THE VOCATION

OF THE

PIONEERS

AT THE ORIGINS OF THE

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY
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**The Marist Family in the Pacific**

- Marist Father (sm)
- Marist Brothers (fms)
- Marist Sisters (sm)
- Marist Missionary Sisters (smsm)
- Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth (csn – Bougainville)
- Daughters of Mary Immaculate (dni – Solomon Islands)
- Petites Filles de Marie (pfm – New Caledonia)
- Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth (soln – Fiji, Tonga, Samoa)
- Marist Laity
MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE SOCIETY OF MARY

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Rome, 2005
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SC  Sacred Congregation
SM  Society of Mary
TOM  Third Order of Mary
TOMMO  Third Order of Mary for the Missions of Oceania
TORM  Third Order Regular of Mary
SMSM  Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary
NDM  Religious of Our Lady of the Missions
NDO  Our Lady of Oceania
PFM  Petites Filles de Marie
     (Little Daughters of Mary)
MFP  Marie Françoise Perroton


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rev.</td>
<td>Reverend</td>
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<td>Fr/s</td>
<td>Father, Fathers</td>
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<td>M.</td>
<td>Mister</td>
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<td>St/Ste</td>
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<td>Sr</td>
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<td>M.</td>
<td>Mother</td>
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<td>cf.</td>
<td>from the Latin confer, compare</td>
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<td>op. cit.</td>
<td>opere citate, work already cited</td>
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<tr>
<td>doc.</td>
<td>document, documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ibid.</td>
<td>ibidem, in the same book or passage</td>
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<td>vol.</td>
<td>volume, volumes</td>
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<td>note, notes</td>
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<td>page, pages</td>
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S. Marie de la Croix (1831-1908)

S. Marie de la Sainte-Espérance (1831-1872)

S. Marie de la Miséricorde (1830-1904)

S. Marie de la Présentation (1834-1886)

S. Marie de la Paix (1824-1896)

S. Marie de Bon Secours (1818-1895)

S. Marie Augustin (1826-1896)

S. Marie de la Merci (1837-?)

Marie Françoise Perroton S. Marie du Mont Carmel (1796-1873)

S. Marie Rose (1839-1912)
The Marist Missions of Oceania (Mangeret, 1932).

Reproduced with permission.
The eleven women whom we recognize as the pioneers of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary continue to be an inspiration for us who follow today in their footsteps. Responding to God’s call, they set out with faith and daring to do “the work of Mary” in a particular way.

The Prologue of our SMSM Constitutions states that

“From them to us there is a long history,
a history of light and shadow
with times of growth,
times of patience and endurance,
in faith” (p. 11).

Because of the particular twists and turns of our history, some aspects of our common heritage and identity have been in the ‘shadow’ and it is only gradually that they are coming to ‘light’. To express our identity clearly we must name the essential elements of our vocation as SMSM. To do this we need to understand better how the pioneers understood their vocation. How did they experience God’s call? What did they desire to live? What was their spirituality?

Thanks to the painstaking work of Sr M. Ancilla and of Sr M. Emerentiana, and the sisters around the congregation who assist with transcribing texts and translation, we now have available to us a treasury of letters of the pioneers. Selections from these letters are offered to us within Sr M. Ancilla’s thought-provoking commentary, the mini-portraits prepared by
Sr M. Emerentiana, the time-line and extracts from the *Manual of the Third Order* and *Rules* given to the pioneers by Fr Poupinel and Fr Favre. It is clear that from the beginning our identity has been to be missionary, Marist and religious: the texts confirm this and provide material for personal reflection and for further study.

It is also clear that the pioneers lived a particular spirituality, some elements of which are delineated. They were convinced that they belonged to God and to Mary and that they had been called to extend the reign of God. Like them, we continue to leave our own country to proclaim the Good News to people of other cultures. They set out for life in total availability for the mission of God. They lived their vocation in times of light and times of shadow, each one according to her own personal history and circumstances. From the beginning they experienced internationality and cultural diversity in their mission, as well as a variety of ministries; all that is still characteristic of the congregation today. In the school of life they developed “a family spirit which united them... as members of the same society having the same vocation and the same aim” (Prologue p. 13).

The mini-portraits confirm for us that there was no one “mould” for a pioneer, just as there is none for an SM sister today: we are each called to use our particular personal gifts and capacities to be missionary, Marist and religious in the time and situation where God has placed us. The pioneers stand before us as signs of hope in the faithful love of God which sustained them and which sustains us today. Women of different backgrounds, education, and talents, they knew how to rely on God’s grace and Mary’s intercession. We are called to do likewise as we face the realities of the world and the Church today.
God entrusts us with our moment of history, and invites us to live our vocation with the same daring and fidelity as our first eleven sisters. This is our “time of growth... in patience, endurance and faith”.

Let us take this book and work with it. May it help us to dialogue with one another and with our pioneers so that, enriched by our past, we may live our vocation in new situations.

Sr Judith Moore, smsm
Congregational leader
FOREWORD

The study presented here is in line with the desire expressed by the last two General Chapters: to continue the research and reflection on our source material and our marist/smism spirituality.

The text tries to respond to two fundamental questions: how did the pioneers see their vocation and, from the witness of their lives, is it possible to draw out some elements of spirituality?

The choice has been made to let them themselves speak, as far as possible, and to give the opportunity to several of them to have a word on different subjects. However, even keeping in mind the concern to be all-inclusive, some are quoted more than others, because the number of letters varies greatly from one to the other, and some were less gifted in expressing themselves in writing.

The ‘Mini-Portraits’ enable us to meet each one personally and to discover some of the elements of spirituality that sustained and inspired her life. Beyond the barrier of time, we are enabled to glimpse the treasure they “carried in earthenware vessels” (2 Co 4:7).

In the Historical Timeline will be found some reference points on the long journey from their departure to the organisation of the Third Order Regular of Mary.

Extracts from the Manual of the Third Order of Mary, the Rule for the Voyage and the Rule for the Sisters of Charity
of the Third Order of Mary in the Mission of Central Oceania
offer the possibility of getting in touch with the very texts our
pioneers read and meditated on, and from where they drew
inspiration and orientation for daily life. The Manual of the TOM
has been edited and transformed several times. The extracts are
taken from the editions received by the pioneers.

In approaching this study and these texts, it is important
to remember that the pioneers were women of their time,
influenced by the currents and the mentality of their era, both in
the Church and in the society from which they came. Some
expressions in their letters, as in the Rules, reflect this. It is the
law of incarnation, true for them as for us.

For a better understanding of the historical and human
context of nineteenth century France and Oceania, there are
studies that have been done and good commentaries available.

Finally, it must be said that what is offered here is a
somewhat global presentation of the vocation of the pioneers,
and a first approach to the elements of their spirituality. Many
points would merit further study.

However, it is hoped that these pages will contribute a
little to helping us discover what has been the response to the
calls of God made by these women, pioneers and Oceanians,
who opened the way for us.

S. Marie Ancilla Gosperrin, smsm
26 May 2005

Translated by Sr Marie Lamerand, smsm, from the original in French
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S. Marie Ancilla Gosperrin, smsm

Translated by Sr Marie Lamerand, smsm, from the original in French
THE VOCATION OF THE PIONEERS

at the origins of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary

We, Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, are heirs of the pioneer sisters who were inspired by the example of Françoise Perroton, and of those first Oceanians who, in seeing their way of life, desired also to give their lives to God for the service of Mission.

In the beginning, stronger than anything else, they heard the call from God for mission expressed through the appeals from Oceania. In response, they made the unconditional gift of themselves, confirmed through the vow of obedience, profession in the Third Order of Mary, community life according to the rule given and received “as the expression of the Holy Will of God” (Const. p. 11, 13).

These two paragraphs from the Prologue of our Constitutions reveal, in some way, the original kernel wherein are hidden in germ the essential elements of smsm identity and of a spirituality lived by our pioneers in their response to the calls of daily life.
Heirs of the pioneers and of the first Oceanians

Those whom we call our pioneers are eleven women who set out from France for Oceania between 1845 and 1860 in order to be "auxiliaries of the Marist missionaries", at the service of evangelization.

In the beginning, stronger than anything else, the call of God...

A letter addressed to the faithful of Lyon by the Christians of Ouvéa (Wallis) was published in the Annales de la Propagation de la Foi: "We are making still another request: it is that, if you hold us dear, you send us some devout women to teach the women [here]". Marie Françoise Perroton read there a personal appeal. Her heart was moved: was it the will of God that she set out? She prayed, took advice and her decision matured: "I have given the matter much thought, and my decision is final... My firm wish is to serve on the mission fields for the rest of my life". She set out. At the age of 49! Before leaving Lyon in that November 1845, she made a point of going up a last time to Fourvière where Fr Eymard, the Marist provincial, added her name to those of the Marist missionaries, in the heart that hung around the neck of the statue of Mary. It was a symbolic gesture she would not forget. On the Arche d'Alliance she joined those who were leaving for the missions confided to the Society of Mary.

Without her being aware of it, the primary elements of the smsm vocation were present in germ in Marie Françoise's
departure. Without her being aware of it, she had “launched the movement”. But for long years she would have to carry on alone in this service of mission. Alone for twelve years, “alone to endure times of extreme tedious”, and then, one evening in May 1858, “when it was dark”, three “Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary” arrived in Futuna, guided by Fr Poupinel himself.

These women, who were sent to Oceania under the authority of the superior general of the Society of Mary, Rev. Fr Favre, with the agreement of the vicar apostolic, had been received into the Third Order of Mary, had made a vow of obedience and had received a short Rule for the Voyage from the superior general himself. Their rule for daily life would be promulgated in Futuna by the visitor of the missions, Father Poupinel sm, who wrote it and who officially received Marie Françoise’s profession in the Third Order. “Happy beyond all telling”, at the age of 62, she became ‘Sr Marie du Mont Carmel’ and would henceforth sign this new name.

Other groups, sent with the same commitment to the vicariats of Central Oceania and New Caledonia, followed.

The pioneers numbered eleven in 1860.

Very soon they asked for assistance from some of their pupils in whom they recognized zeal, generosity and talents. Inspired by the example of the pioneers, some of these pupils expressed the desire to live with them and, like them, to give their life to God for mission. From Futuna, Sara wrote: “Since the sisters have come to us we have considered them carefully ... and I desired sincerely in my heart to become like them in obeying God.” The pioneers believed in these vocations: “on
these distant shores there are chosen souls called to the religious life”, Sr Marie de la Merci affirmed. For her part, Sr Marie de la Présentation did what she could “to assist the effects of grace in the hearts of these dear girls”. Sr Marie de la Croix gave herself to their formation with joy: “If before I die I am able to call my children my daughters and my sisters, oh! what a reward that will be!”

This shared dream was to be realized. In 1867, Sara Fuasea and Silenia Tipai, both Futunians, left for Australia in order to prepare for religious life. In 1875 in New Caledonia, three young Melanesians were received as Petites Filles de Marie (Little Daughters of Mary). Other young women, from Samoa and Wallis, then from other islands, became with them, the first Oceanian sisters.

What heritage did these women leave and where is it to be found?

No foundational text exists... It is their lives that speak.

We have no text, coming from one or another or from several of them together, in which they gave a summary or a synthesis of the constitutive elements of their vocation and which could be considered as a foundational text. Within the group, none of them gave evidence of what could be called a founding charism. But all were convinced that they shared the same vocation and were responding together to a particular call that had enduring traits. They answered that call to the best of their ability, each one with her personal gifts and limitations.
It is their lives that ‘*speak*’, from the joy of setting out to the gift matured in fidelity.

**Our pioneers** set out, rejoicing in their call. They opened the way. Almost without means, in faith and love, they made a beginning; with daring, relying on the strength of God: “for whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (*2 Co* 12:10); counting on Mary’s help: “If... some good has appeared, this has been God’s work, and Mary’s kindness will have come to my aid”,\(^9\) wrote Sr Marie du Mont Carmel with conviction, and Sr Marie de la Croix confirmed: “She (Mary) does everything”.\(^10\) They tried to be faithful to the initial call in the concrete situation they were in, often a difficult one. They longed for the day when their life would be better organized and officially recognized as authentically religious, Marist and missionary, for their own sake and in view of the future.

That fact is evident from **letters**, their own and those of others who observed their lives and had responsibility towards them, in the Church or the Society of Mary. These letters speak of their efforts and failures, their joys and sufferings, as apostles in the service of evangelization, and in their community life. They tell of their aspirations along with their disappointment at being so far from achieving what they wanted to live, and at the same time, their confidence in God and in Mary. These disclosures, surfacing freely through the pages, show indirectly but clearly the characteristics of a *spirituality incarnated in life*.

The **Rules** embody the directives given to these women as “the expression of the will of God and of Mary for them”.\(^11\) The pioneers’ many allusions to the rules along with the expressions that come to them spontaneously indicate how much they had interiorized them.
The Rule for the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary was, as has been said, written explicitly for them by Fr Poupinel on Rev. Fr General’s order. In a few pages, this Rule expresses for the sisters the meaning of their vocation and the spirit that must animate them and gives some simple and precise orientations for their life and apostolate. It refers twenty-four times to the Manual of the Third Order of Mary which the pioneers received at the time of their departure from France. The Manual describes the spirit and advantages of the Third Order. It gives the rules common to all members and the particular rules for the different categories of Tertiaries. It includes pages of meditations on Mary, spiritual guidelines and prayers. For the pioneers, it was their ‘Book of Life’. As they read, meditated on and put into practice the Rule and Manual, their way of thinking and acting was gradually shaped accordingly.

A reading of the letters and rules together reveals significant elements of what the pioneers considered as their vocation, a vocation comprising three inseparable aspects:

- the radical gift of one’s life for mission
- as members of ‘the family of Mary’
- as religious.

A triple call or three constitutive elements of one vocation:

For Marie Françoise, the first, the forerunner, she who “launched the movement”, these three calls came successively. She responded to them generously and integrated them in her life with characteristic humour despite her age. “It is indeed late for a novice!” she wrote, but she made her commitment.
For the other pioneers, these elements came together from the time of departure. Throughout the unforeseen events of their lives, their desire to see the particular form of this vocation recognized officially remained constant: a call to the service of mission, according to the spirit of Mary, as authentic religious and recognized as such.

For Mission

For Marie Françoise first, and for those who followed her, the call to mission was radical. Marie Françoise expressed it concisely in her letter to Captain Marceau.13 The others also expressed this conviction. Sr Marie de la Pitié wrote: “I am drawn on by an interior voice and this thought gives me hope that it is truly God’s will that we go to the Islands”.14 This call was first a gift received, an honour and a grace: “the grace of being called to spread the kingdom of God…”15 according to the wording of the Rule quoted by S. Marie de la Croix.

This radical gift for mission had two fundamental aspects: the ‘departure’ and ‘the proclamation of the Good News’. In the call recognized by the pioneers, there is something of God’s call to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house…” (Gen 12:1), and of Jesus’ call to his disciples: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news…” (Mk 16:15, cf. Const. p. 30).

The Rule of Poupinel takes up these two aspects: “Called to the honour of working to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known to the ends of the earth…”. Such is the goal, a source of pride and joy for the pioneers. They would have to keep this goal in their mind’s eye because
isolation and difficulties lay ahead of them. Also, “they will take care... to ask themselves often: ‘Why have you come to this distant country? Why did you leave your homeland? Why have you renounced the most legitimate pleasures, the most delightful joys, of being with your Christian and dearly loved family? Is it not to dedicate yourself to the glory of God, to sacrifice yourself for the salvation of souls redeemed at the price of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

“Go! leave...” The ‘leaving’ is never finished. For them, it included being uprooted in all sorts of ways and often having to adapt over again. Frequently, their availability in obedience would make further demands, leaving the people with whom they had created bonds. Barely two months after their arrival, Srs Marie de la Miséricorde and de la Sainte Espéranse had to leave their companions and the island of Futuna for Wallis where, after they had begun giving classes, they would again be required to move. It is not hard to find other examples. The faith expressed in their responses is noteworthy. When Sr Marie de la Présentation was called to leave the Île des Pins (where there were so many ties binding her) for Pouébo, she wrote: “This dear Ouzélie, I left her in tears... However, I cannot really say very well which of the two feelings, sadness or joy in the light of faith, has been uppermost. I needed to receive a good shake-up to make me come out of my apathy, my spiritual lethargy... Here, at Pouébo, the way is open to me to run at a gallop on the royal road of the holy Cross...”

