



MOTHER BERNADETTE JOSEPHE BERQUER

October 31, 1927 – December 6, 2025

Marie Josèphe Berquer was born in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, on October 31, 1927.

In 1949, she entered the postulancy in Beaugency, where she then did her novitiate and took her first vows in 1951. After studying classical literature in Paris, she continued her studies at Regina Mundi in Rome and obtained a master's degree in Sacred Sciences. Upon her return to France, she continued her studies at the Sorbonne and obtained a licentiate in philosophy.

From 1960 to 1981, apart from the year of tertianship and four months as a delegate to the Special Chapter of 1969 after Vatican II for the writing of "Lead a New Life" ad experimentum, she was in the community of Arras where she was "Maitresse générale" in the school: she showed a true knowledge of the students, "one by one," and a pedagogical discernment like Angela's.

She was appointed prioress in 1973, and the sisters recall her memorable course on the Book of Revelation. In 1981, she became provincial of France North and was then elected Prioress General at the 1983 chapter.

The 1983 chapter worked on revising the Constitutions, which were approved and published in 1984, based on "Lead a New Life" with several canonical changes as required by Vatican II. In her first circulars, Mother Bernadette Josèphe explained the various aspects of these changes and other adaptations.

During her term, there were other important developments:

- for the first time, the Enlarged General Council was held outside Rome,
- the research on St. Angela by Sr. Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli, and Sr. Marie Seynaeve was published,
- interprovincial service was initiated,
- meetings of new provincials and sessions for formators began.

In 1984, the community in Cameroon was founded and the group of Taiwan was transformed into the Province.

In 1986, the Roman Union experienced a major first: an EGC outside Rome, in Brazil. This was at the time when Liberation Theology was spreading. The message of the EGC called us to become more attentive to the urgency of proclaiming the Kingdom of God through witness and evangelization. We were called to conversion of heart, to solidarity with the poor, to a simple lifestyle, to justice and peace. All of this influenced the choices of our apostolates and our way of life in the provinces.

The year 1989 saw the fall of the Berlin Wall and the restoration of freedom to our sisters in Central and Eastern Europe after 40 years in the wilderness. Our sisters came out of clandestinity, re-established communities, and opened schools.

In 1991, the sisters of Sopron entered the Roman Union.

The 1992 EGC was held in Central Europe, coinciding with the fall of communism. In this session, the EGC invited us to respect diversity and bear witness to unity, encouraging us to take risks for the Kingdom. Contacts with sisters in the provinces that had been under communist rule could be resumed. Their participation in international meetings became possible, as did exchanges with sisters from other provinces. Mother Bernadette Josèphe herself made several visits to the provinces of Eastern Europe to meet with the sisters and help them through their dramatic change of circumstances.

In 1993, the Ursulines of Lozère entered the Roman Union, followed in 1995 by the sisters of Puente Alto (Chile).

The research undertaken in 1986 by Sr. Luciana Mariani, Elisa Tarolli, and Sr. Marie Seynaeve was published. This was an important step forward! St. Angela became closer and more familiar to us thanks to this meticulous and in-depth study of previously published and unpublished documents, including the discovery of the Trivulzian version of St. Angela's Rule.

This publication led to the organization of conferences and sessions throughout the Institute, beginning with an inter-Ursuline meeting at the Generalate in May 1991, with nearly 100 representatives from 36 Merician branches. The presentations were given by daughters of St. Angela from the different branches.

Later, St. Angela sessions were organized at the Generalate to present these new discoveries about Angela's life, her times, and her spirituality to as many sisters as possible. This was greatly appreciated by the Ursulines of the Roman Union and other Merician congregations.

The establishment of the "Interprovincial Service" gave many Ursulines the opportunity to serve in other provinces for a limited time, without transferring. This increased our mutual knowledge among sisters and between provinces, countries, and cultures. It is a great blessing for us today!

In 1991, Mother Bernadette Josèphe brought together all the archivists from the provinces of the Roman Union to discuss plans for a book on the Roman Union for the year 2000. At the end of this meeting, it was decided to write a 300-page scholarly work.

In 1995, the provinces of France North and Belgium united: Mother Bernadette Josèphe was concerned for each of the Belgian sisters, who recognized in her the visit of Saint Angela. At the end of her second term as Prioress General, Mother Bernadette Josèphe returned to France.

In 1996, she was appointed Prioress of the Paris-Serviam community. She was happy to welcome visiting sisters and tertians from various provinces of the Institute. She also remained keen to keep in touch with sisters and various other people, maintaining a regular correspondence and enjoying spending time reading. Her prayer was very faithful to include the many dimensions of the world. Sr. Bernadette-Josèphe participated actively and discreetly in community and liturgical life. For a time, she was in charge of the young professed sisters.

In 2000, as prioress of the Paris Pereire community, she also served as a liaison of the tutelle, accompanying the educational community and the management team of the Ste Ursule-Louise de Bettignies school. She also gave sessions at the novitiate. In 2006, she returned to Paris Serviam.

In 2009, she joined the community of St. Saulve Notre Dame de la Garde, then Merici, where she was attentive to everyone and took an interest in the organization of the house, particularly through her presence on the Social Life Council. She read the daily newspapers and books on spirituality or social issues, which she enjoyed discussing. Gradually, her eyesight declined. However, she continued to correspond regularly by email, maintaining ties with her family and beyond. Until the end, she was interested in the life of the Institute, in the work on the new Constitutions, in the life of the province, and in the progress of the extension work on the Merici house. A sister came to read her articles from the newspaper "La Croix" every day, which stimulated her prayer for the Church and the world.

We remember her as a determined, courageous person who spared no effort in her work. She was a person of decision and authority, with a sensitive heart, beyond appearances, attentive to people and events, with a broad range of thought. She continued to want to understand, question, and give her opinion. A bold woman who knew how to break new ground with tenacity and perseverance. She left a strong mark. Her desire to serve stemmed from her union with the Lord. She experienced the richness of the internationality of our Roman Union. "In our international Institute," she said, "life moves on, it does not die out." We believe that she will continue to intercede for the future of the Institute.