

**Blessed Marie Louise Trichet**  
(1684 - 1759)

**St. Montfort's Spiritual Daughter and  
Co-Foundress of the Daughters of Wisdom**



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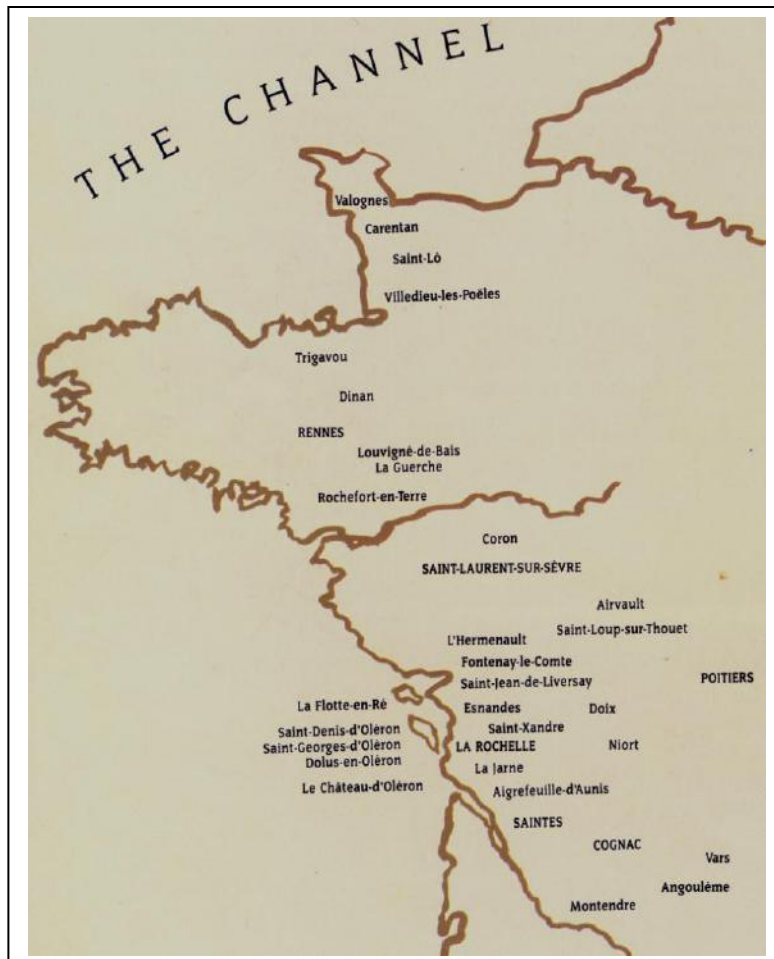
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## A Short Biography of Blessed Marie Louise Trichet

### Chapter 1. Childhood and adolescence (1684-1703)

#### The Background:



Poitiers is a city on the Clain river in west central France. Poitiers was founded by the Celtic Pictones tribe. St. Hilaire was the first Bishop of Poitiers (350-367). The city fell into the hands of Arian Visigoths. In 507, it came under Frankish

dominion. During the second half of the 17th century, Poitiers was a Provincial capital, an Episcopal See and a university centre. Then it had a population of eighteen thousand inhabitants. In the church of Notre-Dame-la-Grande is kept the statue of Our Lady of the Keys. Mary, according to tradition, saved the city from the English siege when she appeared with a shining face on its ramparts, in whose hands were found the keys of the city, which a traitor wanted to give to the enemy. Since that time, Mary was the guardian of the city.



Poitiers Town



Notre-Dame-la-Grande, Poitiers

**Parents:** Mr. Julian, Marie Louise's father, was son of a royal sergeant of Fontenay-le-Comte and a bailiff in the courts, studied at the University of Poitiers and became a lawyer. His parents obtained for him the post of an attorney.



Mr. Julian Trichet



Mrs. Françoise Lecoq

Mrs. Françoise Lecoq was a lady of Norman origin. Her maternal uncle, Fr. Pierre Picquet, blessed her marriage with Mr. Julian on Aug. 02, 1678 in St. John's Church, Montierneuf, Poitiers. Mr. Julian was a straightforward, quiet and honest man. He was good, kind and smiling. Mrs. Françoise was lively, impulsive and affectionate. The family was a middle class family. There were 180 lawyers for a population of eighteen thousand. There was stiff competition and hence the family was not well-off. There were financial difficulties; yet there was peace and a sense of contentment.

**Fourth child out of eight:** The first child was a girl named Jeanne. The second child was Julian and the third Elisabeth. Marie Louise was the fourth child and she was born on May 7, 1684. She was baptized the same day in the parish church of St. Etienne. There were four more children: Therese, Alexis, Claude and Françoise-Elisabeth. The mother was strict and the children were not spoiled. They grew up in the midst of serene frugality and they were provided with solid

moral education. Though strict, the mother took good care of her children.

Marie Louise had a blond head and a round face. She had dark eyebrows and bright and calm eyes. Often she was silent and timid. One day, Mrs. Trichet told her husband about this child, "What shall we do with this child? She is stupid!" Mr. Julian did not share her views; and said, "Rest assured, this little girl will do great things." He appreciated her inborn gentleness, serenity and a certain firmness.

**Studies:** Marie Louise refused to have a male tutor. She preferred to go to the Sisters' school run by Sisters. This school was in another part of the town and it was in the Basses-Treilles Street. At the age of seven, Marie Louise was sent to the school conducted by the Sisters of Ste. Jeanne de Lestonac. Marie Louise used to walk the distance to reach the school and here she learned to read and write and also to sew and also everything to lead a respectable life. She also learned elements of arithmetic, history, geography, good manners and religion. She was introduced to Marian devotion. She acquired the feminine and social accomplishments expected of a young person of quality in seventeenth-century France. In an atmosphere of simplicity and contemplation that was much to her taste, she gave free reign to her spiritual fervour.

**Deaths in the family:** Marie Louise's brother, Claude was born in 1690. The child was not healthy and it died in December 1691. Mrs. Trichet wept bitterly and the whole family felt the loss. Two years later, in November 1693, Therese died. She was eight years old and she was Marie Louise's favourite playmate. Trichet children, especially Marie Louise, became pensive. The winter was very cold; yet Marie Louise refused to warm herself at the fire place and to bring a heated brick to bed as other children did.

A few months after the death of Therese, Jeanne, the thirteen-year-old eldest, was struck by a paralysis which prevented her from moving her hand even to eat. Elizabeth and Marie Louise, on their return from school, began to rush to Jeanne's room to feed her and look into everything to make her as comfortable as possible. Marie Louise learned the art of spending long hours in the room of a sick person.

Marie Louise's passage from childhood to adolescence was spent in caring for her sick sister and in reading and studying her school books. "She refuses to warm herself on the coldest days of winter, remaining silent and cherishing so many memories. An affectionate and arduous family life removes from her character that veil of introversion that risks settling in her reserved nature. Her sensitivity is refined, and she acquires the delicate empathy that comes from having suffered and having seen her dear ones suffer." (Benedetta Papasogli, *The Story of Marie Louise Trichet*, Montfort Publications, New York, p. 7)

### **Jeanne's miraculous cure:**



In 1697, Jeanne convinced her parents to take her to Saumur to pray to Our Lady of Ardilliers. This sanctuary in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows was erected during the 17th century. There the Trichet family started a novena to beg Our Lady to cure Jeanne. "During the second Mass at which they assisted, Jeanne felt such pain that she fainted.

"Nevertheless, she sensed intense activity in her limbs as if they were developing and growing. On being brought back to the house, she was thirsty and declared that she wanted to drink unaided; they gave her a glass, which she easily

brought to her lips. In an ecstasy of joy, her mother and all present fell to their knees to thank God for the rapid and unexpected cure. The novena was concluded, during which all traces of the illness disappeared. The young girl returned to Poitiers, where witnesses who had known her as an invalid saw her walking, moving, working." (ibid, p. 8)

**After her schooling.** "Marie Louise re-enters fully into the mainstream of domestic life with its ordinary duties: taking care of the baby who is trying her first steps; weaving amid the sound of gentle evening conversation; welcoming her brothers, Julian and Alexis, home from college, proud and tired from their Latin and philosophy classes; and, once again, helping her mother pack dishes and move furniture because, in 1700, the Trichets are moving to the small parish of St. Savin, where they will live for many years." (ibid, p. 9)

Alexis, Marie Louise's younger brother, wanted to become a priest and chose Marie Louise as his confidante and told her, "My sister, you must become a Scholastica and I, a Benedict." According to Fr. Charles Besnard, her first biographer, as Marie Louise entered womanhood, "She inherited an upright, generous, and compassionate heart; a good mind; a gentle, kind nature; and a healthy body. She avoided idleness and had a marked inclination to virtue." (No. 10) She possessed a practical and lively intelligence. She possessed loyalty and sensitivity to others. She was prompt in making decisions.

Elisabeth and Marie Louise used to get up early in the morning and walk to the cathedral of St. Peter and assist at Mass daily. Marie Louise loved work and prayer. She took the Blessed Virgin Mary as her model. She belonged to a respectable family; yet the income of the family was mediocre. Hence she learned moderation, coupled with courtesy and intelligence.



**Meeting with Fr. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort:**

Marie Louise's life came to be dependent upon the life of Fr. Louise Marie de Montfort, ever since she met him towards the end of 1701. Elisabeth Trichet listened to a sermon preached by Fr. Montfort in the small church of St. Austreges-ilde. On returning home, she said to Marie Louise, "Oh! If you only knew what a beautiful sermon I just heard! The preacher was a saint!" Marie Louise asked, "Who was he?" The answer was, "He is the priest who recently became the chaplain at the hospital."

The chaplain in question was Fr. Louis Marie de Montfort. He joined the Poorhouse of Poitiers as one of the chaplains in November 1701. He did not accept a salary nor did he eat with the other chaplains. He made himself one with the poor and the sick, who were looked after there. He chose the worst room and his cassock was often torn. Every morning, he went to the town with a baskets-laden donkey and with some poor people to collect alms. He introduced the habit of distributing food thrice a day to the poor in stead of once a day. He was not like the rest of the priests. Some people started looking at him as a mad cap.