The goal of their leaving everything and giving all was to participate in “the proclamation of the Good News”, especially through the Christian education of women and children. Near them, with them, it is in all the aspects of their lives that the young women are formed to be Christian: prayer,
work, service, mutual respect, sharing of joys and difficulties, celebration of feasts, participation in parish life. When necessary, the pioneers contributed also to the formation of the young people and the catechists. Their vocation was apostolic, in a simple, direct contact with the people.

For that reason they were content to live very simply, sometimes in the poorest of conditions. On her arrival in Wallis, Marie Françoise lived in a Wallisian leaf house with the girls entrusted to her. She slept on a mat like them and shared their food. The other pioneers also experienced poverty in their living conditions, surrounded by their pupils. Much later, Sr Marie de la Croix, then over 60 years old, would volunteer for Bélep, where she lived in a simple house, at the service of the leprosy patients exiled to that island. She and her young companion, Sr Marie St Jean l’Evangéliste (Agrippina Morduma, a Melanesian sister from St Louis, New Caledonia), were at the service of the lepers, washing them, nursing them and helping them to die well.

Zeal “to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ” led them to “become all things to all people”, according to the expression of the apostle Paul (1 Co 9:22), repeated for them by Bishop Vidal. In the Ile des Pins, Sr Marie de Bon Secours, a nurse who “didn’t like teaching”, accepted to teach “44 young men who are going to be sent... to serve as catechists” and she added that this filled her “with joy and happiness”. At Bélep, this island to which leprosy patients were sent, Sr Marie de la Croix did “everything possible for their bodies while preparing their souls”. In the same vein, her companion, Sr Marie St Jean, wrote on their arrival: “These poor people move one to pity, it is frightening to look at some of them. Nevertheless beneath these ugly bodies there is a soul to be saved and cared for more attentively than the body.”
In the theological thinking of their epoch, explicit conversion was thought necessary for salvation. But there was more to it. There was human compassion exercised on the spot by loving and selfless service: “that we may be the eyes of the blind and the feet of the lame, with the charity fitting such a beautiful task”. At the same time the inner fire of God’s love impelled them to bring people into contact with Jesus Christ, the Saviour. Prayer supported and completed action. In another letter, where Sr Marie de la Croix speaks of the little ones suffering from leprosy she writes: “How to thank the good Lord for the change that has taken place in the behaviour of these children… thank you for the prayers you have offered… They have made their first communion and receive the sacraments often”. A little further on she adds: “For many months, these children only knew how to insult us… We have never heard anything like that… We have prayed, the Blessed Virgin has done the rest”. Thirty years earlier, Sr Marie de la Merci was writing from Futuna: “I want to be more and more given to the good Lord and I want to prove to him that I love him, by doing everything I can to make others love him”.

Their burning zeal awakened other apostles. Around them the pioneers attracted assistants in whom they placed their confidence. From her first years in Wallis, Marie Françoise discerned among her pupils young women capable of helping her and also able to give the best of themselves in the service of mission. The same process was confirmed with other pioneers in Wallis, Futuna, Samoa and New Caledonia.

However, they knew that mission did not stop on the shores of their islands. They interested the children and adults in the Work of the Propagation of the Faith. Hortense, the future queen of the Ile des Pins, was proud to write: “The work of the Propagation of the Faith has been established here since Sunday.
We will now be united in great happiness to the faithful and Christians by the bonds of prayer and charity”. Sr Marie de la Paix recounts how she saw her pupils arriving one day, each with a coin in their hand, that they wished to offer her in gratitude and the joy she experienced in seeing them accept to give this money for “the conversion of the infidels”.

In the same way, they elicited interest in their mission among Christians who did not set out themselves but supported them by their offerings and prayer. Despite the pressure of work and fatigue, they took the time and made the effort to correspond with members of the Third Order of Mary in Lyon, and with their friends, and benefactors, to thank them, to send them news and also to express interest and spiritual support. Before the term became current, this was an instance of ‘Inter-Church Aid’.

At Bélep, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote in her spiritual notebook: “Out of a spirit of zeal I must pray in a more universal way for all countries, all apostolic works, all those engaged in them”. The influence of the Manual of the Third Order of Mary can be seen again here: “For Christians animated by zeal, it is not enough to be on fire with love for their God, they would want the same for all people. Over and over again, the cry, ‘Holy be your name!’ bursts forth from their heart more than from their lips”.

They lived all this with Mary, thanks to her help.

Members of the Family of Mary

Belonging to ‘the family of Mary’ was a lifelong source of joy, strength and consolation, giving the pioneers confidence and hope. In many ways they expressed their gratitude for having been “chosen by Mary”.
The vocation of the pioneers

It was at the stopover in Tahiti, en route to Wallis, that Marie Françoise Perroton learnt from a letter of Fr Eymard that he had affiliated her to the projected Third Order of Mary. She gave free rein to her joy: “Thank you most sincerely, Father... How did you come to think of me?... My gratitude to God should be as great as the ocean”. The others, later on, expressed the same gratitude. “So here I am, really a part of Mary’s family. Yes, what happiness!” exclaimed Sr Marie de Bon Secours. And Sr Marie de la Merci wrote: “Nothing will ever be able to make me forget the extraordinary favour that our good Mother granted me in receiving me into her dearly loved family”. The expression ‘family of Mary’ is found in the Manual of the Third Order of Mary. “Enter forever into the family of Mary”, the priest presiding says to the novice during the profession ceremony.

Four of the pioneers had been Tertiaries in France: Sr Marie de la Paix, Sr Marie de la Merci, Sr Marie de la Présentation and Sr Marie Rose who had been one of the foundresses of the Third Order Regular of Mary in Jonzieux (Loire). The others were affiliated to the Third Order before their departure for Oceania and all left under the responsibility of the Society of Mary. For several, the call to mission had come first, sometimes going back many years, but it can be said that in their belonging to the Third Order and in the bond with the Society of Mary they found both support and a spirit, like a garment made-to-measure to help them live what they sensed deep within their hearts to be their vocation.

The Manual of the Third Order of Mary gave orientations that corresponded exactly with their missionary aspirations: “The Third Order of Mary inspires... an ardent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls”.

13
Poupinel’s Rule began with the comforting assurance that “by their profession in the Third Order of Mary, (the sisters) have become the privileged daughters of the august Queen of Heaven, and... they have acquired a special right to the protection of the Blessed Virgin who will watch over them, support them and love them with the love of a Mother”. They were really convinced of this special protection and in all circumstances had recourse to Mary with childlike confidence.

The Manual and Rule provided a framework that moulded and sustained this constant recourse to Mary. Throughout the day they were invited to turn to her. In union with the Society of Mary, morning and evening there were “the three Ave Maria’s and the Sub Tuum or the Memorare” encompassing all humanity, the ‘just’ and the ‘sinners’, and morning, noon and evening, the community salutation, the Salve Regina. For the sisters, in addition, there were the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, the Rosary and other prayers.

It was to Mary that the pioneers spontaneously entrusted the works for which they were responsible, their pupils, the sick people, the catechists and everything concerning the mission. They willingly attributed to her the good being accomplished. “I cannot do much not being able to speak but the Blessed Virgin... has already won the hearts of these people for me...”, wrote Sr Marie de la Croix from Ile des Pins soon after her arrival. Sr Marie de la Sainte Espérance asked Mary herself to be the mistress of her new pupil and rejoiced in the progress achieved. Examples abound.

The Rule asked the sisters to give Mary “all the honour of which they are capable” and to work “to imitate her virtues and to live her spirit...”.
The *Manual* was a valuable guide in this direction. Mary is properly placed as the Mother who leads to her Son. There is no confusion. It is clearly Jesus who is at the centre: “to imitate Mary is to imitate Jesus whose most perfect image she is; to put on Mary is to put on Jesus Christ; to be united with Mary is also to be united with Jesus...”.

The Marist priests also helped them discover and deepen the Marist spirit through religious celebrations, conferences, retreats, spiritual direction and personal correspondence. Sr Marie de la Croix too made several references to the superior general’s circular letters that she had read or was awaiting. In 1873 she commented: “So now our little Society of Mary is truly religious... I have prayed and had prayers said. Gratitude is a compelling need. Oh! may our dear Mother deign to anchor us firmly in her humility and make us live our dear vocation with a great fidelity”.

The pioneers’ bond with the Society of Mary was not limited to the spiritual order. They had set out under the responsibility of the Society and they trusted in it for their present and future needs. It was to its superiors (Frs Poupinel and Yardin and the superior general himself) that they had recourse in their trials, difficulties and uncertainties. They confided in them and asked for their help, advice, directives and support. Faced with important decisions, they turned to them. Whatever could separate or distance them from the Society of Mary, they carefully avoided.

Some situations were particularly painful. Sr Marie de la Merci’s anguish is palpable in her long letter confiding to Fr Favre, Bishop Bataillon’s insistence on taking her to Samoa “to found a novitiate for Oceanian religious”. In a cry of distress, she
declared her “resolution never to consent to what was against the Society’s intentions”, and she described all her worries, finishing by recalling his promise to her that she would always be “the child of the Society”.

Several other pioneers would similarly resort to the judgement of the superiors of the Society of Mary before making a commitment in the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, and again at the time of their withdrawal.

These appeals were not in vain. Our Constitutions refer with gratitude to “the constant concern of the Society of Mary” towards them.

**Religious**

Marie Françoise was a lay woman when she set out. In fact, it was this independence that allowed her to respond to the call of the women of Wallis. Having arrived in Oceania, she does not seem to have looked for official signs of her commitment. She gave her life - simply and totally. However, when the first group arrived, she too accepted with great joy to be received into the Third Order and to become, at the age of 62, Sister Marie du Mont Carmel.

The others left as “Ladies of Charity” and “novices of the Third Order” with the vow of obedience which “obtains for them the essential advantages of the religious life”. They had made the total gift of their life to God for mission, desiring to do his will in everything.

On arriving in Futuna they began to live together as a religious community, “as regular as canonesses.” To the best of
their ability, they tried to be faithful to their profession in the Third Order, to daily Eucharist, to personal and community prayer, and to the spirit and practices proposed by their Rule and by the Manual. Like the members of every newly founded community, they lived as religious, without waiting for official recognition and adopted the external signs: religious name, habit and veil. Those who came later to Central Oceania and New Caledonia followed the same form of apostolic religious life, guided by the same rule and conscious of being united in the same vocation.

They realized that this was only a first step, as Fr Poupinel wrote to the superior general: “The sisters themselves are convinced that what has been done up to the present is a preparatory measure in this direction that they greatly desire (that members of our dear Third Order will be constituted as a regular community)”. 48 Many letters confirm this. They wanted to be “real religious”, 49 “to have the true title of religious”, 50 “to consecrate ourselves once and for all... by the three vows of religion”. 51 More than 100 references to this desire, reaching back to childhood for several of them, have been noted in their letters. “I wasn’t yet six years old when... I made a promise to Our Lord... that I would die a religious” . 52

What they were living was indeed only a preliminary stage. They had left their homeland. They had given all. But the difficulties encountered revealed what was lacking: organization, formation and an adequate preparation. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde expressed her hopes quite clearly in a letter to Fr Yardin: “The day I hear that we are members of a real religious community and have a rule and a superior, I will consider as one of my most beautiful days... I think that after a good novitiate and by continuing to receive encouragement and the help of the
prayers of a whole community, the missionary sister will be more courageous in adversity”. All this, she specified further on, would be linked to the Society of Mary: “no matter how you arrange things, you will always find me very attached to the Society of Mary…”.

The priests were aware of the ambiguity and disadvantages of the situation of these women who had set out under the responsibility of the Society of Mary but through their vow of obedience were subject to the vicar apostolic. Moreover, they had no preparation for community life and neither did the priests who assumed the function of superiors in the places where they were assigned. It seemed necessary that they form “a society with its centre and superiors in France”, autonomous as far as the sisters’ relations among themselves and their religious and community life were concerned. In several letters addressed to Frs Favre and Yardin in 1858 and 1859, Fr Poupinel went into these questions at length.

The superior general was himself very conscious of this necessity and of his responsibility with regard to the pioneers. In 1861, he met someone whom he judged suitable to take charge of the formation of women who would be called to set out for Oceania and also capable of helping to organize these members of the Third Order of Mary into a regular community. This person was Sr Marie du Cœur de Jésus, Euphrasie Barbier. The opening of a novitiate having been entrusted to her, a formation house was canonically erected in Lyon on 25 December. The news was received with joy by the pioneers: “That news made my heart beat with joy and hope,” wrote Sr Marie de la Merci. Sr Marie du Mont Carmel was “very happy to learn that a Third Order Regular has finally been established in Lyon,” and Sr Marie de Bon Secours was “happy to learn this good news”. 

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But it was a long time before this hope would be realized. A number of the pioneers expressed their impatience: "The poor sisters of Caledonia have been living such a precarious existence for 8 years now, alas, without any proper organization... it's impossible for any real good to be done either in our works or in our souls so long as we are in confusion like this," wrote Sr Marie de la Présentation. "It is impossible for me to live in this state. I am at the end of my strength, my courage and my patience," Sr Marie de la Miséricorde declared. They had questions about the conditions of their admission that seemed difficult, all the while continuing to want to make a novitiate in order to learn the spirit of the Congregation and to become "real religious".

For several of the pioneers, the initial exchanges of letters with M. Marie du Cœur de Jésus were marked by esteem and mutual confidence. They described their life as it was and told of their desire to prepare for a real religious life and "not only the appearances of it". However, they also expressed their astonishment with a rule that seemed to them incompatible with their apostolic life at the service of mission. "Sometimes I am anxious," wrote Sr Marie Rose, "I don’t know what I will become. I want to do the holy will of God but I don’t know what that is yet. I see so many difficulties in being able to keep the rule of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in these little islands of Wallis and Futuna that I don’t know what to think about it".

In this way the pioneers lived through years of uncertainty, with joy and hope gradually giving way to anxiety and suffering, and at times a sense of abandonment. Several made profession, then withdrew from the Congregation of Religious of Our Lady of the Missions, yet remained faithful to
their initial commitment. The separation entailed its measure of suffering.65

When at last, after so many years, an agreement reached by the Society of Mary, Bishop Lamaze and the other vicars apostolic,66 led to the decision to organize the Third Order Regular of Mary, they were able to live their consecration with the assurance of being recognized and approved by the Church. For the pioneers and the Oceanian sisters, and for those who had joined them, the way ahead was clear from then on.

Community living was both an aspiration and a challenge for the pioneers. They regarded it as an integral part of their commitment, giving thanks and telling of their joy when it was harmonious. “We get along well together: peace, unity and understanding reign among us”,67 Sr Marie Rose was happy to write, and later Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote “My two sisters... are good, gentle and pious and I am very fond of them”.68

Often it is true, they suffered and made one another suffer when they were two or three together. In community living, the lack of a common formation made itself felt, and still more, no doubt, the lack of someone with recognized authority to help them build community in the midst of the realities of daily life. They were conscious of this lack. A number of letters mention the lack of a real superior, “of a sister from France who would have made her novitiate”.69

Often enough also, they were deprived of community because they were dispersed by the vicars apostolic to different places. However, they knew they were members of the same group, bonded together by the same vocation. They were united among themselves and in various ways manifested a real family
spirit. They cared about the situation, health and future of the other sisters, showing compassion towards those who were going through trials. Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance expressed her sorrow at seeing Sr Marie Augustin going back to France "on account of a very sad illness".70 Sr Marie de la Croix wrote of how she was caring for Sr Marie de la Présentation who was very sick and cried out "every night". She adds: "We keep watch with her and don’t leave her alone".71 Sr Marie du Mont Carmel told of her readiness to welcome Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance back to Futuna, despite her difficult character, as "it seemed she wanted to return".72

A vocation takes shape and is affirmed

Throughout the years, the pioneers’ determination not to give up any aspect of what they considered an integral part of their own vocation is clear. Although it was not easy, they found the strength to live in fidelity to God’s particular plan for them, sometimes only after a painful period of discernment in the face of proposals made to them.

