

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL ST. JOSEPH LE PUY- EN - VELAY

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Who Are We ?

Mary Diesbourg, London, Ontario

Born November 23, 1942, in Windsor , Ontario, Canada, I am one of five children of Anne Marie Bastien and Leo Diesbourg. I entered the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London, July 2, 1960. After novitiate, I earned a Bachelor's degree in Honours English and French, and a Master's degree in Education. During my years in ministry, I have served in secondary education, as a teacher of English, French, and Religion, and as Principal of our Boarding School, and later as a teacher to Inuit youth in the high Arctic. I spent 16 years in ministry within the Congregation, as Vocation Director, Director of Initial commitment and Formation Director, and from 1995 until 2003, served as General Superior. Our history, and spirituality have always been a passion in my life. For some years I served on the Canadian Federation Medaille Team, planning and giving talks, retreats, and workshops on our history and charism, and was on the team for the Life Program of the US. Federation, in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1989. While in leadership, as President of the Canadian Federation I attended the Colloque in Le Puy, in 2000, where the idea of the International Centre surfaced. Since then, I have been privileged to represent the Canadian Federation on the committee planning the Centre, and welcome the opportunity to help bring to reality this dream for all of us throughout the world: "to be and to act more as one".

Sheila Holly, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Being in France, especially being in Le Puy, stirs my Celtic heart and spirit. My parents, Bridget O'Donnell and James Holly, were Irish immigrants to the USA. Their deep love of God and respect for education influence my sister and me to the present day. For me, those gifts took root and deepened when I entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia in 1961 and later completed Masters Degrees in English and Theology. Using those educational opportunities, I taught for 30 years (students ages 8-18), served in parish ministry for five years, and ministered in Congregational services for 10 years as Formation Team Member and Regional/Area Delegate. As a trained spiritual director, I have been involved in individual spiritual direction and retreat ministry. Over the years, I have presented workshops on our charism and on Celtic spirituality. A deep love of our charism and a fascination with our historical roots led me to respond to the invitation to serve on the International Centre's first team. Here I feel daily the draw of Medaille and our first sister-founders as well as that of France's and Le Puy's early inhabitants, the Celts. In so many ways and at so many levels, I feel that I am at home.

Josette Gocella, Erie, Pennsylvania

Though "Josette" to most of the natives here sounds French, that is my name in religion, and I actually live and breathe my Italian heritage. Mom, Louise Viola, was born in Italy, and Dad, Alfred Gocella was the son of Italian immigrants. And so, while many passions have been tamed or transformed through 50 years of life as an SSJ from Erie, Pennsylvania, I still approach most endeavors, including membership on the Centre's first team, with excitement, vision and sense of purpose. Educationally, I have a Masters degree in English and another in Religious Studies; training in Spiritual Direction and retreats; a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education; and some initial language study of French and Spanish. Ministry experience includes 22 years in teaching and administration in the Erie diocese, primarily in secondary education; then, 25 years as Pastoral Associate in parishes in Memphis, TN, and Louisville, KY. Congregational ministry has been in Formation work essentially with temporary professed sisters. When time permits, I love to read, cook, hike, sew,

travel, garden. That Italian passion comes through in my affinity for the arts and in creative expression in a variety of ways including living the mission of the Centre into reality.

What Is Happening?

When the festivities of our Opening Day and Dedication Ritual settled and our last few guests left Foyer Saint Joseph, a new band of faithful began to arrive. The first of these has been in our steady stream of workers. Much had been done to have the house readied for October 15: plumbing checked, new showers and bathrooms installed, heating turned on, stage one cleaning completed. But much remains to be done in a house closed for nearly two years.

Under the direction of M. Arnaud, project manager, the work continues. An entourage of professionals keeps us company most days. There have been inspectors and technicians for the elevator. Telecom service personnel have put in a new phone line and a line for the FAX. Electricians have upgraded wiring needed in the room we are using as an office. There have been painters, computer gurus and then our ever-faithful plumber who patiently tries to adapt new equipment to an older system and finds daily challenges in doing this even after 28 years of service to these buildings.