Fr. Montfort was very kind at the confessional and many people went to him for confession. Elisabeth found him a saintly priest. Marie Louise came to him towards the end of 1701, while he was in the Poorhouse. Fr. Montfort asked her, "Who sent you to me?" She replied, "It is my sister," to which, Fr. Montfort replied, "No, my daughter, it is not your sister, but the Blessed Virgin." For six months she continued to meet him, even without her parents' knowing about it. When her mother came to know about it, she told her, "I have come to know that you are going to confess to the priest in the hospital; you will become insane like him." Still Marie Louise continued to meet him seeking his guidance.

In June 1702, Fr. Montfort gathered a few people for a retreat in the hospital chapel. Marie Louise joined this group and attended the retreat. Every day Fr. Montfort named someone to read aloud during the meal. One day he asked for a volunteer. Marie Louise volunteered to read; but Fr. Montfort sent her back, rebuking her for her pride. She quietly went back and ate her meal. During the retreat, she felt called to religious life. She thought that Fr. Montfort, who had helped many women to join religious life, would help her to join a religious house. But Fr. Montfort was silent about this matter. Once she told him, "You are eager to help young women who want to become religious; I am the only one you do not help." But Fr. Montfort's reply was enigmatic, "You will be a religious, my daughter, don't worry, you will be a religious."

**Attempt to join the Canonesses of St. Augutine:** During the summer of 1702, Fr. Montfort left for Paris to help his sister, Guyonne Jeanne. During this unexpected solitude, Marie Louise with the permission of her parents joined the monastery of the Canonesses of St. Augutine as a lay Sister. This monastery was situated in Chatellerault. On entering the monastery, she put on the rough serge habit of a lay Sister. Lay Sisters had to do hard work and Marie Louise was happy to do that.

Marie Louise started her novitiate and she herself later related her experiences: "When I was sixteen or seventeen years old, I entered a community as a novice. I had been there a month when the novice mistress told me to help a lay sister in the linen room. I went and, thinking that this charge had been given me for the whole day, I remained there and did not go to the spiritual reading in the novitiate at ten o'clock. The mistress did not have me called to the reading, but when I returned she asked me why I had not been at the reading with the other novices. I did not answer,

knowing fully well that I was at fault, though unintentionally. She reprimanded me strongly, made me kneel down and, as penance, made me recite five Paters and five Aves with my arms in the form of a cross. I obeyed her without murmur and did my penance with the simplicity of a child." (C. Besnard, Biography of Marie Louise, No. 535)

Unfortunately Marie Louise fell ill. Mrs. Trichet came to know about it. She personally came to the monastery to get information about her daughter's condition. Here, she met a priest, who gave her news about the monastery that was hardly reassuring. Hence she decided to take Marie Louise home. She entered Marie Louise's cell, made her put on her own clothes, packed her bags and brought her home, never to send her back to that monastery. Marie Louise humbly resumed her place in the family.

**The Wisdom group:** By the end of the summer of 1702, Fr. Montfort came back to the Poorhouse or the General Hospital of Poitiers. The spiritual needs of the inmates were not adequately met nor was there a spiritual atmosphere. To counter this situation, Fr. Montfort gathered from the four hundred poor of the hospital some twenty young women, carefully chosen from the physically handicapped but spiritually sound, inviting them to gather daily in one room of the hospital. He named that room "Wisdom".

The Wisdom group had a rule, times of prayer and meditation. Fr. Montfort appointed a clever and virtuous, but a blind young woman as superior. In the middle of Wisdom room, he placed over-a-metre long wooden cross. Later he wrote a programme of the spiritual life based on the words of Jesus Christ. He also admitted others in good health. Thus two Brunet sisters, Marie and Catherine were admitted. Their parents belonged to a middle class family. Both died and their daughters were admitted into the Poorhouse. Catherine

was 37 years old and Marie a little older. They paid a modest rent for their rooms.

**Meetings with Fr. Montfort:** Since Fr. Montfort's return to the Poorhouse, Marie Louise started to meet him often. She was tired of delays as regards her religious life and yet she did not see any road open to her. One morning, she participated in the Mass celebrated by Fr. Montfort in the hospital chapel. Then she confronted Fr. Montfort and asked him, "When shall I be a religious?" By the tone of her voice, Fr. Montfort realized the seriousness of her question and answered her, "Very well, come and live in the hospital."

For three days Marie Louise reflected upon the above words and took a decision to follow them to the letter. Then she met Fr. Montfort and told him, "I have reflected on what you told me, and I want to come and live with the poor." His reply was, "I fear the consequences of such a step. Your entrance into this house will be difficult, I feel it already."

**Meeting Bishop Poype, President of the Hospital's Administrative Board:** Bishop Poype succeeded Bishop Girard. Marie Louise decided to meet him to get the permission to enter the General Hospital. Bishop Poype was a deeply spiritual man. Marie Louise met him, briefly told her story and expressed her desire to join the hospital. The Bishop told her, "I do not think they need a governess at the moment. However I shall present your request to the Board."

After a week, Marie Louise once again met the Bishop and the latter told her, "The gentlemen regret that there is no vacancy for a new governess." Marie Louise's reply surprised him, "Your Excellency, if those gentlemen will not admit me as a governess, perhaps they will not

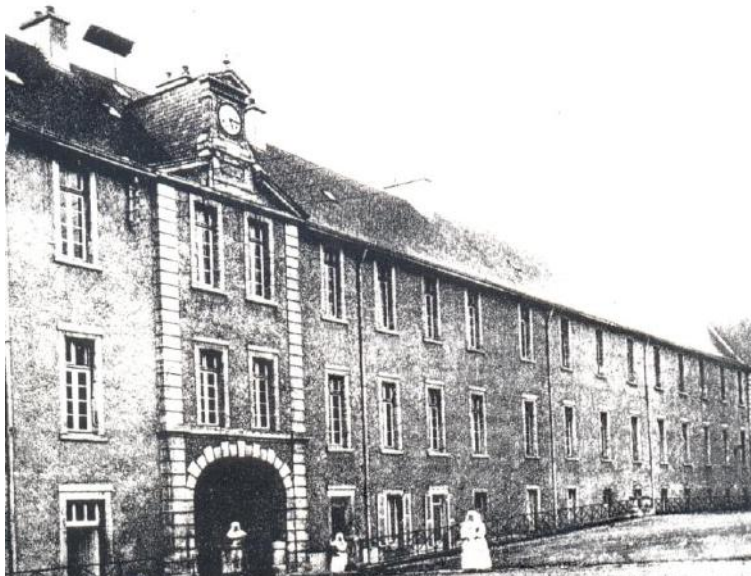
refuse to admit me as one of the poor." The Bishop told her that he would use the whole weight of his authority to obtain the entry into the hospital of this very singular postulant. Finally Marie Louise managed to obtain the needed permission for entry into the General Hospital of Poitiers. Marie Louise once again got the permission of her parents and bade good bye to them and to all her dear ones. The future was not at all clear to her. Yet she trusted in God's Providence.

\* \* \* \* \*



## **Chapter 2. Religious Vocation and Service to the Poor (1703-1715)**

The people of Poitiers did not want beggars on the streets of the town. In 1657, a General Hospital was established with one hundred and fifty beds for three hundred poor people and all the personnel that took care of them. By 1688, wings were constructed to enclose the courtyard. This hospital was in the old Montierneuf quarter of the town. While the notables and the middle class people lived on the top portion of the town, this hospital was in the lower quarters. The area was rather dark and depressing.



In 1662, King Louis XIV (Sun King) promulgated an edict ordering every city or town to have general hospital/s to accommodate the poor people. The goal was to offer a roof and food to the homeless and to introduce them to the pedagogy of work. The beggars were not allowed to roam about on the streets. Actually the beggars preferred to be free and beg for alms. Some people were appointed to hunt for

beggars, who were hiding themselves in street corners. They handcuffed, chained them and took them to the general hospitals. The Sun King imposed severe penalties. Those who were caught were subjected to flogging and to hard labour.

The Church authorities tried to improve the condition of the poor. St. Vincent de Paul wrote the regulations for the hospital of Salpêtrière in Paris. Fr. Montfort composed a hymn known as The Cry of the Poor:

1. Awake, you rich in this world's goods,  
And listen to our cries;  
We, poor, depend on you for help  
In our great miseries.  
We are one Christian family,  
A mite to us accord.
2. Our God has only made you great  
To be our fathers dear,  
Our God has furnished you with power  
So you our pleas hear.  
In comfort you enjoy yourselves  
With all you can desire,  
While you expect us to survive  
On scraps we can acquire.
3. You have fine clothes to keep you warm,  
Sleep on a feathered bed,  
But rags protect us from the cold,  
We have to beg for bread.  
Men bless you, pay you great respect,  
And show you courtesy,  
While we are cursed and knocked about  
And treated shamefully.

4. They give us nothing when we ask  
Save looks of cold disdain;  
They think it's for the common good  
To treat us as insane.  
They chase us and lay hands on us  
And put us into chains,  
They even disallow us poor  
To advertise our pains.

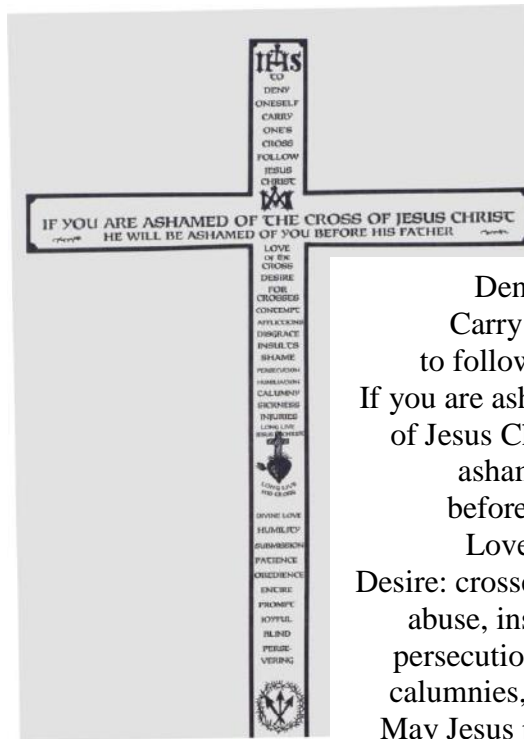
The Board of Administration admitted Marie Louise into the General Hospital as Assistant to the General Directress. She was asked to stay in the workhouse. With this arrangement the parents of Marie Louise were well content. In the first days of January 1703, Marie Louise left her home and moved to the workhouse. She was invited to pay a small fee so that she could have meals with the staff. Her mother was ready to pay this amount. But Fr. Montfort opposed this arrangement.