There is the well known episode of Bishop Bataillon wanting to put them in charge of a farm. In a letter to Fr Poupinel, Sr Marie du Mont Carmel commented: “But, as you may well imagine, the tough old Sr du Mont Carmel was far from weakening on the aims she proposed to herself when she left her country; poultry, cows or pigs never entered into her plans...”73 It was to contribute to Christian education that she had come and, without refusing other services, her priority remained teaching and religious instruction.

Later, Sr Marie de la Pitié, in her turn (after Sr Marie de la Merci), told how the sisters of Futuna refused the same Bishop
Bataillon’s proposal to make vows before him for they wanted “to make vows to the Society of Mary and not to a particular mission”. Aside from such authoritarian behaviour, appalling to our way of thinking, what the bishop was doubtless manifesting more profoundly was a lack of understanding of the pioneers’ specific vocation. He saw them as simply being at the service of his vicariate where he was in charge. They felt torn apart because they knew they owed him obedience yet they wanted to remain faithful to their deepest call, to the reason why they had left their homeland.

During the period of trying to provide an organization with the Religious of Our Lady of the Missions, their questions and reactions reveal their hesitations when presented with a form of religious life that seemed to them incompatible with their apostolic life. A quotation from Sr Marie Rose bears this out: “I have not given up wanting to be a religious... What is required is a non-cloistered congregation with an easy rule compatible with the needs of these countries”. Sr Marie de la Pitié and several others had similar reactions.

In a letter addressed from Sydney to Mother Marie du Cœur de Jésus, Sr Marie de la Merci very sensitively gave her reasons for leaving the institute: “In asking for my admission to the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, my aim was to be even more completely devoted to these dear missions and to the Society of Mary. Now... circumstances have changed”.

From New Caledonia, Sr Marie de la Croix also affirmed: “I don’t want to be separated from the Society of Mary any more than I want to renounce the sole aim of my life, the missions. I don’t want to be separated from them, not even by a hair’s breadth”. In 1871, after having made known her decision
not to renew her vows as a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions, she wrote: “here I am what I was before, a little sister of the Third Order of Mary,” then, to Fr Poupinel: “I have hung around my neck... the medal, so beautiful and modest, of my true family”.

Clearly, they did not wish to give up the possibility of explicit proclamation through catechesis and teaching, nor of contact with the people that a cloister would have made impossible, nor of the fundamental bond with the Society of Mary, and still less, the total gift of their life to God for mission. Here the three constitutive elements of their vocation, which would become the vocation of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, are quite evident: missionary, Marist and religious.
ELEMENTS OF A SPIRITUALITY

A striking characteristic of the pioneers was their conviction of belonging to God and to Mary. They knew they were called and chosen by a gratuitous and unexpected gift, despite their unworthiness, “to the honour of working to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known to the ends of the earth.” This call was an anchor for the whole of their life. They were constantly trying to respond faithfully through trials, sufferings, misunderstandings or the monotony of every day. Humbly and patiently, in faith, they strove to answer that call through the course of their life.

Conscious of their weaknesses and deficiencies, they recognized their incapacity to answer such an exalted call but Mary was there and they had become her “privileged daughters”. With her help, they could face the obstacles and day by day learn to renounce themselves, to love more truly, and to entrust themselves to the infinite mercy of God.

Such was the heritage received from ‘their family’, the family of Mary. Doubtless they would have been very surprised if they had known that anyone would try to discover their ‘spirituality’ but signs of a spirituality are discernible and they are those of a Marist spirituality. The pioneers themselves spoke more modestly of ‘the spirit’ which they tried to internalize, allowing it to transform them.

Nevertheless, their letters reveal, like a backdrop, common traits in their way of responding to their particular vocation and these common traits can be regarded as elements of a spirituality.
Called by God

God’s call was clear for each of the pioneers. Each of them attested to the power of this call, her astonishment and her profound joy. Sr Marie de la Pitié recalls “a very special favour”; Sr Marie de la Paix “an interior desire greater than myself”; Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance of “the happiness I feel”; and Sr Marie de la Croix of “the grace of being called”. Their joy echoes the joy of Mary in her Magnificat: “He has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant” (Lk 1:48). Their response was a gift without reserve and the power of the initial call would be a light for the whole of their lives.

It was for the glory of God that they set out, for his glory that they worked, and for his glory also that they accepted difficulties. This motivation recurs like a refrain. In every situation of their lives, they sought to do his will even if, on occasions, they would have wished that God’s will accorded with theirs. “Called to the honour of working to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ”, they felt committed to seek it by every possible means, in their life and apostolate, no matter what the cost, for “this inestimable grace has obligations”.

The glory of God, the will of God, the reign of God - the first three invocations of the Our Father really motivated the life of these pioneers, but in a way that was somewhat ordinary, without special devotions or spectacular manifestations, at the very heart of their weaknesses, deficiencies and difficulties. Their letters demonstrate that God was first in their life and that he was their source, centre and Providence, the One they loved with all the love of their heart. From the moment of their setting out to the end of their life, this same aspiration remains like a lamp faithfully kept alight.
The oil that kept their lamps alight consisted of all the practices of the spiritual life, the ordinary means offered to all baptized people, and, in their case, completed and reinforced by the recommendations to all Tertiaries in the Manual and to them in their Rule. They were faithful to prayer, adoration, the sacraments and the offering of their life given in obedience with the inherent renunciations, difficulties and joys. They prayed with their pupils and participated in the celebrations organized for parishioners. Contemplating the particular mysteries of the different feasts to which their letters make regular allusions, they found spiritual nourishment in the liturgical cycle.

The Eucharist was their primary source of strength. Their letters show how they lived the recommendation of their Rule: “They will seek in the Blessed Eucharist, the nourishment of this love [of Our Lord], of this simple and generous zeal that should distinguish them”. Countless are their allusions to the ‘happiness’ of having been able to assist at Mass, or the suffering at having been deprived of it, or the joy of knowing that Masses had been offered for their intentions. Many also are their references to adoration and to the consolation they found in praying before the Blessed Sacrament. Sr Marie de la Pitié wrote of the spiritual Communion she used to make in union with her friend at the hour the friend was participating in the Mass. The Eucharist, “the heart... of the consecrated life,” was certainly central in their lives.

As a consequence, they were to be “inspired by Our Lord’s way of acting and his attitudes”, as their Rule exhorted them. In one of her letters, Sr Marie de la Pitié expresses the desire to be united to him in his offering to the Father: “crosses... are lightened when, in offering our work to God, we keep in mind that he willed to carry the heaviest cross... and that he has
given us the example of patience, gentleness and perfect resignation to the most holy will of his Divine Father”.

Endurance in faith

The radical gift of their life, expressed through their departure and commitment in the Third Order of Mary for the Missions of Oceania, was actualised day by day in faith. After the excitement of the beginnings, the pioneers learnt to persevere through the ‘long haul’ despite the poverty, fatigue and monotony... “You have already been told,” Sr Marie de la Croix wrote to a friend, “that in the missions all the charms of piety fall away, almost nothing will speak to your eyes, you will be left almost completely to your own resources, but your resources upheld by grace that is never lacking. Here there is only naked faith, but this faith produces a love that is stronger than death”.

In their lives there was no lack of suffering, doubtless the common lot of missionaries of the era. There were physical sufferings due to the climate and to illnesses contracted: Sr Marie du Mont Carmel wrote humorously of her big leg and of the foot she could no longer fit into a shoe so that it prevented her going down to the church. Several made passing references to their chronic maladies. Sr Marie de la Sainte-Esperance complained of “violent headaches and earaches”, aggravated when she felt the cold.

The local languages remained a barrier for several of the pioneers, for example Sr Marie du Mont Carmel who, already on in years, claimed never to have mastered the language. Sr Marie de la Pitié also spoke of “the difficulty of the Futunian language that I have a hard time understanding”. In addition, there were the difficulties of communication by post, the
shipwrecks, the letters and parcels getting lost: “The mission mail has been lost at sea”. Solitude was something else they suffered: “One feels the isolation”, and “if there is some little upset and you can’t talk about it, then the bag of nails gets tossed around in your imagination and all the points come out each one sharper than the others”.

At times they were tempted to discouragement: “... we would have all left. We have been leading a queer and sad life here at Lano,” wrote Sr Marie Rose. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde asked M. Marie du Cœur de Jésus for “a short response that will restore my courage, alas! too often crushed”.

They had their share of the harassment to which the mission was subjected by the civil authorities, as often happened in New Caledonia, for example, the prohibition to teach and the suffering of seeing Christians submitted to humiliations and injustices. As Sr Marie de la Présentation wrote: “It is not only in China that the Church of Jesus Christ is suffering persecution... all our works are being hampered...” [Allusion to the difficulties of the mission under Governor Guillain, 1862-1870].

Another source of suffering was uncertainty about their future, firstly the long wait to be organized into a congregation, then the anxiety as to whether they would be accepted as Religious of Our Lady of the Missions. Finally came the fresh trial of separation from this congregation because of the disagreement between it and the Society of Mary, their “true family,” and once again - uncertainty. In these circumstances, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote to Fr Yardin: “Ah! God will take care of the future. I think about it too... But will God who has sustained me until today let me down? No”.

A number of the pioneers also suffered the infirmities of old age. In her last years, Sr Marie de la Pitié became deaf and
she suffered much from the cold but she saw in “the prolonging of our days... the opportunity to suffer” and to unite “our sufferings with those of Our Lord Jesus Christ,” adding, “they say that old age exempts a person from the pains of Purgatory”.  

Difficulties did not take the pioneers by surprise. As Marie Françoise had already written to Captain Marceau, they were ready to sacrifice themselves. They found strength in this deeply rooted conviction. Often in their letters they referred to sacrifices they had made, that they were renewing or that they were ready to make. Sr Marie de la Pitié commented: “In order to win souls for God, many sacrifices have to be made... the folly of the cross brings its own consolation”. Sr Marie Victor (Silenia) testified that those were not empty words: “Sr de la Pitié is very old and it is admirable to see the patience with which she has made her sacrifice” [leaving Maofaga to go to Vava'u, in Tonga].

“God will provide...”, wrote Marie Françoise. It was he who had called them, for him they had left their homeland, and for him they were where they were. The difficulties and the precarious situation they were in stimulated their faith and impelled them to cast themselves confidently into his arms. He was truly their all. He was there so they lacked nothing. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde described their little chapel as “very simple, very poor since there is nothing there,” but added “Ah! what am I saying? It lacks nothing, because the God of my heart is there”.

With Mary, at her school

In the life of the pioneers, Mary was really ‘someone who was always there’, a presence unseen but loving and active.
Firstly, as already mentioned, Mary was present in their prayer all through the day. They prayed to her in community and personally. They also prayed with her as did the apostles: they “were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

All that they lived, they lived with Mary, certain of her help. In their responsibilities, joys and daily difficulties, and still more in their efforts to progress and bring their lives into conformity with God’s plan for them, they continually looked to Mary with boundless confidence. Sr Marie de la Paix wrote: “Well then, may God’s will be done in everything and I hope the Blessed Virgin, my good Mother, will always support me”.118

Sr Marie Rose recounted how, when feeling shattered by Bishop Bataillon’s decision to close the school so that the sisters could take charge of the farm, she regained her serenity in Mary’s presence. Unable to sleep, she went off to the church where she cried and regained her calm: “At the end I sang a couplet to my good mother: here I am alone, all alone with my mother, still in the church during the night... that did me good. I went back thinking that I knew I was doing God’s will”.119

The same confidence is found among the Oceanian sisters. “Don’t forget me before this good Mother. Ask her to help me become a good religious”,120 wrote Sr Marie St Jean l’Evangéliste from Bélep. At an earlier date, when asking to be admitted to the novitiate, Sara had written from Futuna: “Pray to Mary for me, for she is the good mother of those who seek to imitate her”.121

“The spirit of the Third Order, the spirit of the Most Blessed Virgin” is “the path of sanctity” for the Tertiary and must
"mark all her conduct". The imitation of Mary in her humility, simplicity, modesty, gentleness, charity, obedience... is the work of a lifetime. The challenging words of Fr Colin included in our Constitutions come to mind: "The spirit of Mary is something very delicate and very profound, which can only be grasped by sustained meditation and prayer" (p. 52; see also Const. 56).

It is an interior work, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and it remains secret. With the pioneers, what can be discerned through their disclosures is a vibrant desire to grow in this spirit. Their writings testify to the constancy of their efforts. Large in their own eyes were their failures and inadequacies so they felt keenly the distance separating them from their goal.

"Very ashamed to see myself so deficient" was but one of Marie Françoise Perroton's continual laments. For her part, Sr Marie de Bon Secours wrote: "I desire... all the same to work generously to acquire the virtues I lack in order to merit to be recognized as a true daughter of Mary". In September 1894, Sr Marie de la Croix entered this reflection in her notebook: "Marist!... Love of the hidden life, charity, humility, simplicity, abnegation... My whole life is passing before my eyes... I am overwhelmed!... O Mary, o my Mother, save me!"

This appeal to Mary keeps resounding all the time like a cry of hope. Marked by their epoch, they tended to see their faults and to be excessively disturbed, it seems to us, by their sins. Certain expressions can surprise us or even shock us. But we see how the Marist spirit, their belonging to Mary helped them situate themselves appropriately before the infinite mercy of God. On two occasions, Sr Marie du Mont Carmel speaks of "having deserved hell" - which seems to us so inconceivable - but she hastens to add: "However, I am full of confidence because it is said that a true servant of Mary will never be lost".
In December 1902, Sr Marie de la Croix writes in her spiritual notebook: “O my God, 2 [December] marks the end of my years of mission, the 44th is drawing to a close. I am almost crushed by the memory of my faults… your graces, my regrets… and despite all, confidence because Mary is my mother”.

**Learning to love**

What is asked for at Mary’s school is the great commandment of love: “love of God above all…; sincere and supernatural love of neighbour; a holy and fraternal unity among the members of the Third Order so that, following the example of the first Christians, they have but one heart and one soul in the love of Jesus and Mary”.

“If you love us…,” was the expression used by the women of Wallis in their letter. Love is the fundamental law of the Gospel. The preceding pages show well enough how much the pioneers loved their pupils, the sick people and the whole population of the islands where they had been sent, giving their life day after day, even if they sometimes regretted that this love was not more spontaneous and more perfect, as Marie Françoise had already written from Wallis. Sr Marie de Bon Secours confided in her turn: “Since his death, the Curé of Ars has obtained for me a very great grace from the divine mercy, that of loving our dear local people”.

Among the pioneers themselves, it has been noted, for multiple reasons unity and harmony were not always easy but there are also positive testimonies as Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote: “All is well in our little convent; I am pleased with my sisters. I love them, and I think they love me, too”. They persevered in their efforts. In the case of Sr Marie de la Croix,
for example, her regular correspondence from Bélep with Sr Marie de Bon Secours, who had caused her so much suffering, testifies to a significant transformation and growth in sisterly love. “My dear old companion of going-on 34 years,” she wrote, “... Praised be God for all he has done... don’t stop asking him for his love for the two of us and all will go well: love and do what you will”. 133 Two years before, from St Louis, she had written to one of her former novices: “nothing can give me greater pleasure than to know you to be united as you are, my children. It is the only way to do some good. Be ready to forgive each other the inevitable hurts, forget yourselves in order to give pleasure to the other and love God in action”. 134

Towards intimate union with God

The expression ‘intimate union with God’ is not found in the letters of the pioneers but several confidences show the quality of their relationship with the One in whom they found joy, courage and consolation.