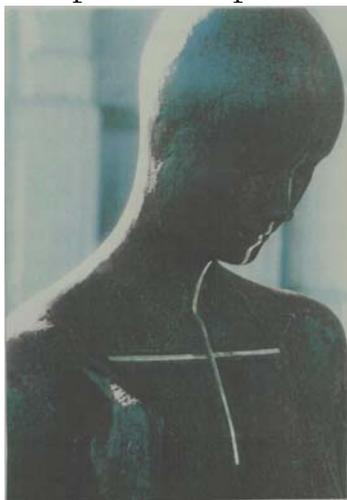
French Support

S. Marie Paul Rascle and the sisters of the Institute in Le Puy support us in these endeavors in many ways. S. Jean Francois and her team of workers have helped us to rearrange and redistribute furniture. S. Simone Saugues assists us with her expert knowledge of English, French and the culture. And S. Odile helps us once a week with housework.

Into this sea of marvelous workers that we usually *expect* to appear, come delightful people whom we don't expect. Former workers at Foyer St. Joseph, including the woman who cooked for the sisters here when it was a residence for Le Puy sisters, have dropped by to visit. We treasure their stories of their time with the sisters here and their help with some of our "mysterious" kitchen utensils and tools. Neighbors in the surrounding "pavillons," lovely little single homes, have offered to help us with whatever they can. One gentleman began by bringing us a much needed telephone directory, something normally ordered. He regaled us with stories of his family's friendship with the sisters over the years. Another couple have expressed their joy that sisters have returned to Foyer Saint Joseph. They have a niece living in Philadelphia who will be back in France for Christmas. Sheila is hoping to meet her! On December 12 we hosted an Open House and met about 35 of our "dear neighbors."

Guests and their Gifts

And our sister guests! S. Catherine Fromager, Lyon, has made the two hour trip repeatedly to help us with phones, computers, and lap tops, as well as special purchases needed for the house. When we picked Mary up in Lyon on her return from Canada, we met S. Gloria Philip, Superior General of Argentina, who returned to Le Puy with us. In connection with a conference in Rome, Gloria wanted to meet as many sisters as possible, and to be in communion with them. She brought us greetings from sisters in Argentina and special gifts, including a statue of Our Lady of Loucan. We were so happy to show her our "family tree," on display in our community room since the Dedication. This tree was done by a sister artist of Argentina. Gloria's brief stay with us put our hearts on fire with a new meaning of "communio."



In the following weeks, sister visitors from Chambéry— Benedict, Denise, and Antonesca from Brazil, and later, Madina from Bolivia, and Georgette— inspired us with their life, and their passionate love for the mission. In addition to their own beautiful spirits, they brought into our circle the beauty of the Chambéry sisters who ministered in Iceland and who "shone from within with

the love of God.” This beautiful phrase lives in the statue of the Lutheran artist who spoke of the sisters that way and who captured this profound truth in the sculpture, (pictured on page 2) commissioned for the 100th Anniversary of the arrival of the sisters in Iceland. Later still, Baden Sisters, Lynn and Mary, graced us with their enlivening presence and their enthusiasm for living into the charism in this new century. Their experience of visiting the Little Kitchen sparked table conversation that touched our hearts, shaped our prayer, and deepened our awareness of the presence of God’s Spirit alive and active in all.

Where Is It Happening?

Our home, the International Centre of the Congregations of St. Joseph, has kept the original name of the building, “Foyer St. Joseph,” in its address, since one of the meanings of “foyer” is “hearth.” The Sisters of the French Institute are allowing us to use the house. We are located in Aiguilhe, a small historical area on the edge of Le Puy, but within a ten-minute walk of the hearth or kitchen of our first sisters.

Outdoor shutters, so like those of the homes in this country, help maintain the heat in the winter and provide safety.

Opening and closing them, morning and evening, has become an unusual kind of

ritual for us three North Americans. But the light and vistas that so many windows afford us are pure gift. Three floors comprise the central portion of the Centre though an adjacent small, quaint structure, “Pavillon,” has sleeping quarters for three. The ground floor of the main building includes a common living area, a small dining room in addition to a larger one, a kitchen, pantry/laundry, bathrooms and gathering area. The second and third floors house an oratory, bedrooms, offices, showers and bathrooms. Floors are all accessible by stairs and an elevator.