Fr. Montfort requested Marie Louise to join the Wisdom community. The Directress suggested that at least she be superior of the group. Once again Fr. Montfort opposed it and said, "No. Madam, she must first learn to obey." Marie Louise refused the governesses' invitation to take her meals at their table and sat among the poor for meals. She, like the poor, ate the black bread and the leftovers of the town. Once when a priest, who knew her, asked her how she ate such a food, she retorted, "Father, I find it excellent and the Holy Spirit gives it a sweetness that I have not tasted in any other food!" (Besnard, No. 35)

"The members of the Wisdom community get up at four o'clock in both summer and winter. Marie Louise and her sisters pray while waiting for the other poor people to get



up. In the room called 'wisdom', their day unfolds with monastic regularity: Mass in common, rosary, recreation, silence." (Papasogli, p. 42)



Deny oneself  
 Carry one's cross  
 to follow Jesus Christ  
 If you are ashamed of the cross  
 of Jesus Christ, He will be  
 ashamed of you  
 before His Father  
 Love the cross  
 Desire: crosses, contempt, pain,  
 abuse, insults, disgrace,  
 persecution, humiliations,  
 calumnies, illness, injuries  
 May Jesus prevail. May His  
 cross prevail.  
 Divine love, humility, patience,  
 Obedience: complete, prompt,  
 joyful, blind, persevering.

"Marie Louise is content in the shadow of the Wisdom Cross, in the only place in the hospital where souls are united, joyous, patient; where the humiliation of so many lives becomes pure gold, gold of glory, spun from hearts united to the Crucified One." (Papasogli, p. 42)

**Marie Louise's vestition:** One day, Fr. Montfort said to Marie Louise, "My daughter, I have thought of making you change your dress for a habit. I have received the gift of ten ecus from a pious person; I want to use it for you for this." (Besnard, No. 36) From the amount involved it was clear that the habit was made from very ordinary clothing. Marie Louise wanted her parents' permission before the vestition and the parents gave her the permission.



Marie Louise receiving the religious habit

A habit is a sign, a social symbol and a life programme. On Feb. 02, 1703, in the hospital chapel, Fr. Montfort blessed the ash-coloured habit and gave it to Marie Louise. She received it kneeling down. Fr. Montfort told her, "My name is Louis Marie, yours is Marie Louise; add it that of Jesus, whom you take as your sole inheritance." (Besnard No. 36) After the simple ceremony, Fr. Montfort asked her to wear it and to go for a walk around the city. This walk of Marie Louise gave rise to mocking looks and compassionate glances.

The news reached Mrs. Trichet and she rushed to hospital to meet her daughter. She questioned her, "Is it

possible that you have lost your mind? Do you want to dishonour your family with such strange clothing, so little becoming your rank? Leave all this immediately and obey your mother." (Besnard, No. 37) Marie Louise's answer was, "I wear this habit on the orders of Fr. Montfort; I cannot take it off without his permission."

Fr. Montfort was in the confessional. Marie Louise went to him and explained her problem. His answer was, "No. this is a temptation of the devil." Still Mrs. Trichet wanted to take her daughter home. Once again, Marie Louise met Fr. Montfort at the confessional. The latter told her that he would talk to her mother. Actually Fr. Montfort talked to Mrs. Trichet and settled the matter for the time being. One morning, Mrs. Trichet managed to enter the hospital and meet her daughter. Fr. Montfort happened to meet them, and he said to Marie Louise, "Sister, what are you doing here? Go to your sick people." Mrs. Trichet said, "My daughter is with me and I want to talk to her." Fr. Montfort said, "No, no, Madam, she is no longer your daughter, she belongs to God."

Mrs. Trichet went back home in an angry mood and told everything to her husband. She further wanted to place the matter before the Bishop. Her husband's reaction was, "Why to fight against the plans of Providence?" After a few months, Mrs. Trichet met the Bishop with Marie Louise. The Bishop spoke to Mrs. Trichet in severe tone, "Madam, you have tried to make your daughter lose her vocation." And turning to Marie Louise, said kindly, "My Daughter, never abandon this habit." (Besnard, No.40) Mrs. Trichet returned home sad and Marie Louise returned to the hospital.

"Marie Louise's novitiate consists of being servant of everyone, of the governesses as well as of the poor. It means carrying laundry baskets to the waters of the Boivre River

and beating and rinsing the tattered clothes of the patients and the vagabonds. It consists of working strenuously, then sitting at table and eating a meal too light for a tired body. At times, this nourishment is above all a penance: a dark broth in which float the city's leftovers. This Sr. Trichet, so young, so approachable, who never counts the cost, of whom one can ask anything, does not even have the rights of the poor. She does not need help, but rather good health and gentle manners. It is easy for the older and less kind governesses to unload their work and bad humour upon her." (Papasogli, p. 49)

**Absence of Fr. Montfort from 1703-1705:** The governesses were not happy with the Wisdom group as its existence was a living reproof to them. They complained to the Administrators stating that this group caused divisions in the hospital. The Board met and decided to suppress the group once and for all. This caused much pain to Fr. Montfort. For the general good and for the sake of peace, Fr. Montfort decided that it was preferable for him to withdraw; he gave his resignation as chaplain and left Poitiers during the spring of 1703.

Fr. Montfort reached Paris and joined the General Hospital of Salpêtrière as a guest chaplain. From there he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise: "My dear daughter in our Lord Jesus Christ, I know from what I am experiencing more than from your letter that you are continuing to pray to Jesus, your spouse, for this wretched sinner. I can only show my thanks by praying for you in return, especially when I hold the Holy of holies in my unworthy hands each day at the altar. Keep on praying, even increase your prayers for me; ask for extreme poverty, the weightiest cross, abjection and humiliations. I accept them all if only you will beg God to remain with me and not leave me for a moment because I am so weak. What wealth, what glory, what happiness would be

mine if from all this I obtained divine Wisdom, which I long for day and night! ... I firmly believe that you will be a religious. Trust and Pray." (Letter No. 15)

After four or five months of devoted work at Salpêtrière, Fr. Montfort was asked to leave. Then he went to live in a small room under a staircase of a dilapidated building on the Pot-de-fer Street. From there once again, he wrote to Sr. Marie Louise, "My dear daughter, .. I feel that you are still asking God that by crosses, humiliations and poverty I may acquire divine Wisdom. Be brave, my dear daughter, be brave. I am grateful to you; I feel the effects of your prayers for I am infinitely more impoverished, crucified and humiliated than ever. Both men and demons in this great city of Paris are waging against me a war that I find sweet and welcome. Let them slander me, scoff at me, destroy my good name, put me into prison; these are precious gifts, tasty morsels, great and wonderful things. They form the accoutrements and retinue of divine Wisdom which he brings into the lives of those in whom he dwells. When shall I possess this lovable and mysterious Wisdom? When will Wisdom come to live in me? When shall I be sufficiently equipped to serve as a place of rest for Wisdom in a world where he is rejected and without a home." (Letter No. 16)

These letters spoke about Fr. Montfort's great desire to get united to divine Wisdom. They reveal the spiritual friendship of Fr. Montfort and Sr. Marie Louise. She became his confidante. The advice given to Marie Louise was "Trust and pray." It was probably at this time, in the silence of Pot-de-Fer Street, that to answer the accusations of the world and the doubts of spiritual persons, he wrote his first book, *The Love of Eternal wisdom*. "The essence of this work dedicated to Wisdom is central to the faith experience. It is a question of the knowledge of Christ and of the journey toward union with him. The initial doctrinal summary

expands into ardent cadences of mystical language: Wisdom is sung in words that veil the nuptial mystery. Wisdom is the Spouse Whose marriage is celebrated on the Cross." (Papasogli, p. 58)

**Death of Jeanne:** On March 14, 1704, Jeanne, who was cured by the Blessed Virgin Mary, died at the age of twenty four years. Marie Louise was with her parents during this time of great loss.

**Return of Fr. Montfort to the Poorhouse as its Director:**

While Fr. Montfort was at the Pot-de-Fer Street, the Archbishop of Paris requested him to restore peace among the hermits of Mount Valerien. While he was in Paris the poor of the Poorhouse of Poitiers wrote a letter to Fr. Leschassier, who was the spiritual director of Fr. Montfort. "We, four hundred poor people, humbly beg you in the name of God's greatest love and glory to send back to us our venerable pastor, the one who so loves the poor, Father Grignon. Alas, Father, we are feeling more than ever the loss that we have suffered, especially from the point of view of the salvation of our souls. As for the goods of this world, this is not what is troubling us: Providence sees to our needs, and we believe that through his prayers, Father Grignon has obtained for us a new superior who has the qualities one could ever want for the administration of the material aspects of our lives.... The Poor of Poitiers."

Bishop Poype also wrote to Fr. Montfort asking him to return to the Poorhouse of Poitiers. On March 23, 1705, Fr. Montfort returned to the Poorhouse of Poitiers. He was appointed Director of the Poorhouse. He was given as deputy an excellent cleric named Fr. Dubois. The Bishop supported him; the poor loved him; and Sisters Marie Louise and Catherine Bruntet cordially welcomed him back.

Fr. Montfort re-established both the rule and spirit which he had inaugurated earlier. He clearly defined the duties of the administrators, the chaplains, the governesses, the superior and the poor. Nearly one year passed and then hostility began to show itself. As time passed, the situation deteriorated. The governesses conspired to make Director's task so difficult that he thought of retiring.