After the long sea voyage which brought her to Oceania, Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote: “Oh! how good it was in the Fathers’ little cabin, when we made our thanksgiving in the most profound silence. The half-hour passed very quickly... Ah! it was so good to be with the Beloved of my soul, I had so many things to say to him”. 135 Alone on the Ile des Pins Sr Marie de la Croix tastes this “absolute solitude... where, with Jesus and Mary, I find myself so much at home; for me this is real happiness, to ‘taste’ them only and where no external thing can distract me from their holy presence”. 136

Sr Marie de la Merci confides how often she was aware of the support of God when, just as she was about to embark for
Oceania, she learned of her mother’s death. She wrote to Fr Yardin: “Oh, Father, if I have been strong and generous in embracing the cross in such a painful trial... it is to Mary our good mother to whom I owe it. God himself has also come to support me with his grace, and if he struck with the one hand, he caressed with the other... he consoled me...”. 137

Most of the time, though, they felt their own poverty, sometimes aridity. Sr Marie de la Pitié shared her profound longing: “Oh, what would be my happiness if I could render to my Saviour love for love”. 138 And Sr Marie de la Croix confided: “This morning, I was saying to Our Lord who had just entered into my desert (that is my heart): I see nothing, I feel nothing, I know nothing, but I want to be yours for the pure happiness of belonging to you”. 139

They were conscious of their human weaknesses and resistances. They knew that if union with God required an effort on their part, it is first of all a gift, a grace to be asked for. Repeatedly, they beg those with whom they corresponded to support them by their prayer. From Tahiti Marie Françoise had already written of their prayer being “an aid” lest she “be left behind on the path of the love of God”. 140 Many years later, Sr Marie de la Pitié also wrote: “Ah! how I would love to know how to pray and to pray as I should. But I am so weak and so cowardly that I call upon all the good persons for support and assistance in praying not only for me but in union with me”. 141

At Bélep in 1896, Sr Marie de la Croix recorded in her spiritual notebook that she was asking Fr Colin to obtain for her “that spirit of fervour”, then she turned to Mary herself: “My good Mother... Inspire me. It seems to me that in our isolation we have “to live more united to God”. 142 Thirty-five years
before she had had this searing intuition: "Our vocation is to be unknown, hidden in God. Our zeal, the quiet zeal of Mary without fuss... the silence of the heart of Mary, but deep down that fire that burns before God in secret".  

In the Church

Isolated as they were, a long way from Europe and the rest of the world, the pioneers' attachment to the Church is striking. A number of letters illustrate this either through a spontaneous exclamation or on the occurrence of joyful or sad events.

"Like you, my dear Sister, I belong, despite my unworthiness, to our Mother, the Holy Church",  

Sr Marie du Mont Carmel proudly wrote to a young sister. On various occasions she would ask that money deposited for her in Lyon be put into Peter's Pence, adding in one of her last letters: "I am pleased to think that my good Pope will have my last few cents; I shall die happy".

Sr Marie de la Pitié, too, often mentioned her prayer for the Church and the Pope. She wanted news of him: "What we have heard said about the Holy Father worries us... may God watch over his Church. He will protect it as his beloved spouse but we are not without anxiety".

Sr Marie de la Croix told of the moving gesture of Caroline, a girl of 19, who wanted to offer the Holy Father her small savings before she died. Another example is that of the collection organised at the time of the First Vatican Council. The pupils of St Louis, who had no more than a few coins among
them all, wanted to contribute to the collection organized to “spare poor bishops their travel expenses”. In 1871, Sr Marie de la Croix wrote that she and her girls were making “a kind of perpetual adoration ... for the deliverance of the Pope and peace in France” [presumably a reference to the loss of the Papal States and the Franco-Prussian War].

Do these examples not witness to the mutual support between churches begun by St Paul (cf. 1 Co 16:1-4; 2 Co 8:24-9:1)?

These concrete signs of solidarity show the spiritual bond uniting them with other Christians. Sr Marie du Mont Carmel wrote to a novice: “Courage, all of you my dear Sisters, I commend you daily to the good Lord. I am united in spirit with all your exercises of piety and charity, desiring to share in your merits... I believe firmly in all the articles of the Creed but of them all, I believe in the Communion of Saints in life and in death”. This explains clearly what we can affirm was lived by the others also. There are numerous letters mentioning their interest in the life of communities or churches elsewhere and expressing a strong sense of mutual union in faith, in prayer and sacrifice.
A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Our pioneers were not saints in a ‘beyond-our-reach’ sense.

They were ordinary women, marked by their era with its greatness and its limitations. Their departure for Oceania was part of the great missionary wave of the 19th century. They shared the fervour, the convictions and the forms of devotion of their contemporaries. Like their compatriots, they believed in the superiority of western civilization. Ecumenism had not yet come to birth. They shared the spirit of rivalry that put missionaries of different confessions in competition with one another. Some passages in their letters need to be read in their cultural and historical context if they are to be understood correctly. But the fallout does not mask the astonishing fecundity of their life.

Filled with wonder at the ‘gratuitous gift’ of their vocation, they knew they carried their treasure in “earthenware jars” (2 Co 4:7). This profound consciousness of their weaknesses, their faults and inadequacies can sometimes seem to us exaggerated. But they did not bury the treasure entrusted to them. Humbly, but with determination, they sought the way to have it bear fruit. The Holy Spirit can work with inadequate instruments. Because they had answered God’s call with an “unconditional gift of themselves” (Prologue, p. 13), God used them. With faith and daring, they opened for us a way in the service of mission.

Their trials and difficulties also challenge us because they did not succumb to them. They lacked preparation but from the time of departure, and in all circumstances, they found their
strength in God, as Sr Marie de la Miséricorde wrote on board ship on the way to Oceania: “I know I am nothing, that I can do nothing by myself, and despite that I hope to do something counting on God’s grace, the help of your prayers”. With joy, they believed also in Mary’s special protection. With confidence, they called on her help in order to stand firm in faith and grow in love. With humility and fidelity, they tried to live her spirit.

A return to our pioneers opens a way to hope.

By “a gracious choice”, we, in our turn, have been gifted with the same vocation: missionary, Marist and religious.

With this gift each of us, and all of us together, are entrusted so that we may bring it to fruition. It is the same treasure offered us.

Today still, God calls us. Today still, the Spirit goes before us. Today still, Mary accompanies us on the path of faith (cf. Const. 2, 10, 16).

Being faithful does not mean to repeat or make over but to keep in our heart that first impulse as a daily source of daring, so as to respond to the calls of God (Prologue, p. 11).
ENDNOTES

1 Letter from all the Christians of Ouvea to the faithful in Lyon, 10.11.1842, OPS I, 8.
2 Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
3 Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9, §12.
4 ibid., MFP Letter 9, §5.
5 Sara-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 03.09.1865, OPS II, 390.
7 Présentation-Poupinel, 31.03.1867, Letter 16, §4, OPS III, 450.
8 Croix-Poupinel, 28.03.1874, Letter 164, §5, OPS IV, 635.
9 Mont Carmel-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 01.08.1862, MFP Letter 17, §2.
10 Croix-Poupinel, 29.06.1876, Letter 183, §3*.
11 Rule for the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary in the Mission of Central Oceania, 1858, ch. 1, 3°, OPS V, doc. 4A (Poupinel).
12 Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9, §5.
13 Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
14 Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §3, OPS I, 68.
15 Croix-Poupinel, 05.06.1859, Letter 10, §7, OPS I, 133.
16 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 4°, 5°.
17 Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1859, Letter 13, §4, OPS I, 163.
18 Présentation-Poupinel, 03.03.1882, Letter 28, §4*.
19 Rule for the Third Order Regular of Mary in Fiji, 1892, OPS V, doc. 13A, introduction (Vidal).
20 Bon Secours-Yardin, 28.03.1860, Letter 15, §5, OPS I, 186.
21 Croix-Forestier, 27.12.1895, Letter 423, §2*.
22 St Jean Evangéliste, torm - a sister, 23.10.1892*.
23 Croix-Bon Secours, 25.01.1894, Letter 354, §5*.
24 Croix-St Anne, 28.10.1893, Letter 343, §§2, 3*.
26 Hortense-Yardin, 12.09.1862, OPS II, 291.
27 Paix-Yardin, 27.08.1860, Letter 12, §5, OPS I, 197.
28 Croix-Spiritual Notes, 18.10.1890*.
30 ibid., 1857 ed., p. 5.
31 Perroton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4.
32 Bon Secours-Yardin, 29.08.1859, Letter 9, §6*.
33 Merci-Yardin, 29.09.1860, Letter 5, §2, OPS I, 204.
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35 ibid., p. 38.
36 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 1°.
37 Croix-Yardin, 20.02.1859, Letter 5, §5, OPS I, 120.
39 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 2°.
41 Croix-Poupinel, 17.05.1873, Letter 155, §2, OPS III, 620, referring to a circular letter of Fr Favre, No. 50, 25.03.1873.
42 Merci-Favre, 15.11.1863, Letter 16, §§10, 12, 19, OPS II, 321.
43 Prologue, Constitutions, p. 25.
44 cf. Mont Carmel-Favre, 08.03.1859, MFP Letter 9; see also Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 30.10.1859, MFP Letter 11.
45 Yardin-Poupinel, 11.11.1857, OPS I, 41.
46 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 4, 1°.
47 Mont Carmel-a friend, Oct. or Nov. 1859, MFP Letter 12, §1; see also Mont Carmel-TOM, 26.06.1859, MFP Letter 10.
48 Poupinel-Favre, 23.10.1858, OPS I, 99.
50 Pitié-Poupinel, 12.02.1859, Letter 9, §2, OPS I, 117.
51 Bon Secours-Favre, 29.11.1860, Letter 21, §11, OPS I, 212.
52 Croix-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 29.06.1866, Letter 75, §4, OPS III, 426; cf. also Rose-Yardin, 17.11.1864, Letter 10, §6*; Paix-Poupinel, 16.05.1858, Letter 1, §2, OPS I, 77a.
53 Miséricorde-Yardin, 14.06.1861, Letter 19, §4, OPS II, 234.
54 Poupinel-Favre, 02.09.1859, OPS I, 150.
55 cf. Poupinel-Favre, 23.10.1858, OPS I, 99; see also Poupinel-Favre, 02.05.1859, OPS I, 126.
56 Canonical Erection of the Novitiate House of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, doc. 42, OPS V, p. 139-140.
58 Mont Carmel-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 01.08.1862, MFP Letter 17, §1.
59 Bon Secours-Favre, 25.05.1862, Letter 27, §5, OPS II, 273; see also Merci-Favre, 08.07.1862, Letter 14, §3, OPS II, 278; Mont Carmel-Yardin, 06.08.1862, MFP Letter 18, §1; Espérance-Yardin, 09.03.1863, Letter 26, §1, OPS II, 309.
61 Miséricorde-Bataillon, 23.06.1867, Letter 39, §3, OPS III, 457.
62 Rose-Poupinel, 30.06.1867, Letter 15, §8, OPS III, 459.
63 Miséricorde-Poupinel, 16.05.1866, Letter 34, §2, OPS III, 422.
64 Rose-Richard, 06.11.1871, Letter 18, §4, OPS III, 593; see also Miséricorde-M. du Cœur de Jésus, end of 1864, Letter 30, §3, OPS II, 358a.
65 cf. Croix-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 01.04.1871, Letter 137, §§2-3, OPS III, 582; see also Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583; Pitié-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 18.05.1880, Letter 70, §4, OPS IV, 759.
66 cf. Historical Timeline.
67 Rose-Poupinel, 20.07.1862, Letter 7, §5*.
68 Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1859, Letter 13, §6*.
70 Espérance-Poupinel, 19.11.1862, Letter 24, §6*.
71 Croix-Colette, pfm, 01.08.[1886], Letter 264, §1*.
72 cf. Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 29.05.1867, MFP Letter 27, §9.
73 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 30.10.1859, MFP Letter 11, §8.
75 cf. Miséricorde-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 11, OPS I, 145; see also Rose-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 2, OPS I, 146.
76 Rose-Lamaze, 18.10.1879, Letter 22, §4*; cf. also Pitié-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 18.05.1880, Letter 70, OPS IV, 758.
77 Merci-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 03.11.1869, Letter 36, §4, OPS III, 542.
78 Croix-Poupinel, 05.05.1869, Letter 110, §2, OPS III, 521.
79 Croix-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 01.04.1871, Letter 137, §3, OPS III, 582.
80 Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583.
81 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 4°.
82 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 1°.
83 Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §1*.
84 Paix-Poupinel, 16.05.1858, Letter 1, §2, OPS I, 77a.
85 Espérance-Favre, Dec. 1857, Letter 1, §1, OPS I, 50.
86 Croix-Poupinel, 05.06.1859, Letter 19, §7, OPS I, 133.
87 cf. Perrotton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4; see also Perrotton-Eymard and Poupinel, 13.07.1853, Letter 8, §2, and Pitié-Rocher, 02.07.1861, Letter 24, §1*.
88 Croix-Poupinel, 05.05.1859, Letter 10, §7, OPS I, 133.
89 cf. Merci-Favre, 30.03.1868, Letter 32, §2, OPS III, 496; cf. also Croix-Berset, 05.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
90 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 1, 7°.
91 Miséricorde-Guillot, 06.03.1858, Letter 4, §10*.
92 Pitié-Poupinel, 12.02.1859, Letter 9, §3, OPS I, 117; cf. also Croix-Ste Anne, Easter 1897, Letter 450, §3*.
93 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 29.04.1872, MFP Letter 56, §3.
94 Pitié-Bioletti, 08.04.1858, Letter 6, §13*.
95 Vita consecrata - on the consecrated life and its mission in the church and the world, 95.
96 Rule of Poupinel, op. cit., ch. 4, 4°.
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98 Croix-Berset, 05.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
99 cf. Mont Carmel-Delaroche, 02.02.1872, MFP Letter 54, §1.
100 cf. Espérance-Poupinel, 20.07.1863, Letter 28, §3*.
101 cf. ibid.
104 Rose-Poupinel, 23.04.1869, Letter 17, §1*.
105 Miséricorde-Poupinel, 04.02.1860, Letter 15, §1*.
106 Pitié-Bioletti, 22.05.1867, Letter 47, §2*.
108 cf. ibid.
109 cf. ibid.
110 cf. ibid.
111 Misericorde-M. du Cœur de Jésus, end of 1864, Letter 30, §9*; see also Miséricorde-Yardin, 14.06.1861, Letter 19, §6, OPS II, 234.
113 Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §2, OPS III, 583.
114 Croix-Yardin, 16.09.1870, Letter 133, §3*.
115 Pitié-Saunier, 19.07.1881, Letter 73, §§I, 4*.
116 Espérance-Poupinel, 12.03.1864, Letter 34, §4, OPS II, 329 [1]; see also Rose-Richard, 06.11.1871, Letter 18, §4, OPS III, 593.
117 Pitié-Maillet, 08.08.1880, Letter 71, §§2, 3*.
118 Marie Victor-Poupinel, 18.07.1883, OPS IV, 824.
119 Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1.
120 Miséricorde-Guillot, 04.11.1869, Letter 13, §6*.
121 Paix-Poupinel, 17.04.1859, Letter 3, §5*.
122 Rose-Poupinel, 08.08.1859, Letter 2, §3, OPS I, 146.
123 St Jean l’Evangéliste-Ste Anne, 26.11.1896*.
124 Sara-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 03.09.1865, OPS II, 390.
126 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 09.06.1869, MFP Letter 44, §2.
127 Bon Secours-Yardin, 29.08.1859, Letter 9, §6*.
128 Croix, Spiritual Notes, September 1894.
129 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, September 1862, MFP Letter 19, §6; see also Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 17.04.1873, MFP Letter 59, §2.
131 Letter from all the Christians of Ouvea to the faithful in Lyon, 10.11.1842, OPS I, 8.
131 Bon Secours-Poupinel, 10.05.1860, Letter 17, §14*.
132 Miséricorde-Poupinel, 21.07.1877, Letter 64, §2, OPS IV, 690.
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133 Croix-Bon Secours, 01.11.1892, Letter 319, §1*.
134 Croix-du Rosaire, 31.10.1890, Letter 296, §2*.
135 Miséricorde-Guillot, 06.03.1858, Letter 4, §10*.
136 Croix-Poupinel, 15.05.1860, Letter 20, §6*.
137 Merci-Yardin, 09.03.1859, Letter 1, §4*.
138 Pitié-Poupinel, 26.10.1861, Letter 29, §6*.
139 Croix-Poupinel, 10.12.1869, Letter 117, §2*.
140 Perroton-Eymard, 02.08.1846, MFP Letter 2, §4.
141 Pitié-Saunier, 19.07.1881, Letter 73, §3*.
142 Croix-Spiritual Notes, February 1896*.
143 Croix-Berset, 01.07.1861, Letter 28, §10, OPS II, 237.
144 Mont Carmel-St Jude, ndm, 26.02.1870, MFP Letter 48, §2.
145 Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 04.07.1870, MFP Letter 50, §2; see also Mont Carmel-Yardin, 10.07.1871, MFP Letter 53, §3.
146 Pitié-Maillet, 26.06.1861, Letter 23, §1*.
147 Croix-Poupinel, 14.09.1869, Letter 113, §9*.
148 Croix-Poupinel, 06.02.1870, Letter 119, §7*.
149 Croix-Poupinel, 02.04.1871, Letter 138, §4*.
150 Mont Carmel-François Xavier, ndm, 26.02.180, MFP Letter 47, §5.
151 Miséricorde-Favre, Dec. 1857, Letter 1, §1, OPS I, 49.