The grounds are spacious, and while already boasting apple, cherry and quince trees, berry bushes of various kinds, roses and holly, they also hold great potential for gardens. The back yard is terraced as much of the property in Aiguilhe has to be since it essentially scales a mountain; but with the rocky base, it requires more than a lawnmower to be “tamed.” One of the major blessings of the site of the Centre is the magnificent views of the city, the Chapel of St. Michel and the statue of Notre Dame de France, all of which bask in bright sunlight during the day and inspiring light at night.



How Is the Mission Unfolding?

As repair and renovation to the Centre continue, the team has eased into a rhythm of prayer, meetings, planning, upkeep and outreach to the local community. Essentially, we are also making efforts to create a spiritual home for ourselves and guests. This we are attempting to do by sharing often the “state of our hearts” about how and where we experience God daily. For the three of us who met for the first time in August, 2004, we are finding God’s presence often in the gifts of one another and in the mutual commitment and visions we all share. But the utter helpfulness of all those we meet in stores, at the gas stations, in the repair persons, in our neighbors, also reveals God’s fidelity to the mission of the Centre.

That mission grounds itself in the team’s intent to study, deepen and live the spirituality of the Congregation. We pray that, in doing this ourselves, the hospitality we offer will mirror the relationship among the persons of Trinity, a globally inclusive one. We are trying to maintain an openness and

sensitivity to the customs and cultures of all who come, to learn from them and thereby continually adjust our own reality. We believe that our charism of unioning love shows us how to live in today's world, a world filled with people who hunger for peace, for union with God, and for meaning in life.

Since coming together in mid October, we have been busy dreaming and planning for future programs to be held here at Centre International St. Joseph. Using prayer and reflection on the vision statement, and the dreams and wishes we have heard expressed by the committee members, congregations and individuals, we have begun the work of shaping that dream into reality.

Summer Program at the Centre, 2005

The Board has asked the Team to offer during the summer of 2005, "a small but significant international program". While details of dates, and the theme are still in the development stage, we envision, probably in the early part of July, a program which will entail interfacing some input on our history, spirituality and charism, with the realities and urgent needs of our times. We hope to invite each Federation and each International Congregation, and Argentina, to send two participants, giving us a total of up to 16 participants, and ensuring a cross-cultural, and global experience. We imagine the most vital part of any program here at the Centre, being the sharing of experiences, stories and world views across cultures and languages. This will require translation services, and much mutual acceptance and understanding. This very interchange is the greatest richness of our Centre.

Retreats, Times of Reflection

Some sisters have already asked about coming to make retreat. We see this as an essential and important part of our ministry. We will be planning some retreat experiences as our program takes shape. In addition, we welcome Sisters, Associates, and friends to make private retreats here, as the schedule of the house and space permit. We are all three qualified spiritual directors and welcome the opportunity to companion those who wish this service.

Pilgrims and All Who Thirst

We welcome Sisters, Associates and friends, who wish to visit Le Puy and the spaces sacred to our shared history. We do not ourselves plan the itinerary or accompany pilgrim groups, but are happy to offer any information available which might be of assistance. If you wish to stay at the Centre, please plan to book well in advance and wait for confirmation from us before considering your space here secure. We have a total of 12 beds available for guests. Accommodations are simple but adequate.

Other Programs: Ideas and dreams for other programs abound, including short and long programs, sabbatical time, volunteer service opportunities, etc. and we welcome any ideas you may wish to suggest. At this point, we simply have not had sufficient time to put flesh on any of these. We do hope to produce a brochure sometime within the next few months.

Bookings, Stipends

We ask that you address bookings to: centre.international@wanadoo.fr. We have calculated that our minimal costs for bed and breakfast are approximately 25 Euros/person. Additional meals would add to that base amount. From this initial estimate, we are suggesting a daily offering of somewhere between 25 and 50 Euros, as you can manage.

So many have been asking us how we are spending our days. These are a few of the highlights of very full, very busy days at Centre International. We have been spending that time gazing on the Face of God revealed to us by so many fine workers, reflected to us by so many of our dear neighbors, shining through to us in the lives and gifts of our beloved sisters. We are being blessed over and over again in this land, this town, of our beginnings. From this sacred place, we send you our warmest wishes and prayers for a Happy Christmas and Blessed New Year.

“Be utterly given to God by a holy self-surrender . . . utterly in God by a continuing effort to be more conscious of God’s presence” Maxim 24