Fr. Montfort sought the advice of the Bishop. The Bishop told him to meet his confessor, Fr. de la Tour. Father de la Tour advised Fr. Montfort to leave the hospital. Finally Fr. Montfort met Marie Louise and she too advised him to go away. Fr. Montfort once again submitted his resignation. Before leaving he told Sr. Marie Louise, "My daughter, do not leave this place for ten years. If the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom is not established before that, God will have been satisfied and His plan for you fulfilled." (Besnard, No. 45)

"Fr. Montfort left Marie Louise without a guide, without consolation, without any resources to speak of. Her status as a religious has not yet been regularized. She wears a habit which no other person wears yet. She is Superior of a Congregation that does not exist and will not come into existence until several years have passed. She is mother of a posterity that consists only of promises. She will be vulnerable, exposed to all sorts of persecution from which he is escaping. She will have no recourse in time of adversity, no one to guide her initiatives, to help solve her uncertainties, to see to her needs. She will live almost as an alien in her own country." (Besnard, No. 44)

Marie Louise continued to be for Fr. Montfort a hope for the future. She continued her devotedness to the poor, while Fr. Montfort started his missionary activity. So far he faced many difficulties and he had to make a fresh start, and

the future was not at all clear. Fr. Montfort and Sr. Marie Louise had to entrust themselves into God's hands, his Providence.

It was at this time, that Fr. Montfort composed the following Cantic, cantic No. 22:

1. Mind's made up. The world's my field.  
To preach and labour in.  
Shall I stand by and see, indeed,  
My brother die in sin,  
With heart unmoved? Great Lord, not I!  
For his dear sake, you came on earth  
To suffer and to die.
  
5. Be Wisdom mine, and Charity  
Which makes of me your son.  
Destroy then iniquity,  
My voice your thunderbolt!  
And thus your will be done in love  
By all your children evermore,  
In earth and heaven above.
  
16. Your faithful one and zealous too,  
Be I in word and deed,  
To seek alone what pleases you,  
Your law - my only heed.  
By night and day, your grace in me  
Abound and touch the sinner's heart,  
And I the richer be.

For Fr. Montfort the time came for him to return to the deepest instincts within him, the call to be wayfarer was deeply rooted in him. "I feel a tremendous urge to make our Lord and his holy Mother loved, to go in a humble and simple way to teach catechism to the poor in country places



and to arouse in sinners a devotion to our Blessed Lady.." (Letter 5)

**Fr. Montfort, a missionary in Poitiers:** Bishop de la Poype invited Fr. Montfort to start his missionary activity on the outskirts of the town. Fr. Montfort started staying at the Penitents' House on the street des Feuillants. From 1705 to the beginning of 1706, he exercised his missionary endeavours among the people of Montbernage, Saint Simplicien, Saint Savin, Saint Radegonde, Saint Catherine and the Resurrection. He returned to his real calling, and he used all his talents of persuasion and magnetism revealing his pastoral ability.

Then came a set back. While preaching at the Calvary church, the people brought bad books and pictures to be burned. A heap was made. Someone placed an effigy of the devil at the centre of the heap. People started talking that Fr. Montfort was going to burn the devil. Fr. Villeroi, the Vicar General, heard about it. He came and ordered Fr. Montfort to stop the preaching and humiliated him. When he left, Montfort told the people, "we were planning to plant a cross at the entrance of the church. Our superiors forbid us. Let us plant it instead, each one, in the middle of his heart." Another V.G., Fr. Revol, intervened and temporarily solved the problem. Bishop de la Poype, who returned from Paris, yielded to the pressures of those who distrusted Fr. Montfort and forbade Fr. Montfort to do any ministry in the diocese of Poitiers. This was a hard blow to him.

**Fr. Montfort's trip to Rome and audience with the Pope:** Fr. Montfort thought of consulting the Pope before taking any new step. He was keen on foreign missions. He walked to Rome and met Pope Clement XI on June 06, 1706. The Pope told him to be a missionary in France itself and made him an Apostolic Missionary. On the day he returned to Poitiers, the Bishop ordered him to leave the diocese within

24 hours. Before leaving Poitiers he met Sr. Marie Louise for a few minutes and bade good bye to her. Montfort had once again to make a new start. He was determined to be missionary. Before starting he went on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Adrilliers in Saumur and to Mount St. Michael to place his future missions under the protection of Our Lady and St. Michael. As he took to road, he sang the canticle he had composed, (Montfort's Hymn No. 144, Papasogli, p. 70):

- "1. With my stick in my hand,  
My bare feet on the road,  
I speed through the land  
For I carry no load.  
I feel like a king  
Though no kingdom have I  
For I lack not a thing  
And my crown is the sky!
14. Like a bird in a tree  
With no worry or care,  
My heart is quite free  
For no burden I bear ...
18. For father and brother  
I've hundreds of men;  
For sister and mother  
A hundred times ten...
20. My courtiers are wearing  
The rags of the poor;  
Our banquet is sharing  
Our food and much more ...
21. To join us you're longing?  
Good welcome to you!  
But leave all your belongings  
And live as we do!  
No pompous pretenses  
No income have we;  
We sing the defenses  
Of glad poverty!"

**Sr. Marie Louise, the Bursar:** Marie Louise, though feeling the absence of Fr. Montfort, carried on with her routine work in the hospital. Many started looking at her respectfully as the little sister of the poor. One year went by. "At the end of 1707, the lady from Paris, Madame de la Fenestre, who did not support Fr. Montfort's reforms, resigns from the position of superior and the administration has to replace her. The year 1708 begins tempestuously. At the center of the drama are the Bourceau de la Touche sisters -the strongest faction since they hold the most prestigious positions in the hospital: directresses of the infirmary, storeroom, wardrobe. Then there are the two Brunet sisters, sub-governesses without any authority, who express, with characteristic vivacity, their own discontent. Named superior, Therese Bourceau also presides over the work of the 'middle room' where Sister Trichet helps her. But in May, the sudden death of Catherine Bourceau poses a new problem of succession. Who will take care of the workshops of the 'lower room,' where homeless women are gathered together with paupers and prostitutes, the most difficult inmates of the whole hospital?" (Papasogli, p. 71)

At the end of May 1708, Sr. Marie Louise was appointed governess and she took responsibility of the 'lower room'. The lower room had women who were disturbed and undisciplined. Administration appreciated Marie Louise a lot because she knew how to record and keep accounts with shrewd intelligence and even temper. In 1708, a Charitable School was opened for the children of the hospital. Bishop Poype appointed seminarians who reached the diaconate as tutors. Thus seminarian and Marie Louise's brother Alexis was appointed as a tutor. He started coming there every day to teach his class of undisciplined and unloved children. Thus Marie Louise got a chance to meet her brother every day.

The winter of 1709 was very severe. The wars fought by the Sun King made the nation economically poor. Some poor people died on the streets. Many poor people sought asylum in the hospital. The addition of new inmates upset the daily routine of the hospital. Finances were not sufficient.

On Sept. 23, 1709, the bursar, Mr. Bastard, died. He had been in charge of keeping the accounts and had taught Marie Louise how to keep accounts. Since no other accountant was available, Marie Louise replaced him and became the bursar of the hospital. At night, after doing all her normal works, she worked on the accounts of the hospital. She became the heart and head of the hospital. The Bourceau faction continued to give her a lot of trouble. Catherine Brunet, the fiscal agent, helped her greatly by doing her work well, honestly and accurately.

**A new plague** infected the hospital in 1710. The epidemic struck the whole town leading to many deaths, in the town as well as in the hospital. Marie Louise cared for the sick and prepared corpses for burial. The Brunet sisters temporarily withdrew for fear of contagion. Often Marie Louise was alone to look after the sick.

**Death of Elisabeth:** The mysterious epidemic struck Elisabeth and she died in 1710 at the age of 27. Marie Louise felt this loss terribly. Elisabeth was her companion of childhood and youth.

**Alexis' ordination to priesthood:** At the end of 1710, Deacon Alexis was ordained a priest. Most probably, he celebrated his first Mass in the hospital chapel. He was appointed assistant parish priest of St. Germain, near to the hospital. Thus Marie Louise felt happy to have him close by. But in 1712, Fr. Alexis was appointed parish priest of the small parish of the Resurrection.

Four hundred German, English and Dutch prisoners of war were confined in a field hospital near the town. The

plague started to claim victims among the prisoners. Quite a few died outside the town walls without any assistance. Frs. Fallou and Alexis volunteered to look after the sick.

**Fr. Alexis' death:** Both the priests, who volunteered to help the plague stricken prisoners, fell victims to the plague. Thus Fr. Alexis died a martyr in 1712 and he was buried in the cemetery for plague victims on the banks of the Clain River, and no family members could attend the burial. He was twenty-six years old. This news devastated the Trichet family. For Marie Louise it was a great loss.

Trichet family got reduced very much. Julien, the eldest son, who followed his father into the legal profession, was the only member of the family to marry. In 1710, he married Marianne Desvignes de la Plancherie. Françoise Elizabeth joined the Daughters of Wisdom.

**The dark night for Sr. Marie Louise:** In 1712, Sr. Marie Louise completed seven years without any information from Fr. Montfort, who bade good bye to her in 1706. Though she had the religious habit, she had no religious vows nor a religious family to which she was attached. She was 28 years old. Her desire for stability was getting deeper and deeper. She continued to fulfil well the duties of a bursar.

Miss. Bendetta Papāsogli, in her biography of Marie Louise Trichet has quoted the following: "Marie Louise procured, in proper time, all the necessary provisions and rendered exact account to the administrators. She was charged with keeping accurate records of the poor admitted to or discharged from the hospital. She knew how to ration the provisions perfectly; and she never surrendered, in doubt, to a superfluity that occasions waste nor to the fear of want that causes double expenditures. Her account books were clear and organized in such a way that they showed the receipts and expenses at a glance. The administrators did not tire of praising her sense of economy and relied totally on

her fidelity." (Allaire, Abridged biography of Marie Louise, pp. 49-50) (Papasogli, p. 77)

"The directors had proof of Marie Louise's loyalty when one of them secretly tried to get her to lend him some money from the common fund. The daughter of the most honest man in Poitiers simply answered, 'you would be the first to disapprove of what you are asking of me.' She kept to herself the name and the request of the dishonest administrator, but the news got around by word of mouth, and the directors of the hospital appreciated the behaviour of the young treasurer all the more." (Papasogli, p. 78)

The governesses continued give Marie Louise trouble. There was no one to support and console Marie Louise. But everyone expected comforting words from her. The sick people of the hospital and her own parents sought for her comforting words.