* unpublished text.
MINI-PORTRAITS

OF THE

PIONEERS

Photos

Facsimiles (with translation)

Sr M. Emerentiana Cooney, smsm
Marie Françoise Perroton
Sr Marie du Mont Carmel
(1796 - 1873)
I. SISTER MARIE DU MONT CARMEL

Marie Françoise Perroton 1796-1873

Marie Françoise, the woman whom we esteem and revere as the one ‘who gave the initial impulse’, left for Oceania at the age of 49, prepared to make the radical gift of herself for mission for the rest of her days. In her letters we get glimpses only of the faith that sustained this gift - a faith lived in the ordinariness of daily life in nineteenth century Wallis and Futuna and expressed in a great love of the Eucharist, in daily prayer and in confidence in God and Mary.

In humility, she could acknowledge God’s gifts to her in her call to mission. She mentions “having received special favours at my departure,” some of which she seemed able to identify and for which she was always grateful. She has shared something of her faith in God’s providence and in Mary’s protection. In asking Captain Marceau for passage to Oceania, she is confident in the God who provides. “Once I have arrived God will provide for my needs ” (Perroton-Marceau, summer 1845, MFP Letter 1, §1). Later in life she writes of “counting on Providence who has never abandoned me” (Mont Carmel-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 07.09.1866, MFP Letter 25, §2).

She gave herself in mission despite the loneliness and the isolation. No doubt her faith was refined in the depths of such suffering. Solitude weighed heavily on her. She actually left Wallis in 1854 for Australia but the boat brought her to Futuna where, with renewed courage, she spent the rest of her life. Some of the Fathers had suggested she return to France - they felt it was too lonely a life for a woman (cf. Junillon-Colin, 1853, OPS I, 30). Fr Poupinel sensing her pain wrote: “She alone knows all she
had to suffer in body and soul during those twelve long years
with solitude as her constant companion" (Poupinel-Vauthier,
15.06.1851, OPS I, 81).

The gift of herself to God was made in times of joy as in
times of inner anguish as she faced her own inadequacies and
even failures. “I can do nothing but fall and pick myself up
again” (Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 30.10.1859, MFP Letter 11, §3). Others
saw the witness of her life, including Sara, the young Futunian
woman who took her name when she became a religious.

Often faith is put to its severest testing in human
relationships. Marie Françoise knew this kind of testing – she
had difficulties with Bishop Bataillon (ibid., MFP Letter 11, §8),
with some of the Fathers and sometimes with her sisters, though
she speaks positively of them in her letters.

Marie Françoise’s gift of herself was lived to the end,
perhaps even more profoundly in the physical pain and suffering
of her later years. Certainly, it was lived in trust in the infinite
love and mercy of God that she knew could be relied on
absolutely to bring her to her final destiny: “I abandon myself to
God. He is my Father although I am his unworthy daughter”
(Mont Carmel-Poupinel, 04.07.1870, MFP Letter 50, §1). Marie Françoise
speaks of herself that way; at this distance we see her as one who
radically lived for the God she loved, and for the Oceanians she
served. Her life bore within it the living seed of a future for those
who would follow in her footsteps, both from her native France
and many other countries.
Oh! yes, my honoured Sisters, I feel deeply the happiness the highly esteemed and Very Rev. Fr Poupinel obtained for me in admitting me, unworthy as I am, to the honour you yourselves have of belonging in a special way to the Blessed Virgin. You fervent women of Lyon could not give the lie to this title, for great is your devotion to the Mother of God by which you have always been distinguish. Oh, how wholeheartedly I unite myself to your fervent prayers, wishing also to share in your merits. I congratulate you too, on the happiness you so often feel in that holy chapel of Fourvière, where it is especially consoling to pour out your heart into that of our loving Mother, who is pleased to listen to the requests of her devoted children and makes it a duty to grant them, [...] (Mont Carmel-TOM, Lyon, 26.06.1859, MFP Letter 10, §2).
Sr Marie de la Miséricorde
(1830 - 1904)
II. SISTER MARIE DE LA MISERICORDE

Marie Basset 1830-1904

Marie Basset was born in St Laurent-de-Chamousset, France, on 2 November 1830. As a young woman, she responded to the appeal of Bishop Bataillon for mission in Oceania, but as she shared later, she also wanted religious life (cf. Miséricorde-Guillot, 06.03.1858, Letter 4, §9*). She was gifted with intelligence, common sense and had received a good education.

Having been received into the Third Order of Mary (November 1857), she left France with Srs Marie de la Pitié and Marie de la Sainte-Espérance. On arriving in Futuna, she set to work to teach. But she had little more than 2 months to settle in before Bishop Bataillon sent her and Marie de la Sainte-Espérance to Wallis. Of this beginning, she writes “for the 18 months I have been in Wallis I have found only obstacles in the way of my ardent desire to do something for the glory of God and the good of young people” (Miséricorde-Favre, 04.01.1860, Letter 14, §2, OPS I, 177). Before long they were asked to work on a farm at Lano. Marie de la Miséricorde knew this was not what she had come to do as a missionary. From Sydney, in 1863 where she went for health reasons, she wrote: “Perhaps it is necessary that the work begun in Wallis be completely destroyed, and that the sisters disappear from the island for a while, so that in the future, if desirable they can be treated quite differently from how they have been up until now...” (Miséricorde-Yardin, 16.12.1863, Letter 27, §3*). A new foundation was made in Samoa in 1864. The following year the bishop decided it was Marie de la Miséricorde he needed for the school to function well.

Together with the radical gift of herself for mission as a Marist, the desire for a ‘real religious life’ made itself more and
THE VOCATION OF THE PIONEERS

more felt. "I must be a religious and not only have the appearance of one" (Miséricorde-Poupinel, 16.05.1866, Letter 34, §2, OPS III, 422). She suffered from what she considered confusion, indecisiveness and unnecessary delays on the part of the superiors in organising the TOMMO into a canonically recognised religious congregation. She was frank and fearless in expressing impatience with all this.

She placed great hope in the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions from Lyon who came in 1871 and made profession with them that year, without further concern about a novitiate. However by 1875, she realised that their way of life, and their spirituality, was not what she understood as her vocation, nor was it, in her opinion, suited to mission in Oceania. After having withdrawn from the congregation, she sought God’s will again, as she had done throughout her life.

Bishop Elloy allowed her to found a congregation more adapted for life in Samoa: Our Lady of Oceania. Several letters testify to the excellent formation and work of the young Samoan women who were professed in the congregation. In 1881 Bishop Lamaze, who had succeeded Bishop Elloy, invited her and her sisters to join the Third Order Regular of Mary that he had erected at Wallis. She adamantly refused. It seemed to her a backward step.

Marie de la Miséricorde was a gifted educator and a dedicated missionary. We have reason to be grateful to her for her pioneering missionary work, in education in Wallis and Samoa during her 46 years of missionary life; for her encouragement of religious vocations; her commitment to forming young Samoan religious; and for helping bishops and priests understand our vocation by insisting on the importance of the religious dimension.
I love Samoa, I love our girls, and I think I have told you that a long time ago. Nevertheless it is impossible for me to remain here in the position I am in now. I need a community, a community life... I must be a religious and not only have the appearance of one... Hope is a very good thing and in the past I put up with a great deal because I hoped everything would work out well. But seeing that it is taking so long, I am at the end of my courage and the decision I have taken after six months’ reflection is this: this time next year I will leave for Sydney. [...] (Miséricorde-Poupinel, 16.05.1866, OPS III, 422).
Sr Marie de la Pitié
(1820 - 1894)
III. SISTER MARIE DE LA PITIE
Françoise Bartet 1820-1894

Sister Marie de la Pitié emerges from her letters that have come down to us and from those of others who write of her, as a woman of prayer, a woman who stated her goal was “to leave all for God alone and the accomplishment of his will” (Pitié-Favre, 05.12.1857, Letter 2, §4, OPS I, 48). This goal, referred to often, seems to have given a certain perspective to her missionary life. She expresses the hope that “the goal for which we came will be accomplished for the glory of God” (Pitié-Poupinel, 23.06.1859, Letter 11, §5*).

A Lyonnaise, she was one of the first departure group who responded to the call of Bishop Bataillon for volunteers for Oceania. After being accepted as a member of the TOM, she set sail from London for Sydney with Srs Marie de la Miséricorde and Marie de la Sainte-Esperance. They were all assigned to Futuna where they arrived in May 1858.

Marie de la Pitié seems to have often regretted her lack of formation, including certain skills like sewing etc. She had her times of disillusionment, loneliness, lack of energy and vitality, feeling her life was useless (cf. Pitié-Bioletti, 20.10.1860, Letter 20, §3*). Tending to view herself as less than adequate, she probably suffered from poor self-esteem. However, it is remarkable how she balances this lack of self-confidence with great confidence in Jesus and Mary. Nor did it keep her from accomplishing much for the women and children of Futuna.

In her letters, there is a strong eschatological sense. She writes of earth as “the land of exile,” heaven as the “eternal homeland”. She communicated something of this “spiritual
homelessness” to her family and friends when she writes “of the beautiful day when we will be all reunited in a blessed eternity,” and of “awaiting our glorious meeting again in the celestial homeland” (Pitié-Maillet, 26.06.1861, Letter 23, §9*).

She expresses joy in her vocation, believing her group “privileged by the good God,” (Pitié-Bioletti, 18.11.1857, Letter 1, §10, OPS I, 43), and happiness “with the choice God made in favour of me” (Pitié-Saunier, 07.04.1858, Letter 5 §2*). Like her two companions, she ardently desired the religious life. In March 1869 after a novitiate in Futuna, she made profession in the congregation of Our Lady of the Missions with Marie du Mont Carmel. In February 1874, Marie de la Pitié left Futuna with Marie Rose, as Bishop Bataillon decided there would be no more sisters there. After participating in the provincial chapter in Apia, she went with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions to Tonga. Adaptation there was very hard. On learning of the difficulties between the congregation of Our Lady of the Missions and the Society of Mary, two of her companions decided in 1878 to join the Sisters of Our Lady of Oceania, recently founded in Samoa.

Marie de la Pitié herself also withdrew from the congregation that same year. In 1880 when Marie des Anges, left her to continue with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in New Zealand, Marie de la Pitié gave her the symbols of her belonging - rosary, cross and ring - to be returned to the congregation. She wrote to the superior general: “Since we are now no longer in uncertainty, I am leaving the institute, because it has left me and I cannot follow it” (Pitié-Marie du Cœur de Jésus, 18.05.1880, Letter 70, §4, OPS IV, 758). She looked forward with joy to making profession in the newly-erected TORM and took perpetual vows in it in 1881 in Tonga, where she remained until her death in 1894.
We have been severely tossed about for three days... Well, now we are a bit calmer, the ship at least, for we never lost courage and resignation, which helps us to regain our balance and keep our hearts in the right place, mine at least... It is a small thing, however, when it is for God, and this, after all, is only a good preparation; we feel our own weakness and helplessness more. I think I will pray with greater fervour and with complete confidence and real abandonment to Divine Providence who, I hope, will lead me to the end I have in view: to leave all for God alone and the accomplishment of his holy will, [...] (Pitié-Favre, 5.12.1857, OPS I, 48).
Sr Marie de la Sainte-Espérance
(1831 - 1872)
Jeanne was the youngest of the first departure group who left for Oceania in November 1857. She was born in Rive-de-Gier, near Lyon, and given a reasonably good education. From her letters, and from those of others, she appears as a hardworking, capable young woman, though perhaps with a certain immaturity for her age.

Assigned to Futuna, she began by giving herself generously to classes for the women but in less than 3 months was sent to Wallis with Marie de la Miséricorde. Health problems and difficulties in interpersonal relationships surfaced after a short time; she returned to Futuna. Her health continuing to be a problem, she was sent to Sydney in 1861. There she had more than 5 months in hospital, though doctors could not find the real cause of her illness. This was an added source of suffering. A period of convalescence followed during which she learned English and taught catechism to French children to whom she communicated her own great love of Mary “beginning her class always in the company of our good Mother” (Espérance-Poupinel, 19.07.1862, Letter 18, §6, OPS II, 284).

Fr Poupinel suggested she return to France but she felt she should stay in Oceania as the other sisters, whose health was also impaired, remained “on the battlefield”. A willingness to sacrifice was part of the fabric of Marie de la Sainte-Espérance’s life, when this was in keeping with what she saw as God’s will for her. In 1863, when it was decided that perhaps a change of climate would help, she was assigned to St Louis in New Caledonia. During the voyage, the ship was wrecked. Though no
one was seriously hurt, the entire cargo was lost. She says: "... I had an unfortunate and terrible shipwreck! A sad and painful experience I shall never forget... It is not that I regret all that I lost, no Father, I can tell you with assurance that although I have felt keenly the present and future pain of it, I have made my sacrifice generously enough, at least I think so. Some months before God had imposed a much greater one on me, in the person of my good and loving mother!" (Espérand-Poupinel, 12.03.1864, Letter 34, §4, OPS II, 329).

In St Louis the same health problems recurred; others found it hard to understand her. She also suffered from some harsh criticism made of her. Even Fr Poupinel found her "rather foolish" at times. However, in 1867, when she was sent to La Conception, she is said to have done good work in teaching, sewing, caring for the girls. According to Fr Rougeyron, she was "adept in everything, and very capable" (Rougeyron-Favre, 10.09.1867, OPS III, 476).

Marie de la Saint-Esperance speaks in her letters of her joy in belonging to “Mary’s family”. She values her consecration in the TOMMO as “her daughter”. She looked forward to the day she would become a fully recognised religious. Though accepted for the novitiate in Our Lady of the Missions in 1867, she never made profession, probably because of questions concerning her health.

Marie de la Sainte-Esperance was a woman who loved the people and was loved by them. Her gifts of mind and heart shared generously with others were restricted only by the problem of poor health throughout her life. She died in Noumea at the comparatively early age of 41.
I wish you Father, a much better trip than the one I had last November, the time I had an unfortunate and terrible shipwreck! A sad and painful experience I shall never forget... It is not that I regret all that I lost, no Father, I can tell you with assurance that although I have felt keenly the present and future pain of it, I have made my sacrifice generously enough, at least I think so. Some months before God had imposed a much greater one on me, in the person of my good and loving mother! (Espérance-Poupinel, 12.03.1864, OPS 11, 329).
Sr Marie de la Croix
(1831 - 1908)
It was at La Roche-sur-Yon that Pélagie Phelippon was born in 1831. She received a good education in a convent school in Bordeaux and afterwards taught very successfully at a school there herself. In 1857, she made known to Fr Favre in Lyon her desire to give herself to the missions of Oceania. She was then 26 years of age. She had desired to be a religious from a very early age. Having been accepted for Oceania despite her questionable health, she arrived with two companions, Srs Marie de Bon Secours and Marie de la Paix at La Conception (New Caledonia) in December 1858. She set to work straight away to teach the women and children, to care for the sick and to learn the language.

Five months later Fr Rougeyron decided she and Marie de Bon Secours would open a school on the Ile des Pins. In October 1863 she ran into difficulties with the laws passed against Catholic schools by the governor, Charles Guillain. She succeeded in passing the examination she had to take. Finally, her school could reopen in 1865.

Marie de la Croix was a woman of strong likes and dislikes: in some of the priests she could see no fault; in others little to commend them. As the years went on she came to a more balanced appreciation of others, to a greater compassion. She was surely helped by Fr Poupinel and perhaps others in whom she could confide.

In August 1864, she was sent to St Louis (New Caledonia) where she spent 28 years. There she began a day
school, opened a boarding school and set up a novitiate for local sisters in whom she placed great confidence and hope for the future. Some made profession in the TORM but after several years, those coming on were encouraged to remain Petites Filles de Marie (Little Daughters of Mary) and become a diocesan congregation.

