list of her conferences is impressive, as well as that of her translation work. She had a remarkable gift for languages, which, among other things, enabled her to do translations for various congregations other than the Ursulines.

**I**n 1995, she lived through the time when the Province of Belgium changed status and was attached to the Province France North. This change, occurring after the deaths of sisters she knew well, was difficult and trying. Sr. Marie experienced it in an act of faith which greatly amazed the sisters. One of them testifies: *"Such an uprooting was so mysterious to experience, she accepted it in silence and with a remarkable simplicity of heart".*

In addition to her great intellectual qualities and her linguistic knowledge, Sr. Marie was a woman of heart and great faith. She had great love for the Church. Her life revealed the depth of her spiritual life. She knew how to put her talents at the service of others, while herself stepping aside. A lay person who took part with her in a pilgrimage to Brescia in 1997 writes: “*We felt good in her presence, safe, she protected us and wanted good for us. And we experienced some intense moments with her.*”

She was happy to move to the Merici retirement home at Saint Saulve in France because she would be able to visit her sisters, help them and have more time for prayer. This new situation did not stop her enthusiasm. The publication of her articles on the Province's website bears witness to this and remains a source from which sisters and lay people go to draw on the spirit of St Angela Merici and of St Marie de l'Incarnation Guyart, whom she also loved much. Up to the end she worked on her computer, she collected daily news of the Church and the world and printed it for her Ursuline sisters, sometimes she even read the news to them.

A great traveller, **geographical travels** (about twenty countries on 4 continents), **Merician travels, spiritual travels**, Sr. Marie has come to the end of her pilgrimage on earth. She has always lived in search of “*that dazzling face of Jesus*”, in the words of the prayer of our Mother St. Angela. Sister Marie, is now in this Light and Joy!

#### **Marie-Jeanne's childhood and adolescence**

*Testimony of Paul Seynaeve, younger brother of Sr Marie. He is 15 years younger than his older sister!*

**T**o understand someone, a journey to their roots can be very revealing. Marie-Jeanne was born on 9 April 1927 in Belgrade, at that time still a royal city, where her father was the Belgian consul. She stayed there until she was 4 years old and was joined by 2 other sisters, Madeleine and Marguerite, now deceased.

She spent 2 years in Belgium before leaving for San Francisco where she spent her childhood from 1933 to 1938 and where Elisabeth, here present, was added to the family.

After a short stay in Belgium, Papa was appointed Consul in New York and the family moved to New Rochelle where Anne-Marie was born in 1940 and myself in December 1945.

Marie-Jeanne spent her teenage years there and went to school at ..... the Ursulines.

**A**nd it was there that Marie Jeanne thought after a few years of entering the Ursulines but Papa thought she was too young, as she was already talking about this at the age of 16. Her dream was to be a missionary in Alaska, which explains how happy she sounded when, many years, later, she was telling how she had been in an igloo.

**W**hen I was born, Papa had already been appointed to Berlin and Maman was left with six children including a baby. And it was here that a special bond developed between Marie-Jeanne and me because, as the eldest, Maman entrusted the baby to her. This bond was further

strengthened on the sea voyage back to Belgium when Maman was constantly seasick and the co-passengers thought that Maman was my grandmother and Marie-Jeanne my mother because then also she was looking after me.

**B**ack in Belgium Papa went to Berlin, leaving the rest of the family in his home village. He would stay there for a month and then come back for a weekend and leave again. After a few months he would leave, accompanied alternately for a month by Maman, then for a month with Marie-Jeanne and then for a month with Madeleine for the duration of his posting.

Around 1947 Marie-Jeanne entered the Ursulines in Beaugency.

**S**ince her childhood she had lived in different countries, heard and learned various languages. She was also faithful to the Belgian origin of our family name: Seynaeve, which originated on the Belgian coast, in old Flemish: Seynhaeven  
Seyn = the sign, Haeven = the harbour, originally meaning “the sign of the harbour.”

So don't be surprised at the ease with which she travelled to so many different countries! Speaking fluently in different languages!!!

Some anecdotes ....

The nephews and nieces had great pleasure visiting her when she was a teacher in Mons and playing in the gymnasium.

**S**he was also very obedient. When Papa came to pick her up for some occasion, she refused to get out of the car to visit his new flat in Brussels until some ecclesiastical authority told her that this level of obedience was exaggerated,

Her pupils called her 'Digitus' because she was constantly playing with her pen between her fingers.

When we visited her in Saint-Saulve she loved the tarts we brought her but we also had to bring a big box of chocolates so she could share them with the other residents.