Marie Louise had her own worries about becoming a religious. This anxiety daily pierced her heart. She really had an experience of the desert and the deepest agony: doubt about the future. She was feeling like the disciples of Jesus who fished the whole night and caught nothing. She truly went through the night of the spirit. It was a night of searching, full of yearning for the Beloved. Sometimes Marie felt guilty and examined herself to find her faults. She was groping for her Beloved. Often she was heartbroken.

**Marie Louise's attempts to become a religious:** In 1713, Marie Louise consulted Fr. Carcault, the spiritual director to whom Fr. Montfort had entrusted her when he left, concerning her desire to join the Sisters of Charity founded by Vincent de Paul. The latter agreed to her plan. One day, Bishop Poype came to the hospital and met Marie Louise. He asked her, "What is this I hear about you, my daughter? They say you want to become a grey sister. Are you not one already?" Marie Louise, replied, "That is true; but I have

only the habit." The Bishop answered, "Well, I forbid you to do so." Marie Louise accepted his words and carried on with her work in the hospital.

Some days later, Marie Louise told Fr. Carcault about her desire to join the Benedictines of Calvary. Latter wanted to consult Fr. Montfort before giving any answer. Fr. Montfort was on a visit to Paris. He was contacted by letter and he sent to Marie Louise a very short letter which read, "Providence has recently found a place for a poor girl by providing a dowry for her. His time has not yet come for you. Wait for his time and stay at the hospital." (Letter 25)

"Once Marie Louise abandoned her plan, not ceasing to suffer. Then this woman of balance and harmony takes an impetuous step, a blind step which reveals the intensity of her suffering. She leaves the hospital one day, probably without having asked the advice of Father Carcault, and goes to the Carmelite monastery, attracted by the renowned and famous prioress, Mother Henrietta of the Holy Spirit, whom the city of Poitiers venerates as a saint." (Papasogli, p. 81)

Mother Henrietta listened carefully to Marie Louise's request. Her replied, "My daughter, you are not strong enough for the Carmelite life." For Marie Louise this was the third refusal. She accepted the triple failure as something indicating God's will for her. She understood that she had to stay on in the hospital and wait for God's time. Finally she completely abandoned herself into God's hands.

**A very short visit of Fr. Montfort:** In September 1713, Fr. Montfort paid a very short visit to Marie Louise. The seven years of silence between them did not change their relationship, rather it became deeper. She told him about her experiences and difficulties. Further she recited the prayer that he had taught her. He said, "Is it possible, my daughter, that you still remember that prayer?" She said, "Of course, Father, I have recited it every day." Fr. Montfort said, "God

be praised! What joy you give me! I had forgotten the words." (Besnard, No. 55) He told her about his future plans for her, especially as the diocese of La Rochelle, where he was working, was very supportive.

Catherine Brunet also met Fr. Montfort and expressed her desire to join Marie Louise as a Sister. Fr. Montfort accepted her and asked her to start one year of probation. Actually Fr. Montfort made arrangements and on Dec. 08, 1714, Fr. Dubois gave her the religious habit and gave her the religious name of Sister of the Conception. As the Bishop of Poitiers asked Fr. Montfort to leave the diocese, Fr. Montfort bade good bye to the two Sisters and left for La Rochelle.

**Marie Louise's departure for La Rochelle:** Marie Louise continued her service at the hospital as before. In June 1714, Fr. Montfort wrote a letter to Sr. Marie Louise asking her to be ready to leave for La Rochelle; but she did not receive this letter. At the beginning of 1715, Fr. Montfort wrote another letter to Srs. Marie Louise and Conception.

"You have not answered my last letter and I wonder why. I have spoken several times to his Lordship, the Bishop of La Rochelle, about you and about our plans and he thinks you ought to come here and begin the work we want so much. He has rented a house for the purpose until another house can be bought and suitably furnished.

"I know you are doing a great deal of good where you are, but you will do infinitely more away from home and we know that since the time of Abraham right up to the time of our Lord and even to our own day. God sends his greatest servants out of their own country because, as our Lord himself says, no prophet is accepted among his own people.

"I know you will have many difficulties to overcome, but an enterprise which is going to do so much for the glory of God and the salvation of men will have its way strewn



with thorns and crosses. If you don't take risks for God, you won't give anything worth-while. I am writing to you on behalf of the Bishop, so keep this confidential.

"I will send you Brother John with some money and a horse to accompany you. Travel as best you can; take a coach or hire a horse. If you have no money, we will try to cover the cost for you." (Letter 27)

Sr. Marie Louise had many difficulties to face. Being told about her departure for La Rochelle, Mrs. Trichet's reaction was typical, "You may go if you wish. As for me, I will never consent to it. Marie Louise sought Fr. Carcault's advice. He said, "You cannot leave without your mother's consent; let us work to obtain it." He started a novena to the Holy Spirit at end of which his own doubts were cleared and he said to Marie Louise, "My daughter, a few days ago I told you that your departure for La Rochelle was perhaps not God's will. I have made a novena; God wants you to go."

Marie Louise, Fr. Carcault and others continued to pray. One day, Mrs. Trichet came to the hospital and told Marie Louise, "My daughter, you may be surprised at what I am about to say, 'For some time, I have refused to allow you to leave Poitiers. Well, I can no longer detain you here. The Holy Spirit inspires me to consent to your departure.'" (Besnard No. 63) Mr. Trichet had no objection. He had already written to the Bishop of La Rochelle seeking protection and practical assistance for his daughter. The Bishop agreed to his request.

Then Marie Louise approached the administrators of the hospital to relieve her. They found her irreplaceable and opposed her move. Cries of protest rose from many quarters. Even the Bishop wanted her to stay. Her only means was prayer and penance. Finally one by one all those, who were important, gave her the permission. Bidding farewell to the poor was not easy; they loved her very much.

Then another letter from Fr. Montfort was brought to Marie Louise by Bro. John. "Leave as soon as possible, my daughter. The day for the establishment of the Daughters of Wisdom has at last arrived. I only wish you were already at La Rochelle, where I am at the moment; but if you delay you will not find me here as I am in a hurry to leave for a mission." (Letter 28)

Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine got ready to leave. The administrators met in a plenary session. Marie Louise entered the room, thanked them and told them she had to go to La Rochelle for a foundation. Though they allowed her, though most unwillingly, to leave, there were other hands to block.

Fr. Boudon, the hospital chaplain blocked her way. "Is it possible, Sister, that you want to abandon our hospital? Can a pious person like you think, in good conscience, that you can take such a step? Have you forgotten the law of charity? Alas, what will happen to these poor people? You leave a whole hospital in neglect. How much gossip will start! What disorder it may cause! How many sins you will have to answer for! You are the only two here on whom we can count, and you are both leaving together without anyone to replace you..." (Besnard No. 71)

Marie Louise was silent. The last night in the hospital was a painful night. He could not sleep. In the morning Catherine Brunet advised Marie Louise to meet Fr. Carcault. Marie Louise met him and he told her, "I have already told you that it is God's will that you leave immediately for La Rochelle. Go, reserve two seats on the coach and if they are all taken, hire two horses and leave today. That is all I have to say to you." (Besnard, No. 73) Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine came out of the hospital to leave. There came Mrs. Trichet and a heart breaking farewell took place at the station. Marie Louise embraced her mother and then started the journey for La Rochelle. \* \* \* \* \*

### **Chapter 3. In La Rochelle and in Poitiers (1715-1720)**

**The background:** In 1711, Fr. Montfort, with the approval of Bishop Champflour of La Rochelle, preached a mission there. During the course of the mission, the bishop confided to Montfort his great desire to build schools for the poor children of the diocese. Fr. Montfort, seeing the religious education of children as a fruitful outcome of the mission, was in full accord with him. A decision was taken to open two schools, one for boys and one for girls. For the latter, Fr. Montfort wanted the Daughters of Wisdom, which he was going to found.

**Arrival of Srs. Marie Louise and Catherine Brunet:** Despite fierce opposition to their departure, these Sisters left Poitiers for La Rochelle. They travelled by a coach. The journey took six days and it was very tiring. They reached La Rochelle on March 23, 1715.



Fr. Montfort was not there in La Rochelle to receive the Sisters. The Bishop of La Rochelle had asked one Miss. Marie Roy to receive the Sisters. She told the Sisters that the house that the Bishop had in mind for them would not be free for a month. In the evening, Mrs. Roy sent one of her

apprentices, Marie Valleau, with the Sisters to Mrs. Geoffroy. This lady did not want to burden her household. After much pleading, she accepted the Sisters. It took two hours to get this accommodation, which was grudgingly given. The Sisters settled down as best as they could. The stay was not at all comfortable. They stayed there for a month.

On April 15, 1715, the Sisters left for Le Petit Plessis, Jesuit country house with a chapel. Here Fr. Montfort met them. He celebrated Mass for them. He told them, "When I saw you, my daughters, I did not know if I should sing the Magnificat or the Te Deum. I am so happy that you wear the habit of Wisdom! I admire the promptness with which you put on these capes and the prudence and firmness with which you left the hospital of Poitiers..." (Besnard, No. 80-81.) Fr. Montfort took them to the Hermitage of St. Eloi.

Concerning the hospital of Poitiers, Fr. Montfort told Marie Louise, "Be consoled, my daughter, all is not lost for the hospital of Poitiers. You will be called back and you will stay there." Continuing, he told her, "My daughter, God has chosen you to be the head of this new community. It is God's will. You must lead with firmness, but gentleness must prevail over all else... Look, my daughter, see that hen with her chicks under her wings. See with what gentleness she tends to their needs. That is the way you must be with those daughters whose mother you are destined to become." (Besnard, No. 81)

**Charitable school for girls:** Bishop Champflour and Fr. Montfort were keen on starting charitable schools. In October 1714, Fr. Montfort started a charitable school for boys. Then he wanted to start a charitable school for girls. A house was obtained on the street of the Jesuits near the parish church of Our Lady. It was poorly adapted for the use of the

community and school. The Sisters adjusted themselves well and the school for girls started in May 1715. Very quickly pupils joined the school and the strength of the school reached 400. The girls came from a wide range of backgrounds and of age. Some girls left the town school and joined the new school. Some town school teachers became hostile to the Sisters who started the new school.

Marie Louise faced problems with firmness, kindness and humility. The school taught academic subjects and formed the pupils to good habits of discipline and piety. Whenever Fr. Montfort was in the town, he paid a visit to the school and looked into all details. Marie Louise herself proved especially adept with adolescents, forming an association of thirty-three pupils in honor of the thirty-three years spent on earth by Jesus, Incarnate Wisdom.