In 1892 she left St Louis, having volunteered to look after the leprosy patients in Bélep, an island to the north of New Caledonia, where they were completely neglected after being exiled there. Her letters, and those of others, testify to her love and care of these suffering people. She wrote: “I am only the servant of the poor leprosy patients. May God be blessed in all this” (Croix-Ste Anne, 04.09.1895, Letter 414, §1*). In writing to Marie de Bon Secours, she says: “Ask the good Lord that we may be the eyes of the blind and the feet of the lame, with the charity fitting such a beautiful task” (Croix-Bon Secours, 25.01.1894, Letter 354, §5*). Her companion, Sr Marie St Jean l’Evangeliste, whom she had formed for religious life, and who was professed in the TORM in 1892, affirms: “Our mother will finish her last years as she spent her early ones, doing good to everyone” (M. St Jean-Apollonie pfm, 28.12.1895*).

Both Srs Marie de la Croix and Marie St Jean were very distressed when, in 1898, the government decided to close the leprosarium in Bélep and send away the patients: “These poor people were crying, they extended their hands which we grasped without dreaming of any danger at all! We held these stumps of hand, without fingers. Oh, these unfortunate people whom we loved so greatly, and that we were so happy to console” (Croix-Eugénie, pfm, 06.05.1898, Letter 463, §2*). When the original people of Bélep returned to their island, the two sisters remained helping them resettlee and opened the school again.
Marie de la Croix continued her work, despite her physical limitations, until her death on 9th August 1908, after having celebrated the preceding May, 50 years of missionary life, judged by others as outstanding in so many ways.

Marie de la Croix was profoundly Marist: in her letters and writings she speaks often of her attachment to the Society of Mary, Mary’s family, and its Third Order; she looks on Fr Colin as ‘Father founder;’ she speaks of trying to live the spirit of Mary and encourages the Petites Filles de Marie, the local congregation for whose religious formation she was responsible for many years, to love Mary, their mother and first superior, "our all after Jesus," (Croix-Yardin, 02.09.1861, Letter 34,§6*) and to live her spirit.

The letters of Marie de la Croix make it obvious that she was a woman of prayer. There is constant reference to prayer and union with God in her letters. The Eucharist held an important place in her life. In her personal prayer, she knew the experience of desert dryness and shares this in writing with Marie Ste Anne: “Ah, if you could let the graces you received during your retreat flow into my poor soul, on to me freezing in the full light of the sun” (Croix-Ste Anne, 27.03.1901, Letter 500, §1*). She encourages the sisters to pray for one another and, in writing to her former novices, stresses the importance of prayer: “Let us unite in incessant prayer that the Lord may be loved everywhere and by all” (Croix-Colette, pfm, 26.11.1896, Letter 444, §6*). Many letters show that her prayer embraced the world - bishops, priests, sisters TORM and PFM, the children of St Louis, the leprosy patients, France, the Church, local and universal (cf. Croix-Ste Anne, 06.05. 1903, Letter 528, §12*).
She leaves us all, smsm and Filles de Marie, a heritage of about 600 letters but, more important, the very powerful continuing witness of a life completely given to God, lived in the spirit of Mary, whom she loved and revered as mother, model, first and perpetual superior.

She de l'île, 19 Nov. 1866.

Maman [illegible] et San Pére, 

[...] La vie ... est le seul que je sois, dans la vie, dans la vie, dans de beaux moments de mémoire qui me reviennent. Je me suis dehors travaillé dans une solitude absolue. Je le disait au P. Forestier, dans mes lettres, nouv. avec J. et H. Je me trouvais à bien, ce n'est pas vrai. J'ai beaucoup de lettres toutes et qu'elles soient extérieures, une étrange de leur santé... Je n'ai qu'elles devront spirituelles que sont lettres et celles du P. Forestier que deviendront je après cela, ce n'est tout. Le P. Forestier écrit de la même manière de prières, ce que les dévotions, sont de... Le fait bon mois... 

... direction finale, droit et son sable... partout un ami, demain et lundi, avec lequel vais dîner et qui partage encore toutes les joies s'il me convenait avec la charité d'un vrai prêtre et d'un véritable ami.

Sœur Marie de la Croix

66
... Fr Chapuy is the only one I see in the mission; despite that I have not the least regret for the little times of recreation which his visits give me. I rest from my labours in an absolute solitude. I was saying to Fr Forestier, in a cloister where, with Jesus and Mary I find myself so much at home; for me this is real happiness to 'taste' them only and where nothing from outside can distract me from their holy presence. I have no other spiritual help than your letters and those of Fr Forestier. What would I desire after that? It is all that I need. Whether from a distance or near, Fr Forestier remains what Our Lord in his divine goodness has made him for me: a holy spiritual director, honest and sure. I dare to add a sincere and devoted friend with whom I have suffered and who continues to share all the pain that he knows I have with the charity of a true priest and a real friend. (Croix-Poupinel, 15.05.1860*).

Ask the good Lord that we may be the eyes of the blind and the feet of the lame, with the charity fitting such a beautiful task. [...] (Croix-Bon Secours, 25.01.1894*).
Sr Marie de la Paix
(1824 - 1896)
VI. SISTER MARIE DE LA PAIX

Marie-Virginie Jacquier 1824-1896

Much of what we would like to know about Marie-Virginie will remain in the obscurity of history as she has not left us many letters to tell us much about herself, her family and her life either as a TOMMO or a TORM. We do know she was received as a novice in the Fraternity of Christian Virgins in Lyon on 26 May 1856 and made profession the following 8 December. However, drawn as she says by “an interior voice”, she felt God calling her to something more - to leave all for Oceania. With Marie de la Croix and Marie de Bon Secours she left from London in July 1858, assuring Fr Poupinel she was “ready for all sacrifices,” and wanted “to do all that the good Lord demands of me” (Paix-Poupinel, 16.05.1858, Letter 1, §3, OPS I, 77a).

Missionary life for her began at La Conception (New Caledonia). Within a very short time, her two companions were sent to the Isle of Pines. She was left alone to care for the school, the church and to look after the sick. Although she found “the girls good companions,” she felt keenly the separation and isolation. She also suffered from a lack of formal instruction but Fr Rougeyron helped her to prepare her French lessons. The children loved her. In a very touching way, they expressed it on one occasion by offering her money. As they were so poor, she felt she could not accept it. On the suggestion of the priest, who told the children she worked for God and not for recompense on earth, it was given to the Propagation of the Faith. The question was settled this way (cf. Paix-Yardin, 27.08.1860, Letter 12, §4, OPS I, 197).
Marie de la Paix apparently took very good care of the sick, knowing "her strength came from God". When an epidemic was raging in La Conception, she writes of having "had to hurry from house to house bringing remedies" to the sick and helping the dying (Paix-Hélion, 24.04.1861, Letter 14, §3, OPS II, 225).

She had desired religious life from a very early age. She expressed disappointment with the letters of M. Marie du Cœur de Jesus fearing she would not be considered capable, but according to Fr Poupinel she was "afraid to enter the congregation" (Poupinel-Yardin, 07.11.1865, OPS II, 401). There is no record of any acceptance.

In 1867, Marie de la Paix pioneered the work of the school at Pouébo where she remained until 1879. Her work there drew the admiration of Fr Rougeyron who wrote that she was "filled with zeal and good will but is deficient in learning and education" (Rougeyron-Favre, 10.09.1867, OPS III, 476).

During the fighting that broke out there, the wounded were brought to her for care. She was falsely accused there of "exciting the revolts by cutting off the head of the corpse of Hippolyte Bonou" - an accusation that hurt her deeply (cf. Espérance-M. du Cœur de Jésus, 03.03.1868, Letter 43, §4*). Her love for Mary and confidence in her protection, whom she always called "my Mother" never waned even in such difficulties.

It was in 1882 when stationed in Ouvéa, her health deteriorated and things proved too much for her. Suffering already from acute anaemia and violent headaches, she had a breakdown in mental health from which she never seems to have fully recovered. She died in the Île des Pins in 1896.
How I pity this dear Society of Mary that has taken me into her holy [heart], and by that has saved me from frightful misfortunes. Yes, Reverend Father, every day I thank our good Mother and beg her to protect you in every way and everywhere. I felt bad when I heard the religious houses have been made to suffer terrible persecutions, especially those in Lyon. Every day Rev. Fr Ameline has had us redouble our prayers that the Blessed Virgin will protect you more and more. (Paix-Poupinel, 17.04.1872, OPS III, 595).
Sr Marie de Bon Secours
(1818 - 1895)
VII. SISTER MARIE DE BON SECOURS
Clotilde Viannay 1818-1895

Before coming to Oceania, Marie de Bon Secours had lived as a Daughter of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, having made profession there in 1842. She left the institute in 1855. Her assignments had included working as a nurse in Turkey and Egypt. At almost forty years of age, she wanted to make reparation for her “rash impulse” to leave, and offered herself for the missions of Oceania. With Srs Marie de la Croix and Marie de la Paix she was sent to New Caledonia arriving there December 1858.

She was described by Fr Favre as “headstrong”; Fr Yardin acknowledged she was “well educated”, “had a facility for learning languages”, and knew “a great deal about medicine and surgery”. She brought a wealth of experience to her missionary work in New Caledonia, as well as goodwill and generosity. Adaptation was difficult. To her great regret, she did not do much nursing despite her training and experience. She was asked to teach which, she says: “I didn’t like” (cf. Bon Secours-Poupinel, 28.03.1860, Letter 16, §5, OPS I, 1860). However, at La Conception she taught 70 men to read, write and sing French hymns - very successfully, according to Fr Rougeyron (cf. Rougeyron-Favre, July-Aug. 1860, OPS I, 195); she had 100 men students in the Ise des Pins! She seems to have got on well with young and old.

Marie de Bon Secours served in many missions, not being too long in any of them. Sometimes she asked for the change; sometimes the priests asked for her to be changed. Her companions found her difficult in community but there are also
testimonies to her ‘conversions’ (cf. Vigouroux-Yardin, 04.07.1863, OPS II, 313; Rougeyron-Favre, 20.10.1865, OPS II, 397). No doubt, she called forth in others a more gratuitous love. In September 1868 she volunteered for a new foundation in Ouvea (an offshore island), but the task was too much for her nor was there any money for her support. She left there in 1869; in 1871 she set out again for the Ile des Pins. There she cared compassionately for the girls from Maré (another offshore island) from where Catholics were driven out by the threats of the Protestants.

Having tasted religious life as a Daughter of Charity before coming to Oceania, Marie de Bon Secours longed for the day when the TOMMO would be organised as a fully religious congregation. In several letters she expresses the “ardent desire to give myself irrevocably to God by taking perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience” (Bon Secours-Favre, 01.08.1864, Letter 33, §3, OPS II, 341). She had asked several times to make a novitiate in the congregation of Our Lady of the Missions, but her application for admission was never accepted.

Frequently in her letters she refers to Mary, often under the title of Mary Immaculate, and she desires to be her “true daughter”. Her last years were spent in St Louis, not far from Nouméa. Marie de Bon Secours had traversed the well-travelled road of the Cross, through many difficulties and sufferings. Before leaving for New Caledonia, she says she had been told by the saintly Curé of Ars, her cousin, that “she would suffer there … but she would do much good” (Bon Secours-Poupinel, 01.07.1877, Letter 58, §3, OPS IV, 688).
It seems to me that since his death the Cure of Ars has obtained for me from the divine mercy a very great grace: that of loving our dear local people. Actually, I find now that it is very pleasant for me to be with them. When taking them for class I am happy to be there and I enjoy a deep peace. You know that last year I had a certain aversion to being with them and I was distancing myself from them as much as I could to the disedification of the Rev. Father and the Sisters who often pointed it out to me. I can assure you I have had a very real and profound conversion. With all my heart I thank Our Lord and the Immaculate Mary to have freed me from this regrettable repugnance and to have given me in its place a real feeling of love and religious dedication. [...] (Bon Secours-Poupinel, 10.05.1860*).
Sr Marie Augustin
(1826 - 1896)
VIII. SISTER MARIE AUGUSTIN
Marie Jacqueline Claray-Fromage, 1826-1896

Sr Marie Augustin was born at Crest-Voland in Savoie (France) on 16 March 1826. Like the other pioneers, on hearing the call of Bishop Bataillon for the missions in Oceania she volunteered and was accepted. At 31 years of age, she left with Marie Rose and Marie de la Merci from Bordeaux on 24 October 1858.

After arriving in Wallis, she had only a month in Mata Utu, before being sent by the bishop to Lano, a farm, with Marie de la Miséricorde and Marie Rose. Fr Poupinel shares with Fr Yardin an early impression from Wallis of S. Marie Augustin: “she has simple tastes and she loves the poor, she is sincere” (Poupinel-Yardin, 02.09.1859, OPS I, 150). The work imposed on her at Lano was to care for the pigs and manage the farm. The whole cultural shock seems to have been too much. Her mental health, already fragile, suffered and deteriorated rapidly. She seems to have gone from one crisis to another that was a source of suffering for her companions, and especially for her herself. She speaks of being “in the crucible,” of “discouragement,” of “pain,” all of which she found hard to understand and accept. Writing to Fr Poupinel in the midst of her mental confusion and anguish, she says: “It is the moment to put my confidence in God and in Mary. How keenly I feel the pain at this time” (Augustin-Poupinel, 04.09.1861, Letter 7, §4*).

Understandably, Bishop Bataillon and Fr Poupinel decided in September 1861 that she would have to be repatriated. “The sentence is pronounced,” she wrote. She left for Sydney in May 1862 and for France in November of that year. She accepted
to return to her family but letters written after this show a continuing interest in the mission and in the Society of Mary, "her family".

Despite the limits of her missionary life and work in Oceania, Marie Augustin is one whom we claim as 'a pioneer' and who contributed in her own way to incarnating our charism. But it was a contribution with a difference - one of suffering and return to France as an apparent failure. As St Paul points out different members have different gifts, different services to render (cf. 1 Cor 12: 4, 5). For some, their gifts are seemingly restricted through suffering. Nevertheless, suffering has a mysterious but important part in the Christian life, and a power beyond human understanding. The very short missionary life of Marie Augustin in Wallis was to be in tears, in poverty and brokenness, in a humiliating sense of failure, but, in union "with Jesus in the garden of Olives", as she wrote (Augustin-Poupinel, 04.09.1861, Letter 7, §4*). Her particular contribution to the TOMMO, and to the church in Oceania, is not to be underestimated.

For her life after 1862, she found God had another plan. It was "to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known" in another way, namely, by using her circumstances to do all in her power for mission - praying, keeping her interest in the sisters and the people, writing, sending money and parcels to Oceania, and by working in her own local church. She remained a member of the Third Order, convinced she was a "child of Mary," and happy to describe herself as a "marist exile" until her death in 1896 (Augustin-Poupinel, 11.04.1871, Letter 11, §2*).
Sydney 20 October 1862

Mon bien cher Père

Que la très sainte volonté de Dieu soit faite, comme il le désire et le plus ingénu de ses enfants s’est le moment du grand fiat, mais je vais le dire le plus parfait que je pourrais, tout pour qu’il en puisse délier le mérite, je l’une à tout les fiatés depuis Jesus et Marie sur la croix et ceux de tous les saints et bien de ciel et tout les justes de secur la terre, j’adore la devise de la providence sur moi sans chercher à les penetrer; on dit que la tête est encore plus tourment ici qu’à Wallis… (Augustin-Poupinel, 20.10.1862*).

May the very holy Will of God be done as He desires it from the most ungrateful of his children. It is the moment of the great fiat, but I want to say it as perfectly as I can. It is in order to have more merit. I unite it to all the fiatés since Jesus and Mary on Calvary, to all these saints in heaven and all the faithful on earth. I adore the designs of Providence for me without seeking to enter into the reason. They say my head is more disturbed here than it was in Wallis… (Augustin-Poupinel, 20.10.1862*).
THE VOCATION OF THE PIONEERS

Sr Marie de la Merci
(1837 - ?)
Sr Marie de la Merci emerges from her letters as a very gifted young woman, a natural leader, well-educated, with a pleasing personality. The eldest of three girls in the family, she left for Oceania at 21 years of age in the third departure group in October 1858. She was a member of the TOM in La Seyne and had taught in the Marist Fathers' college there before leaving France.