**The Rule:** Fr. Montfort withdrew from his missionary activities to spend time at the hermitage of St. Eloi at La Rochelle. While there, he put the finishing touches to the Rule of the Daughters of Wisdom. He then submitted this Rule to the Bishop for approval. On Aug. 01, 1715, Bishop Etienne de Champflour approved this Rule. It had 320 articles.

**The Novitiate:** After the Sisters settling down at the street of the Jesuits, Marie Roy, the girl who had welcomed them to La Rochelle and another young woman from Nantes expressed their desire to become novices of Wisdom. Soon the Novice from Nantes proved to be unstable and she returned home. Unfortunately she had a bad influence on Marie Roy and she too left leaving the novitiate empty. Further the Sisters had to face financial difficulties also.

Marie Valteau, who had helped the Sisters to find accommodation in La Rochelle, expressed her desire to the

Daughters of Wisdom and thus the novitiate was reopened. Marie Regnier joined the novitiate on Aug. 14, 1715. Her father was a merchant as well as a farmer belonging to the village of St. Sauveur-de-Nuaille.

**The Religious Profession:** On Aug. 22, 1715, in the church of the Sisters of Providence in La Rochelle, Sr. Marie Louise and Sr. of the Conception pronounced their religious vows in the hands Fr. Montfort. Novice Marie Valleau and Marie Regnier received their religious habit. The former was given the name Sister of the Incarnation and the latter Sister of the Cross.

Soon after the profession, Fr. Montfort sent Sr. of the Conception to work at St. Louis Hospital, La Rochelle. The sacrifice was bitter for Marie Louise who was losing the support of her best friend. For Sr. of the Conception too it was bitter as she was leaving the nest of Wisdom for the stormy atmosphere of the new hospital.

Marie Louise accepted the young Geoffroy girl to the novitiate and gave her the religious habit. In October, Fr. Montfort paid a visit to the convent and reproved Marie Louise for the above mentioned act. He said, "What, my daughter, you give the habit without a precise order from me? You are too hasty; moreover, this girl has no vocation. God does not call her here." (Besnard, No. 98) This October visit was his last visit to the community. Fr. Montfort continued his missions as before, his final mission being the one at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre.

**Death of Marie Louise's father:** while Marie Louise was in La Rochelle, her beloved father Mr. Julian Trichet expired in Poitiers. Marie Louise felt the loss a great deal.

**Stay in Red Hat Inn:** The Sisters were asked to leave the house where they were living, as the neighbours complained of children's noisy comings and goings. The Sisters had to find another place or close down the school and admit a failure. Finally, they moved to the end of the courtyard of the Red Hat Inn, where the classes were accommodated in little rooms. A proper accommodation was lacking. Being a little discouraged Marie Louise wrote to Fr. Montfort, explaining the difficulties. At that time Fr. Montfort was at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre preaching a mission. From there he replied.

"If I were to look at these setbacks from a human standpoint, I would be tempted, like the foolish people of this corrupt world, to complain and be anxious and worried, but that is not how I look at things. Let me tell you that I expect more serious setbacks, more painful ones to test your faith and confidence. We will then found our community of the Daughters of Wisdom, not on quick sands of gold and silver which the devil is always using to adorn his house, nor indeed on the strength and influence of any human being, for no matter how holy and powerful man may be, he will always be no more than a wisp of straw. We want to found our Congregation on the Wisdom of the Cross of Calvary. This adorable Cross has been stained with the blood of a God and chosen by Jesus to be the spouse of his heart, his heart's only desire and inspiration, the only object worth his toil, his only arm in combat, his only crown of glory, his only guide in his judgments... My dear daughters, apply this to the state in which you find yourselves. I think of you always, especially during holy Mass. I will never forget you, provided you love the precious Cross. I am united with you in bearing the cross as long as you follow the holy will of God and not your own. In this holy will I am all yours..." (Letter 34)

**Fr. Montfort's death:** The above mentioned letter was Fr. Montfort's last letter. In the evening of April 28, 1716, he met with an unexpected death, although he knew it was approaching. He died due to pleurisy. He asked Fr. René Mulot to continue the work. Thousands attended his funeral the following day. The Sisters could not be informed immediately. A few days later, Fr. Mulot sent through a messenger a letter to Sr. Marie Louise. This news was heart-breaking for Sr. Marie Louise. For her, it was an hour of very bitter passion. Who was left after the death of the founder? Just two priests, his missionary companions, who were not committed by vows; four Brothers with vows; three lay mission helpers, and, at La Rochelle, a female community that already had a structure, with a superior, three professed Sisters, and one novice. The numbers were negligible, but the numbers of Sisters especially would grow rapidly. For the next three years, the school continued to function.

**Taking full responsibility for the congregation:** Fr. Montfort's death was a great tragedy for Sr. Marie Louise. Bishop Champflour continued to support the Sisters. Still the responsibility of establishing the Daughters of Wisdom fell on her shoulders. Marie Louise realized this fully and trusted fully on God's Providence. She was determined to play her unique role.

**Stay at St. Louis Street:** Because steps taken by the Bishop, the Sisters moved from the unsuitable "Red Hat Inn" to the street of Petit-Saint-Jean. Then they moved to St. Louis Street and occupied a better house facing the hospital, where Catherine Bunet was working. Here the community settled down well. The community consisted of three Sisters, teaching in the school and Sr. Catherine struggling alone with the problems of a large hospital. The classes were flourishing.



In 1717, Sr. Marie Louise recalled Sr. Catherine from the hospital. Further a postulant named Marie-Anne Bourdin, joined the community. She was 34 years old and she had a heart of gold for children and for the poor. At vestition she was given the name Sister of St, Joseph. The community had a holy and wise priest as spiritual director. The Sisters were a happy group in spite of meager meals, the poor furniture and an uncertain future. "If sadness comes to the little house on St. Louis Street, someone was always ready to intone one of Father de Montfort's hymns to lighten the heart and recall the presence of God:

"1. My dearest Sisters of Christ-Wisdom,  
In your life it is your aim  
To assist the poor, the outcast,  
The despairing and the lame.  
All those by the world rejected  
On your love have greater claim." (Hymn 149. 1)

"9. I have everything I yearn for  
Almost like a bird on high,  
Since no riches hold me back now  
I can even higher fly." (Hymn 91,9)

10. With no money, with no baggage,  
With my walking stick in hand,  
Nothing can dismay, upset me  
As I travel through this land. (Hymn 91,10)

23. I no longer plant or harvest,  
Of each soul I am a friend.  
For reward, God's loving graces  
And sweet heaven at the end." (Hymn 91,23)  
(Papasogli, p. 119)

**Arrival of Mrs. Trichet and leaving for Poitiers:** In January 1719, Mrs. Trichet came to La Rochelle to meet her daughter Marie Louise. Further she had a plan. She came with a request from the Administrators of Poitiers hospital. They wanted the Sisters back and they made a promise to facilitate the starting of a novitiate in the hospital campus itself. Marie Louise recalled Fr. Montfort's words, "They will call you back to the hospital of Poitiers. You will return and remain there..."

Marie Louise consulted the Bishop, the latter told her, "My daughter, it is a temptation of the devil. You must resist." She consulted a good priest and his answer was, "God wants you in Poitiers." Mrs. Trichet met the Bishop and requested his permission for the Sisters to leave for Poitiers. She convinced the Bishop and got the needed permission. Srs. Marie Valleau and Marie Regnier preferred to continue to be in La Rochelle.

**Return to Poitiers:** On Jan. 23, 1719, Sr. Marie Louise, Sr. of the Conception and Sr. of St. Joseph reached Poitiers Hospital. Sr. Marie Louise was appointed Treasurer. The three Sisters met Bishop Poype and Frs. Carcault and De la Tour. Sr. Marie Louise made a deep study of the contract with the authorities of the hospital. She attended the Board meeting. The administration guaranteed the possibility of forming subjects in the hospital for the instruction of the young and the care of the sick. But it claimed the perpetual right to name the superior and demanded that half the dowry of the novices be deposited in the coffers of the hospital. The Bishop sided with the Administration though agreed that he could be the superior of the community, and be liaison between the community and administration. Sr. Marie Louise reflected deeply on the matter and stood resolutely and said, "No" to the proposal.

The Bishop respected the No from Sr. Marie Louise. The administrators made another proposal by which Sr. Marie Louise could be the Bursar, Sr. Catherine fiscal agent and Sr. Anne-Marie Boudin one of the governesses. There was no question of novitiate nor of any reform. One Bouceau sister was to continue as superior. The Daughters of Wisdom had no other choice but to accept this arrangement. Fr. Adrian Vatel, the first disciple of Fr. Montfort, paid a visit to Sr. Marie Louise and requested her to return to La Rochelle. Further Srs. Marie Valteau and Marie Reginer did not want to come to Poitiers as requested by Sr. Marie Louise.

**Meeting with Mr. Jacques Goudeau:** One day, while passing near the sanctuary of Montbernage, which had been restored by Fr. Montfort, Marie Louise met Mr. Jacques Goudeau, to whom Montfort had entrusted the care of the statue of the Virgin of Montbernage. During the conversation, he said to Marie Louise, "Sister, I know that you regret having left La Rochelle. You fear that through your fault Father de Montfort's work will not continue and that God will blame you for it. Well then, listen to me. I know that Madame de Bouillé, widow of Sir Colasseau, deceased Lord of Machefolière, lives near Saint-Laurent where Father de Montfort is buried. This lady is looking everywhere for accounts of Father's life and the miracles which occur everyday at the tomb of that great servant of God. Madame Bouillé could help you in your good work; she helps everyone who comes to her." (Besnartd, No. 121)

Marie Louise in her childhood had heard about Madame de Bouillé, daughter of René Le Vacher, Lord of the Brunetière and of Montigny, mayor of the city and inhabitant of the parish of St. Savin, where the Trichet family lived for several years. Returning to her room, she knelt down and prayed to the Holy Spirit. Then she wrote a letter to Madame Bouillé. In 1713, Madame de Bouillé was

in her father's house in Poitiers. She was then dangerously sick. Fr. Montfort came to her room and prayed for her. She recovered from her sickness. In 1719, she replied to Marie Louise. Then she personally came and discussed matters with her. Both agreed that the Novitiate should be built in St. Laurent, close to the tomb of Fr. Montfort.

Mr. Henri-François de Racappe, Marquis de Magnanne, lieutenant of the marshals of France at the court of Angers, was the uncle of Madame de Bouillé. He had two sons. In 1714, his wife died most unexpectedly. He, at the age of fifty, was shattered. To escape the sad memories, he came to Rennes to his friend, Mr. d'Orville. In his house, Mr. Henri met Fr. Montfort and had a conversation with him. This completely changed the ways of Mr. Henri and he was completely converted. He decided to spend much time in prayer and also to serve the poor.

**Purchase of Long House Inn in St. Laurent:** Madam Bouillé and the Marquis of Magnanne together bought a dilapidated old inn called the Long House Inn, which could as a beginning.

**Bidding good bye to Poitiers hospital:** Madame de Bouillé met the Bishop Poype and told him that she was planning to take Sr. Marie Louise back to the diocese of La Rochelle. The Bishop was very unhappy at the proposal and told her, "Madame, if you are so interested in the Daughters of Wisdom and wish to help in their foundation, put on their habit, go and live with them. Then your plans will be realized. But now, do not insist any longer!" (Besnard, No. 123)

Madame de Bouillé wrote to her uncle, Marquis de Magnanne, requesting him to write a letter to Bishop Poype in favour of Marie Louise. He wrote a letter as requested and

sent it to Madame de Bouillé, who handed it over to Marie Louise. Marie Louise handed it over to the Bishop. After reading that letter, the Bishop told Marie Louise, "My daughter, go to St. Laurent, since you desire it so much. It seems to me that God's finger is clear in this regard. I give you my consent. But, I do not want you to leave before the Marquis de Magnanne and Madame de Bouillé have convoked a general assembly of the inhabitants of St. Laurent in the presence of the Dean and have obtained from them a written commitment to accept the foundation in their parish." (Besnard, No. 125)

**Agreement with the people of St. Laurent:** The people of St. Laurent were ready to accept the Sisters on condition that they guaranteed the instruction of the children and the care of the sick without being in any way a financial burden on the meager income of the village. Marie was not ready to assume the responsibility other than that of committing themselves to serve when and how they became able as a result of their good will. Negotiations took a long time. Finally, the act of agreement was registered at Mortagne on September 14, 1719. Bishop Champflour was happy to welcome back the Sisters.

Marquis de Magnanne promised to contribute as long as he lived from the interest on his income and as much as possible, every year to the Daughters of Wisdom. Marie Louise consulted Fr. De la Tour, s.j. and the latter told her, "I do not advise you to go Sister, before everything is settled and well regulated in St. Laurent. For everything else, go to Fr. Carcault." (Besnard, No. 130) Marie Louise met Fr. Carcault and the latter told her, "Leave immediately, otherwise the foundation will not take place. Notify the administrators and leave." (Besnard, No. 130)

**Resigning from Poitiers Hospital:** At the plenary session of administrative council, Marie Louise resigned her position as bursar and announced her departure for St. Laurent.

**Administrators preventing the departure:** Immediately the members divided into two groups. One group stood as guards at every door so that the bursar could not escape. The group ran to get the support of civil authorities. Unexpectedly Mr. Des Gallois de La Tour, asked the accused bursar be brought before him to the town hall, accompanied by Sr. Catherine. The Intendant shouted, "What do I hear of you, Sisters? You want to leave the poor? In the name of His Majesty, I forbid you to leave the hospital! If you do, I know where to send you!" (Besnard, No. 132)

The Sisters did not make any reply. They went down the steps to go to the hospital. Marie Louise met Fr. De La Tour and latter advised her to delay the departure. Madame Bouillé's messenger insisted on their leaving. Yet Marie Louise did not leave; but instead she increased her prayers to God.

**Marie Louise getting permission to leave:** Another day, Marie Louise went to the Intendant and presented her arguments why she should leave. St. Laurent, though in the diocese of La Rochelle, was under the jurisdiction of the Intendant of Poitiers. She described the future of the institute. Finally the Intendant allowed Marie Louise alone to leave. Mrs. Trichet shed many tears; yet she permitted her daughter to leave.

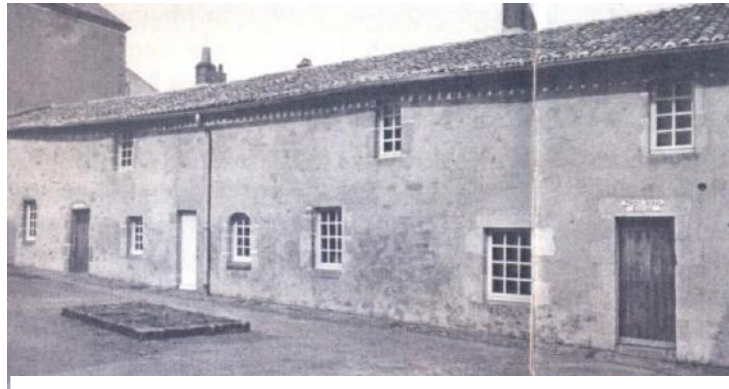
**Arrival St. Laurent:** After bidding farewell to her dear ones, Sr. Marie Louise mounted the horse provided for the journey and started her journey to St. Laurent along with the messenger also sent by Madame de Bouillé. The journey was done in June 1720 and it was very tiring. Finally, Sr. Marie

Louise reached St. Laurent on June 20, 1720, during the octave of Corpus Christi. She dismounted in front of the parish church. She entered the church and knelt down before the tabernacle and offered herself completely to God. Then she prayed at the tomb of her spiritual father, where she knelt in fervent prayer; then she went to the "Maison Longue," the house purchased for her by Madame de Bouillé. She found it dilapidated, lacking the barest essentials. Here, in extreme poverty, the mother house of the Congregation would function for several years. Bedding, clothing, and maintenance were nonexistent. Sr. Marie Louise from the following morning onwards started to work in order to make the house habitable.

\* \* \* \* \*



#### **Chapter 4. Foundation of the Mother House at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre (1720-1724)**



The Long House

**The early situation:** "Poverty welcomed Marie Louise at St. Laurent. The Long House was in a state of neglect; there were no funds to repair it; there was no furniture in the house, no utensils, no linen, no provisions of any kind. The community would find nothing but four bare walls and a leaky roof to cover them. Marie Louise had launched this enterprise with a daring worthy of the apostles themselves, but without a thought for the merely human side of life. For an instant she was discouraged and uncertain but, strong woman that she was and trusting in Providence, she took to heart and began to prepare as well as she could for the coming of her community. cccc While she was engaged, she was surprised by the arrival of a man of thirty-two, René Joseau, who came to offer his services to this daughter of Montfort. Through his efforts and that of some of his friends, the garden was cultivated, furniture was made and a stock of food was bought. Within two weeks the other Sisters arrived from Poitiers. It was the beginning of the realization of Marie Louise's dream for a mother-house at St. Laurent." (The 300th anniversary of the birth of Marie Louise Trichet,



booklet prepared by the Charism Committee, 1984 pp.12, 13)

**René Joseau's help:** He was a part gardener and part carpenter, who had a small property and had a modest independent means. He had not yet decided about his future. He came to the help of Marie Louise. He cleared the little plot of land around the Long House and planted some vegetables. As he was a carpenter too, he made some furniture.

**The arrival of the other Sisters:** Sr. Catherine was the first Sister to arrive. The Long House had interconnected small rooms with low ceilings and narrow windows. Then it was the arrival of Sr. Anne-Marie Bourdin. Along with her came Françoise Trichet, the youngest sister of Marie Louise, as she wanted to join the Daughters of Wisdom. The day after their arrival, a little oratory was got ready. The community became complete with four Sisters and they started their regular life. They led a poor life and sometimes they did not have enough to eat. The community life, regulated by the bell that called the Sisters to prayers, seemed more conventual in style than was to the liking of the local priests.

**Problems with the Dean:** Fr. Rougeou de La Jarrie was the Dean of St. Laurent. Some months had passed since the arrival of the Sisters. Schools and Dispensaries were not started. The Dean was disappointed. One day he paid a visit to the Sisters and then they asked him to be their spiritual director; but he refused. After praying for nine days, once again they made the same request and this time, too, the Dean refused.

**Plan to get Fr. René Mulot as spiritual director:** On June 06, 1716, Fr. Mulot registered Montfort's will with the notary Mr. Michel Forget in Nantes. In September he came to stay with his brother, the parish priest of St. Pompain. Fr. Adrian Vatel also came to St. Pompain. In 1718, Frs. Mulot and Vatel preached a mission at Loges. On June 02, 1718, Bro. Mathurin joined the two priests.

Sr. Marie Louise thought of requesting Fr. René Mulot to be the spiritual director of the Sisters. She shared this idea with Madam Bouillé. At that time the Bishop of La Rochelle was camping at Hermenault. Sr. Marie Louise and Madam Bouillé went to Hermenault, met the Bishop and placed their request before him. The Bishop graciously accepted their request. From Hermenault on Sept. 27, 1720, the Bishop wrote to Fr. Mulot, "You have already given a retreat to the Daughters of Wisdom at St. Laurent; I request you to continue to direct and guide them and also to hear their confession. I ask you to do it: these are good daughters who will not give you much trouble, and they will edify the public by their good conduct and their practice of virtues." In September 1720, itself, Fr. Mulot paid a visit to Sr. Marie Louise at St. Laurent. The Sisters received him as an angel. After a few days he went back to St. Pompain.

**The purchasing of "Chêne-Vert - the Holm-Oak House:**

To establish the Company of Mary in St. Laurent, another house was needed. Marquis of Magnanne and Madam Bouillé bought the Holm Oak House or the Green Oak House to house the Fathers and the Brothers. The registration took place in April 1721.

"The property known as "Chêne-Vert Jouse (The Holm-Oak House) along with the garden called "Les Huelles" and the end portion of a prairie was bought on 7th April 1721 from René Pabault by Françoise-Renée, ... in the name of the Brothers, who are to teach small boys of the parish." (Card.

Tisserant, Montfort and the origin of Bros of St. Gabriel, p. 263) The Green Oak House was bare and dilapidated. René Joseau worked hard and made it habitable.