Just as she was to board the ship in Bordeaux she received news of her mother's death which naturally came as a terrible shock. However, she decided to go on rather than return to her family. "After having reflected on everything, I resolved to persevere and to follow the route God has traced out for me" (Merci-Yardin, 09.03.1859, Letter 1, §4). At that time, it became clear to her that the Society of Mary was her family, a conviction that grew stronger as the years went on as she often expresses joy in her letters in belonging to the "family of Mary".

Her giftedness was obvious to all in Futuna where she was missioned. She seems to have acquired the language without too much difficulty, was very successful as a teacher and very popular with her pupils whom she loved. As a result, she was given responsibility very young. Bishop Bataillon, who noted her gifts, even wanted to make her foundress of a diocesan congregation he would begin in Samoa for young women from the islands. In his view it was too expensive to continue having European Sisters (cf. Dezest-Favre, Dec. 1863, OPS II, 324). Her vow of obedience, taken for 5 years, had expired; the bishop asked her to renew it to him. She had the courage to refuse as she knew
her vocation was not to a particular mission, nor to a particular bishop (cf. Merci-Favre, 15.11.1863, Letter 16, §14, OPS II, 321). However, she paid a price for her refusal.

Having come to Sydney in 1865 for health reasons, she welcomed the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in 1867 and made profession in the congregation in February 1868. However, after the difficulties that arose and the return of the sisters to France, she withdrew in 1869, preferring to be once again a simple Tertiary. She continued to be at the service of the Marist Fathers in Villa Maria, with the help of Sara and Silenia, two Futunians, whom she formed at the same time for religious life.

Unfortunately about 1875 her relations with Fr Joly, the superior, became strained. His “incomprehensible conduct,” as she describes it, caused her much pain. She grew increasingly depressed at the impossibility of her situation in Villa Maria. Besides, she was very sick. Doctors advised her to return to France which she did in 1881. Broken in health and without any immediate family, nor any financial resources she looked for work. Finally, she accepted an offer of marriage from Vital Seymat, widower and landowner, but as she shares it was not without much heartache.

At this distance in time, we can’t help regretting the way Marie de la Merci was treated in Sydney. She who had so much potential was deprived of community and mission for so long there, despite the fact she had expressed many times her desire to return to the missions in the Islands. Her departure from the congregation is a sad page in our history.
It is you who deigned to authorise me to become a full member of the family of Mary...

I have always loved the Society of Mary; it has been a mother to me, so I shall never forget her, nor her missions where Our Lord has allowed me to taste the sweetness of his mercies. I am happy to have given them my health; and I hope with God’s grace I will be able to give all the strength that remains to me to serve Jesus where and as He wills. (Merci-Favre, 30.03.1868, OPS III, 496).
Sr Marie Rose
(1839 - 1912)
MINI-PORTRAITS OF THE PIONEERS

X. SISTER MARIE ROSE
Jeanne-Marie Autin 1839-1912

At 15 years of age, Jeanne-Marie entered a TORM, founded in 1854 in her home village of Jonzieux by the Abbé Pierre-Antoine Richard. One of four founding members, she made profession in 1855. On hearing Bishop Bataillon’s appeal for help in Oceania, she discovered a call within her first call - to live Marist religious life in mission beyond her own country.

On October 24, 1858 with Srs Marie Augustin and Marie de la Merci, she left from Bordeaux, after renewing her profession. Fr Yardin recommended her for her good judgement and leadership qualities, but warned that her formal education was limited (cf. Yardin-Poupinel, 06.10.1858, OPS 1, 95). Despite this limit and the inadequacy she felt, with a tendency to discouragement and mild depression in her early years in mission, it is extraordinary all that God accomplished through her, first in Wallis, especially in caring for the sick; in Samoa in education from June 1864 until 1871; in Futuna from 1871 until 1874 in the parish and caring for Marie du Mont Carmel during her last years; finally in Wallis, for the last 37 years of her life.

Having experienced religious life, rooted in the Society of Mary, before coming to Oceania, Marie Rose longed to be a perpetually professed religious in a recognised congregation. When told by Bishop Bataillon that “they were not religious”, she was deeply hurt. She could have made profession in 1871 with Marie de la Miséricorde when the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions arrived in Samoa, but declined as she had not made a proper novitiate. Nor could she accept Marie de la Miséricorde as superior under these conditions. They knew one another too
well! She was sent to Futuna but when Marie du Mont Carmel died (August 1873), Bishop Bataillon decided there would be no more sisters there.

In May 1874, on passing through Apia, Marie Rose finally made profession as a Sister of Our Lady of the Missions, after which she was re-assigned to Wallis with three companions. After hearing of the problems with the Society of Mary, she did not renew her vows in 1877. Marie Rose may not have had much formal education, but she had good judgement and a natural wisdom. She still longed for religious life that would express the complete gift of herself to God, in the spirit of Mary in whom she always had great confidence. She considered neither that offered by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, nor that of the Sisters of Our Lady of Oceania, to be in keeping with what was clear to her as her vocation. She awaited the return of Bishop Lamaze. On 3 September 1881, he received her perpetual vows in the newly-erected TORM. He also affirmed her formation of the first young Wallisian women, by receiving seven of her twenty-two postulants into the novitiate on 7 September.

Sr Marie Denyse who lived with her in Wallis (1893-1898) paid tribute to her pioneering work which, though ‘sown in tears’ earlier, was then bearing abundant fruit, especially in the area of formation: “Actually, it is our dear Mother Marie Rose who formed our first Sisters. She is a model of courage and energy, despite her poor health and her 35 [actually 37] years of trials and struggles, in fact, our good sister is dedication itself…” (Annales des Missions d’Océanie, p. 324). The people of Wallis also recognised this dedication over many long years as she was much loved by them.
Sr Marie de la Miséricorde and I are always in a good relationship. She suffers continually from her swollen legs but she has not had an attack of puke (elephantiasis) for a long time. The good Lord has tried her in another way. You know she had great pain in learning of the deaths in her family [her father and sister died in 1868]. Her resignation and surrender to God’s will has really been very [edifying] in these circumstances. (Rose-Poupinel, 23.04.1869*).
Unfortunately, to date we have not found a photo of Sr Marie de la Présentation
XI. SISTER MARIE DE LA PRESENTATION

Marie Brait 1834-1886

Marie de la Présentation, the daughter of a naval officer, was already a Third Order member in Toulon, when she decided to make the radical gift of herself as a missionary in Oceania. The last of the pioneers, she left France in October 1860. Assigned to teaching in a school in the Ile des Pins, she spent twenty years there, about thirteen alone. In 1881 she was sent again alone, to Pouebo, where she ran an excellent school. Probably early in 1886, she returned to St Louis where she died the following June of throat cancer. All in all, nineteen of her twenty-five years of missionary life were spent alone, but isolation did not seem to have been too much of a problem for her. She even wrote to Fr Poupinel from the Isle of Pines: “I would love to be sent alone to a mission, very far away in the middle of a primitive people, for here we’ll soon be thinking we are in Europe” (Présentation-Poupinel, 11.11.1863, Letter 4, §3, OPS II, 320).

Marie de la Présentation expressed joy in belonging to the Society of Mary, the ‘family of Mary’, and of having given herself completely through it to mission: “ever since the day Very Rev. Fr General authorised my departure for the foreign missions” (Présentation-Marie du Cœur de Jésus, 08.09.1864, Letter 5, §2, OPS II, 344). However, there is no doubt that she longed for the day when they would be “constituted real religious,” (Présentation-Poupinel, 21.09.1865, Letter 10, §2, OPS II, 391). She became increasingly impatient with what she felt was a lack of organisation for the Tertiaries: “It seems to me that God cannot be pleased with the little interest that is taken in souls he has chosen to go to him by the way of a higher perfection” (ibid.).
With Fr Poupinel’s encouragement, she became a novice in the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions but, for reasons that remain obscure, decided she was not called to that congregation. She encouraged local vocations and wanted the possibility of religious life for the young women of the islands desirous of this way of life.

Though rather serious and reserved by nature, Marie de la Présentation was capable of deep friendship as that with Marie de la Croix shows, despite the difficulties in the beginning in their relationship. The latter admired her gifts and appreciated her ability to think for herself (cf. Croix-Poupinel, 05.07.1866, Letter 76, OPS III, 427). However, some of the missionaries found her “uncommunicative”; others “obstinate in her ideas”.

Her relationship with Mary was one of love and confidence. Writing to Fr Favre after arriving in Sydney, she says: “I will content myself with proclaiming Mary’s power, pleased to say she took care of us beyond all our hopes” (Présentation-Favre, 02.02.1861, Letter 2, §1, OPS II, 221).

Marie de la Présentation was a natural leader and a good missionary with great energy and zeal, ‘excessive’ for Fr Rougeyron, when he thought she was taking over some of the work of the priest in the Ile des Pins! Her bishop acknowledged that she “possessed very great qualities” (cf. Fraysse-Poupinel, 1881, OPS IV, 782). A gifted woman and well-educated for her times, Marie de la Présentation gave herself without counting the cost until God called her to Himself in August 1886.
You are right in thinking that I left that much loved Ouzélie in tears. However, I could not say for sure which of the two feelings, sadness or joy, in the light of faith has been uppermost. I needed a good shock to make me come out of my apathy and spiritual lethargy. My bishop, very dear to me because he was the instrument of God’s goodness towards me, brought it about. I have thanked him for that, and again with you, Father, I am happy to bless divine Providence for this grace. Here in Pouebo I have a wonderful opportunity to gallop along the royal road of the Holy Cross. [...] (Présentation-Poupinel, 03.03.1882*).
HISTORICAL TIMELINE
This outline is not intended to include all the details of the situation of the pioneers as it evolved but simply to highlight some points of reference in chronological order.

**THE DEPARTURE OF THE PIONEERS (1845-1860)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>15 November</td>
<td><em>Marie Françoise Perroton</em> left Le Havre on the <em>Arche d’Alliance</em> which arrived in Wallis 23 October 1846.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>At Tahiti, she learned of her enrolment in the projected Third Order of Mary from Fr Eymard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>24 August</td>
<td>She left Wallis and began in Kolopelu, Futuna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>30 November</td>
<td>Departure from London: the first group for Central Oceania of the <em>Ladies of Charity of the Third Order of Mary</em> (TOM):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sr Marie de la Pitié</em> (Françoise Bartet),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sr Marie de la Miséricorde</em> (Jeanne Marie Basset),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sr Marie de la Sainte Espérance</em> (Jeanne Albert).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>Arrival in Futuna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31 May</td>
<td><em>Marie Françoise Perroton</em> was received as a novice in the TOM and took the name of <em>Sr Marie du Mont Carmel</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 August</td>
<td>Fr Poupinel received <em>Sr Marie du Mont Carmel</em>'s profession in the</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
HISTORICAL TIMELINE

27 August

TOMMO. He promulgated the Rule for the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of Mary in the Mission of Central Oceania.

Sr Marie de la Miséricorde and Sr Marie de la Ste Espérance were sent to Wallis.

1858 27 July

Departure from London: the 2nd group for New Caledonia:

Sr Marie de la Croix (Pélagie Phelippon),
Sr Marie de la Paix (Marie Virginie Jacquier),
Sr Marie de Bon Secours (Clotilde Viannay).

2 December

Arrival in New Caledonia.

1858 24 October

Departure from Bordeaux: the 3rd group for Central Oceania:

Sr Marie Rose de Lima (Jeanne Autin),
Sr Marie Augustin (Jacqueline Claray-Fromage),
Sr Marie de la Merci (Marie Meissonier).

1859 28 June

Arrival in Wallis.

1860 25 October

Departure from London for New Caledonia of Sr Marie de la Présentation (Marie Brait).

1861 18 February

Arrival in New Caledonia.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Official inauguration in Lyon of a novitiate entrusted to Sr Marie du Coeur de Jésus (Euphrasie Barbier) under the authority of the superior general, sm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>M. Marie du Coeur de Jésus began working on the Constitutions for the Sisters of the TOM. The text was communicated to the pioneers; reactions were invited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Arrival in Sydney for Villa Maria of three Sisters formed in Lyon who were in community with Sr Marie de la Merci. Before long there were difficulties in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 April</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Merci takes the habit of Our Lady of the Missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 August</td>
<td>Departure from Futuna: Sara and Silenia for Sydney for formation under Sr Marie de la Merci.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Présentation (New Caledonia) and Sr Marie de la Ste Espérance (New Caledonia) were accepted as novices in Our Lady of the Missions. Neither made profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 February</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Merci made profession in Our Lady of the Missions in Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Croix made profession in Our Lady of the Missions in New Caledonia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Merci withdrew from Our Lady of the Missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March</td>
<td>Sr Marie du Mt Carmel and Sr Marie de la Pitié made profession in Our Lady of the Missions in Futuna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 June</td>
<td>The Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions received from the SC for Bishops and Regulars a Brief of Praise that made no mention of the Society of Mary. This signified their autonomy and, in fact, a separation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Arrival in Tonga of three Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions from Lyon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 March</td>
<td>In New Caledonia, Sr Marie de la Croix withdrew from Our Lady of the Missions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 April</td>
<td>Arrival in Samoa of three Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. Sr Marie de la Miséricorde was named superior of the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 August</td>
<td>Sr Marie de la Miséricorde made profession in Our Lady of the Missions in Apia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1872 28 April  
**Sr Marie de la Ste Espérance** died in Nouméa.

1 November  
Entry of the first two Samoans as postulants.

1873 9/10 August  
**Sr Marie du Mont Carmel** died in Futuna.

end of January  
Arrival of M. Marie du Cœur de Jésus in Samoa,

February-March  
visit to Wallis and Futuna,

mid-March  
return to Samoa with **Sr Marie de la Pitié** and **Sr Marie Rose**.

6 May  
**Sr Marie Rose** made profession in **Our Lady of the Missions** in Apia.

12-20 May  
Provincial Chapter of Oceanian communities NDM.

20 May  
**Sr Marie de la Pitié** was sent to Tonga with two other Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

end of May  
M. M. du Cœur de Jésus returned to Wallis with **Sr Marie Rose** and three other Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions.

1875 1 February  
M. M. du Cœur de Jésus returned to Samoa. Difficulties arose between her and Bishop Elloy, Vicar Apostolic, because of their different ways of understanding religious missionary life.
26 March  M. M. du Cœur de Jésus left Samoa with two Sisters.

*Sr Marie de la Miséricorde withdrew from Our Lady of the Missions.* She decided to remain at Savalalo with: Sr Marie de l’Enfant Jésus, Marie de Sts Martyrs, Marie St Hilaire, Marie St Vincent (novice), Marie St André (novice) and a postulant. There, with the agreement of Bishop Elloy, she began a diocesan Congregation.

12 September  In New Caledonia, profession of the first three *Petites Filles de Marie* (*Little Daughters of Mary*).

1877 June  *Sr Marie Rose withdrew from Our Lady of the Missions.*

12 December  In Samoa, *Sr Marie de la Miséricorde* and the Sisters of her community adopted a distinctive habit and were known as the *Congregation of Our Lady of Oceania.* (Right up until her death in 1904, *Sr Marie de la Miséricorde* remained in this foundation and refused to join the TORM).

1878 16 April  Directives came from the SC of Propaganda Fide following the difficulties in Samoa. The Congregation of Our Lady of the
Missions was asked to withdraw from the Vicariate of the Navigators (Samoa).

Each professed sister was invited to choose her future (cf. OPS V, doc. 53B).

21 November  Profession in Our Lady of Oceania of the first two Samoans.

22 November  Death of Bishop Elloy in France.

1877-1878  Four volunteers recruited by Bishop Vitte arrived in New Caledonia. Three became TOMMO:
Srs Marie St Charles (Roy),
Marie St Joseph (Peysson)
Marie du Sacré Cœur (Faure).
Sr Marie du Calvaire (Villermet) left soon after arriving.

1879  August  Bishop Lamaze named Vicar Apostolic of Central Oceania (Tonga, Wallis and Futuna) and Administrator of the Navigators, left for Europe for his episcopal ordination and to settle certain questions, including that concerning the Sisters.

1880  February  
_Sr Marie de la Pitié withdrew from Our Lady of the Missions_ but remained in Tonga. Sr Marie des Anges left to return to the community of Our Lady of the Missions in New Zealand.
ORGANISATION OF THE THIRD ORDER REGULAR OF MARY

1880 May Agreement in Lyon between Bishop Lamaze and the Superior General of the Marist Fathers to establish a **Third Order Regular of Mary for the Missions of Oceania.**

A house of formation had to be set up in France to prepare the Sisters. Fr Méchin took responsibility for it and in October a house was bought at St Brieuc.

September Bishop Lamaze left London for Oceania. Three Tertiaries embarked with him.

1880 8 December In Sydney, they, as well as Sr Marie Victor (Silenia) received the habit of the TORM. Bishop Lamaze received the three vows of Sr Marie Xavier (Magnillat), and the vow of obedience of Srs Marie St Pierre (Reirieux) and Marie Delphine (Méchin).

31 December The minutes of the Episcopal Council of New Caledonia mention Bishop Fraysse’s agreement to the plan for the establishment of the TORM.

1881 January Fr Bréhéret, prefect apostolic of Fiji, also expressed agreement.
May  Mme des Groues accepted to be directress of formation.

3 September  **Institution in Wallis of the Third Order Regular of Mary as a diocesan congregation, for the sisters of the Apostolic Vicariates of Central Oceania and of the Navigators by Bishop Lamaze.**

_Sr Marie Rose_ was called to make her perpetual vows.
Two other Sisters, Marie des Saints Martyrs et Marie François d’Assise made vows for one year.
(On passing through Tonga, Bishop Lamaze had already received the vows of _Sr Marie de la Pitié._)

7 September  Seven Wallisian postulants were received as novices in the TORM.

10 September  Departure from London of four postulants (after only 3 months of formation at St Brieuc!...) They were: 
_Sr Marie de Jésus_ (Mainguy),
_Sr Marie Louise_ (Marion),
_Sr Marie du Sacré Cœur_ (Pincemin),
_Sr Marie de la Présentation_ (Marie).

1882 February  Arrival in Fiji of _Sr Marie François d’Assise_ (Heffernan). She left in April.
March
Arrival in Fiji of Sr Marie de Jésus, Sr Marie du Sacré Cœur and Sr Marie de la Présentation.

July
Official opening of the formation house in St Brieuc.

1883 May
A Draft Rule for the Postulants of the Third Order Regular of Mary preparing to leave for the Missions of Oceania was sent to St Brieuc. This draft stated clearly the aim and the conditions of the undertaking (cf. OPS V, 12a).

1883 and 1884
Two groups of sisters left after receiving formation at St Brieuc: they were Tertiaries who received the habit of the TORM, but had still not made profession before their departure.
In 1883: Srs Marie St Clair (Mainguy), Marie Lazare (Castagnet), and Marie Magdeleine (Thomaré).
In 1884: Srs Marie Ste Anne (Dupart) and Marie Marguerite (Faure).

1885
The Vicars Apostolic delegated the Superior General of the Society of Mary to receive the vows of the Sisters in their name. From then on the house of formation at St Brieuc became officially the novitiate of the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Mary.
Finally, this novitiate would assure the necessary formation and unity of spirit among Sisters missioned to the different islands of Oceania.

Later, these diocesan congregations could be united into the one Congregation under the name of: Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary.

Established from:

*Our Pioneer Sisters from correspondence 1836-1885, Vols 1-IV, General Administration, Rome 1973-75.*


*Origins in Oceania, Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary, 1845-1931, Marie Cécile de Mijolla, smsm, Rome, 1984.*
EXTRACTS

FROM THE

EARLY RULES
I. THE HAPPINESS OF BELONGING TO THE THIRD ORDER


The name alone of the Third Order is enough to make us appreciate the honour of belonging to it. Third Order of Mary! that is to say, part of her privileged family. Members of the Third Order of Mary! consequently, children of predilection of this divine Mother. And this name is not an empty title: it gives a real claim on the heart of Mary, the right that children have to be specially loved, protected and heard by their mother [...].


[...] The Third Order of Mary is the work of the Church, the work of God; and those souls chosen by Mary can come to drink confidently at this new source of blessing.


[...] Third Order of Mary! This is no empty title but one that recalls for you, pious Tertiaries, both your duties and your privileges. Your duties, that is, to bear the name of Mary worthily, to honour it by the holiness of your life, by imitating
the virtues and following the example of her who is Queen of all the Angels and Saints [...] Your privileges, that is to be able to count on the special protection of the powerful Mary. In allowing her name to become your name, Mary desires above all to see you bearing it with honour; she will help you. In calling you to become part of the new family she has taken to herself, she wishes by the same token to become even, in a particular way, your mother [...]..

II. THE AIM OF THE TOM


The principal aim of the Third Order of Mary is the religious perfection of its members who are living in the secular society. It seeks especially to make of each Christian family a domestic community on the model of the Holy Family of Nazareth, living according to the same rule, one within everyone’s reach, so that all are animated by the same spirit and aim at the same goal by common means.

Its secondary aim is the perseverance of the faithful and the conversion of sinners, which its members strive to accomplish through their good example and their prayer. It also seeks in a special way the grace of holy baptism for all children recommended to it before their birth and whose names are written in a book reserved for this purpose.
III. THE SPIRIT OF THE TOM


[...]
The tender name that distinguishes the Third Order of Mary shows clearly enough in what spirit and under what powerful auspices it is destined to bring about both goals it sets itself [the sanctification of its members; the perseverance of the just and the conversion of sinners] [...].


[...]
To imitate Mary is to imitate Jesus whose most perfect image she is; to put on Mary is to put on Jesus Christ; to be united with Mary is also to be united with Jesus but to Jesus close to us, more within our reach, more adapted to our weakness, to Jesus under the traits of a mother.


Each religious congregation has its particular spirit which distinguishes it from others, and which at the same time is the reason for its existence in the church, the secret of the good that it will accomplish there and the particular path of holiness for those who belong to it.

It is obvious that the characteristic spirit of the Third Order of Mary ought to be the spirit of the Blessed Virgin, that is, her own character, the particular features of humility, simplicity, modesty, tenderness, and charity, so admirably marked out in the circumstances and actions of her life. It is by that spirit that
Marist Tertiaries ought to regulate their conduct in all that leads to their own sanctification, whether in the practice of zeal, or in their private life, or in the many relationships of their social position. Such is the privileged path of holiness traced out for them.

In consequence, the Third Order of Mary proposes to its members:

1° Truly childlike and solidly practical devotion towards the Blessed Virgin; that is, not only a tender love for this loveable Mother, a limitless confidence in her power and goodness, a burning zeal for her honour, but also and especially, habitual recourse to her all-powerful intercession, constant study and faithful imitation of her virtues, and that life of union with her, that are embodied in this motto: “All for Jesus through Mary”.

In the study and imitation of the virtues of their Most Holy Mother, all the Tertiaries of Mary must give special attention, and make a particular choice to live her chosen virtues stated above (her characteristic humility, simplicity, modesty, meekness and charity), since these are the special traits that are to inspire all the actions of their life: a simple life, humble, modest, like that of Mary with Jesus and Joseph at Nazareth; simple and edifying piety; forgetfulness of self and a willingness to be unnoticed; above all, charity, by which they can be recognised as true children of Mary, mother of Fair Love; love of God above all, and in particular of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the most holy Sacrament of the altar; sincere love of neighbour; a holy and fraternal union among the members of the Third Order, so that following the example of the first believers they may all have only one heart and one soul in the love of Jesus and Mary [...].
2° Great esteem of the interior life and of the practices necessary for this life. Without the interior life, there is no solid progress in holiness; there is but little merit, and we are absolutely incapable of ever reaching the perfection of love and the full reign of God within us [...]. With it [the interior spirit] the faithful heart tastes an ineffable peace, and each day acquires immense spiritual riches. It is the secret of the extraordinary sanctity of Mary in her simple and communal life in the eyes of the world, since it is of her that it has been said: “All the glory of the king’s daughter is from within”. It must be able to be said of every Third Order member [...].

4° Finally, an ardent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, lived by the Tertiary according to his [her] vocation, the attraction of grace and the spirit of the most blessed Virgin Mary. Not everyone can preach the word of God and exercise the ministry of the apostles, but all can preach by example, and convert by prayer and sacrifice; and Mary calls each one of her children to this apostolate [...].
IV. CONSECRATION OF A NOVICE


O Mary, mother of Fair Love and Holy Hope, desiring with all my heart to work more perfectly for my salvation in the vocation where God has placed me, I dare to ask you to take me under your motherly protection, and to receive me as a novice in the Third Order which, the first, has the happiness of bearing your name, and which makes it a special duty to imitate your virtues, above all your vigilant purity, your delicate charity, your love of the simple and hidden life and your spirit of prayer [...].

V. ZEAL


[...] This imitation of Mary should be practised by all Christians but, above all, by those who have the honour of walking beneath her banner, of bearing her name, and who are part of her much loved family [...].


Zeal is an ardent desire to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls: it is the flame of the purest charity [...]. The Christian, animated by zeal, tries to make his [her] gift of
self day by day more perfect by making continual growth in love and in perfection; but he [she] is not content to burn with love for God, he [she] also wishes that all others love God in the same way. A thousand times, from the depths of the heart still more than from the lips, this cry comes: Holy be your name! May you be known, blessed and adored everywhere in the whole universe. Your kingdom come!


[...] It is not only in order to be conformed to the good pleasure of God, it is to obey his formal will and by command, that we are obliged to keep in our hearts the fire of zeal for his glory and for the salvation of our brothers [and sisters]: You will love the Lord your God with your whole soul, with your whole heart, with all your strength. That is the first and the greatest of all the commandments. How could we live this if we are deprived of zeal? Can we love God ardently and not desire deeply that God may be everywhere adored? [...].

You will love your neighbour as yourself. This is the second commandment which is similar to the first. The love that you owe your neighbour gives birth necessarily to zeal for his [her] salvation. This means that he [she] does not truly love others, if they do not desire their greater good and do not have it at heart to contribute towards it [...].


If we want our zeal to be meritorious for us and effective for our neighbour, it must be accompanied by certain conditions. We will draw attention to those that are the most indispensable:
EXTRACTS FROM THE EARLY RULES

1° It must be supernatural in its motivation and its means [...]. The glory of God and the spiritual good of our brothers [and sisters]. This alone is what true zeal seeks [...].

2° Our zeal should be ardent and generous. The children of Mary have a beautiful model of this generosity in the life of their mother. The ardent love for poor sinners with which her heart was filled brought her to the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem, to make the offering of herself to the Eternal Father of the One who was to redeem them [...].

3° Because of the ardour that animates it, our zeal must also be combined with prudence that directs it, otherwise it could become harmful rather than being for others’ benefit. This prudence is not worldly wisdom, which produces indolence, inertia or discouragement; but the wisdom that comes from God, the spiritual prudence that does not rush anything [...].

Finally, zeal must be gentle and patient [...]. Do not forget the lesson of the Master: “Learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart” [...].
JMJ

AMDG and BVA*

[...]

1° Never lose sight of your apostolate and the sublime mission that is entrusted to you.

2° Use the time of your voyage to prepare yourselves for your apostolate by prayer, study and quiet patience, in enduring generously all the trials of the voyage.

3° Each day be very faithful, as far as possible, to all the exercises of piety: meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading, the rosary, and, if possible, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, etc. When you are unable to do these at a certain time, do them at another.

[...]

5° Since you are members of the one Society, having the same vocation and the same aim, redouble your efforts for unity, harmony and charity so that truly you will have only one heart and one soul.

6° In a spirit of charity, be happy to render one another all the services of which you may have need.
EXTRACTS FROM THE EARLY RULES

7° Obey with joy the one appointed to be your superior during the voyage.

8° Conduct yourselves in such a way that all the crew as well as the passengers may be edified by the way you behave and have a good impression of the holiness of your life.

9° Do not let a day pass without consecrating yourselves, your voyage and your mission, to Her whom the Church rightly calls "Star of the Sea" and "Queen of Apostles".

[...]

* under the auspices (patronage) of the Blessed Virgin
Chapter 1

1° The Sisters of Charity, by their profession in the Third Order of Mary, have become the privileged daughters of the august Queen of Heaven, and in consecrating themselves to a distant and difficult apostolate, they have acquired a special right to the protection of the Blessed Virgin who will watch over them, support them and love them with the love of a Mother.

2° For their part, the sisters will strive to render to their Glorious Queen, to their loving Mother, all the honour of which they are capable. They will try above all to imitate her virtues, and to live her spirit in carrying out the duties of their holy vocation.

3° The rules and constitutions of the Third Order of Mary approved on 31 May, 1857, by His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyon, in virtue of an apostolic delegation, and the directory which follows them, will be for the sisters the expression of the will of God and of Mary for them; they will make it their duty to keep them with generous fidelity and so to prove their love and their gratitude to their heavenly Mother.

4° Called to the honour of working to extend the Kingdom of Jesus Christ and to make Mary known to the ends of the earth,
the sisters will consider themselves blessed and rejoice in the honour which is granted them. Such a grace carries obligations, so the sisters will understand that they need solid and generous virtue in keeping with the excellence and the sublimity of their apostolate.

5° They will take care, above all in moments of discouragement and sadness, to ask themselves often with St Bernard: “Why have you come to this distant country? Why did you leave your homeland? [...] Is it not to dedicate yourself to the glory of God, to sacrifice yourself for the salvation of souls redeemed at the price of our Lord Jesus Christ?”

6° In order to rekindle their zeal constantly, they will often raise their thoughts and desires towards heaven, where they will find the reward of their sacrifices and where they will have a peaceful and glorious rest after their work, unending happiness after the sorrows of this life.

7° The sisters will strive to keep alive and to grow each day in a tender and generous love for Our Lord, for whom they have left all. This love will be their consolation, their healing, their strength. They will seek in the Blessed Eucharist the nourishment of this love, of this simple and generous zeal that should distinguish them.

8° A loving piety towards God, a childlike confidence in Mary and an affectionate devotion to St Joseph will support them always in the difficulties of their vocation. Trials are the surest signs of God’s works, especially those which are to do much good; they are a necessary condition for virtue, the measure of its reward.
9° The Sisters should make a particular study of the virtues of Mary, especially those which are explained in the first book of the second part of the Manual, and they will try courageously to live them. They will meditate on them, and will ask for them in prayer.

10° Regularity and fervour in the spiritual exercises and practices of piety indicated in the following chapters will be for them a powerful help towards growth in these virtues and will increase their merit.

[...]

Chapter 4

1° The sisters are bound to God by the vow of obedience, a vow that in reality obtains for them the essential advantages of the religious life. By obeying His Lordship the Vicar Apostolic or his representatives, they will be sure of doing God's will. By doing this they will increase their merits, will have peace of heart, and most sure hope. Daughters of the most obedient of creatures, they will never forget in practice that obedience is more pleasing to God than the conversion of sinners and unbelievers. The sister tertiary of Mary who is generously obedient is sure of attaining heaven.

2° They will practise obedience, above all, in the tasks entrusted to them, and for which they have come so far, such as the education of girls and other persons of their sex, and the care of the sick. The goal that they will set for themselves will not be merely to teach reading, writing or sewing etc., or to heal a sore or cure a sickness; it will be to win the hearts of these people
little by little, and by patience bring them to love the gentle and
holy Christian virtues, the practice of which assures happiness in
this life as well as in the next.

3° For the schools they will consider it a duty to follow the
advice and directions of the Vicar Apostolic or the Superior of
the station. This applies also to the care of the sick. Except in
rare cases, of which the superior will be the judge, they will not
visit the sick in their homes.

4° One essential disposition needed in order to do good
among the peoples of the islands of Oceania is a great patience
in supporting them and listening to them. The sisters will be
inspired by Our Lord’s way of acting and His attitudes. They will
try to moderate their natural activity, their brusqueness of
manner, their haste. What merits they will have the opportunity
of acquiring!

5° Like Our Lord, before He preached, they will begin by
giving good example which will be a powerful sermon. One
could say that example alone would be sufficient to do a great
amount of good among these newly-converted people.

6° In a love of simplicity and unity and to help them
remember the holiness of their vocation, the sisters will wear the
accepted habit; it will procure greater respect for them from the
faithful.

7° Although the sisters are not obliged to practise religious
poverty, the spirit of this virtue is necessary for them. In view of
their perfection, and for the sake of harmony among them, they
are advised to practise a real and generous detachment [...].