The Green Oak House

**Fr. Jacques Le Valois' joining the Missionaries:** Fr. Jacques Le Valois was from Normandy. He studied in the Holy Spirit Seminary, Paris. In 1713, when Fr. Montfort addressed the seminarians of this seminary, Fr. Jacques listened to him as a seminarian. With a desire to join the Missionaries of Fr. Montfort, he left Paris, and went to Nirot and met Frs. Mulot and Vatel, who were preaching a mission there. Then he came to St. Laurent to pray at the tomb of Fr. Montfort. Then he knocked at the door of the rectory of St. Laurent. Eleanor, the Dean's sister opened and finding the vagabond priest, she was about to close the door. The priest said, "Dear lady, consult your good angel and do what he tells you." Thus the lady opened and he spent the night there. The following morning, Fr. Valois paid a visit to Sr. Marie Louise. After a chat, the latter requested him to be her daughters' director. Fr. Valois accepted the proposal and thus he became the first occupant of the Green Oak House.

**René Joseau's joining the Missionaries:** He wanted to be in the service of the Missionaries. He consulted some priests; but no one took him seriously. He left St. Laurent for a pilgrimage. He travelled bare foot and slept in open air. One day, he stepped on a wood and a nail pierced his foot. Still he continued his journey. He stopped near a fountain to wash his swollen wound and then he knelt down and prayed to Our Lady to permit him to continue the journey. He attended a retreat in Nantes guided by a Jesuit. He told the preacher about himself and about his desire to join the missionaries of Fr. Montfort. The father asked him why he wanted to join the Montfort Missionaries. He said, "Father, it is because the missionaries of St. Laurent are so poor and I would like to live poorly, serving other poor people who work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls." (Papasogli, p. 155), The priest told him, "Go, my son, do not resist your inclination. It can only come from God."

René Joseau came back to St. Laurent and met Sr. Marie Louise. He asked her if the missionaries would want him to be in their service. Marie Louise assured him that and then requested him to look after Fr. Valois, who was sick and was staying with the parish priest of La Tardière. Towards the end of 1721, René Joseau brought Fr. Valois to St. Laurent and both of them occupied the Green Oak House. Thus the first community of the Company of Mary came into existence.

**Arrival of Frs. Mulot and Vatel in St. Laurent:** Towards the end of June 1722, Frs. Mulot and Vatel arrived at the Green Oak House with three new missionaries, Frs. Aumont, Toutan and Guillemont. Bro. Mathurin and other Brothers also came and joined the community. Fr. Mulot was the leader.

**Retreat, Election and Religious Profession:** Sr. Florence has described these events in the Chronicle kept by her: "After some days of rest, their first attention was to find a leader according to the Rule of Fr de Montfort, for, till then, they did not have anyone and Fr. Mulot was considered only as the first among equals. Hence they had a retreat to seek enlightenment from God... At the end of the retreat each one voted in secret ballot and put his vote in the box on which was written the names of those who could vote. All except one voted in favour of Fr. Mulot and all agreed to depend on him... All, with the exception of two, made their vows in his hands, as per the Rule... and the two were Fr. Guillemont and Bro. Mathurin. As the house of the missionaries was founded for charitable schools and for looking after the sick, Fr. Mulot thought of Bro. Joseau for these works." (Nos.88-90). According to Fr. Grandet five missionaries and four Brothers made the profession. (p. 279)

**Fr. René Mulot, Superior General, 1722-1749):**



Fr. René Mulot

Bro. Joseau made his first profession. The five priests who made the profession were 1. Mulot 2. Vatel 3. Valois 4. Aumont and Toutan and the four Brothers were 1. Jacques Burgard 2. Philippe, 3. Louis and 4. Joseau. After the election and the profession, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters met each other and felicitated each other. Then they went to the tomb of Fr. Montfort, stood around it and thanked God

and prayed to Fr. Montfort to intercede for them.

Fr. René's father Mr. Jacques Mulot was procurator of the king's estate at Fontenay. His elder brother Jean

became a priest and was appointed parish priest of St. Pompain. In 1706, the widow Mulot came with her children and took up residence in the large rectory at St. Pompain. Fr. René was ordained in 1708 and became assistant at Villiers. Then he was the parish priest of Soullans for six years. While being there he became dangerously ill. He was forced to take rest with his brother at St. Pompain.

In 1715, while Fr. Montfort was preaching a retreat to Sisters in Fontenay, Fr. René met him and requested him to preach a retreat at St. Pompain. As Fr. Montfort had accepted to preach a number of missions, he could not oblige Fr. René. As Fr. René went on pleading, Fr. Montfort said, "If you help me during my mission at Vouvant, I shall preach a mission at St. Pompain." Though his health was not good, he agreed. While Fr. René helped Fr. Montfort at Vouvant, he was cured of his sickness and from that time onwards, he joined Fr. Montfort. He helped Fr. Montfort during the mission at St. Laurent. There Montfort became sick and dictated his Will to Fr. René and he made Fr. René the Executor of his Will.

**The school for boys and the dispensary:** The Dean of St. Laurent was keen on schools and dispensaries. Bro. Jacques was in charge of the parish school from 1716-1719. Then there was a gap. On Nov. 01, 1722, Bro. Joseau took charge of the Boys' School and he continued to be so till 1752. Bro. Joseau took lessons from a surgeon called Chatilon and became the nurse for the people of St. Laurent.

**The Novitiate and the First Profession:** In 1720, Françoise Trichet (Marie Louise's sister) joined the Daughters of Wisdom and in 1721, Louise Le Bel, Marie Garnier and Madeleine Renou. Sr. Louise admitted them as novices and looked after their formation. After one year in 1722, they

were to have their vestition and profession. Sr. Marie Louise wanted that ceremony to take place in the parish church. It was not easy to deal with the Dean.

Fr. Mulot, Sr. Marie Louise and Madam Bouillé discussed the matter and decided to approach the Bishop with a letter from Fr. Mulot. Madam Bouillé left for La Rochelle, met the Bishop and got the needed help. On Dec. 14, 1722, she returned to St. Laurent with the following letter from the Bishop, "We consent that the missionary priest René Mulot give the Wisdom habit to all the young women who present themselves and that the ceremony take place in the parish church of St. Laurent in our diocese, until the chapel of the Daughters of Wisdom be built. We also approve that the said Father Mulot and his companions live in their house at St. Laurent whenever they deem it appropriate." (Besnard, No. 163) The Bishop wrote a letter to Dean also advising him and also asking him to have a welcoming attitude to the Daughters of Wisdom. Both the letters were handed over to the Dean.

On Dec. 16, 1722, Fr. Mulot met the Dean to get his permission to have the Profession in the parish church. This took a long time. Then Fr. Mulot, Sr. Marie Louise, the Novices and their relations and the Sisters went in procession from the Long House to the sacristy of the parish church. The Superior announced the religious name of each Novice: Louise de Bel - Sister of Calvary, Marie Garnier - Sister of the Nativity, Madeleine Renou - Sister of the Angels and Françoise Trichet - Sister Seraphin. The Dean came to the sacristy. In the sacristy the Dean had a long discussion with Fr. Mulot and finally he allowed the ceremony to take place in the parish church.

The ceremony was brief, and the whole ceremony was conducted. Fr. Mulot blessed four grey habits in the

church and gave to each novice the habit meant for her. Then the novices went into the sacristy to put on the religious habit. While the Novices were putting on the new habit, the congregation sang the following hymn composed by Fr. Montfort: Hymn No. 149

- "1. Dearest Sisters of Christ-Wisdom,  
In your life it is your aim  
To assist the poor, the outcasts,  
The despairing and the lame.
  
5. Be the servants of God's people,  
Give them all with all your power.  
Such will be a source of treasure  
Which no moths can ev'r devour."

The four novices came in front of the congregation. Then each one pronounced her religious vows. Then the Sisters, relations and others thanked God and then had family celebrations.

**The school for girls in St. Laurent:** In December 1722, Sr. Marie Louise started a school for girls of the parish. Young religious Sisters were the teachers in this school.

**Madam Bouillé's stay in the Long House:** Madam Bouillé decided to become a guest in the Long House. The house belonged to her and she set up a small apartment and occupied it with her two children. She followed the schedule, endured the privations and respected the silence. Yet her stay caused certain disturbances. She started to look after the accounts, to receive donations and authorize expenses. She even accepted three sick women into the Long House and started looking after them, as the Dean wanted the sick people to be looked after. The Dean even wanted Madame



Bouillé to be the superior and thus he added to the worries of Sr. Marie Louise.

**Exchange of the houses:** "It became impossible for the Sisters to accommodate everything in the Long House: community, novitiate, school, and soon a pharmacy and hence finding more space became a necessity. But on the other side, the Green Oak House with its dependencies was spacious to accommodate usually the Chaplain and three Brothers. The missionaries, during the holidays, were satisfied with some simple accommodation... Hence it was decided to have an exchange of houses." (J.F. Dervaux, *Folie ou Sagesse ...? Marie Louise Trichet et les premières filles de M. de Montfort*, p. 348) This exchange took place in 1723 and then much transformation was effected.

"The missionary priests and brothers inherit this house of irregular spaces and silent messages and settle there with their gusto for the unforeseen, while waiting to adapt the building to new demands. They have to divide the rooms and find a place for every priest who might seek place and quiet there. Meanwhile, if some passing stranger knocks seeking asylum, Brother Joseau and Brother Nicholas give up their beds and sleep in the hay-loft, while Jaques Le Valois or René Mulot stretches himself out on a cot in another wing of the house. There is no hint of warmth in the air since the fire has been out all night." (Papasogli, pp. 165, 166)

**Chapels:** The need for a chapel in both the houses was felt and permission from the bishop was sought and the same was granted on Sept. 21, 1723. A room in the Green Oak House was converted into an oratory for the Sisters and it was blessed by Fr. Mulot, while the one in the Missionaries' place was blessed by Fr. Pierre Thomas, who came from the Holy Spirit Seminary in Paris and this chapel was under the

patronage of the Holy Spirit. This chapel gave the Long House a new name, the Holy Spirit House. The Missionaries came to be known as Holy Spirit Missionaries.

**Marquis of Magnanne's stay in the Long House:** Mr. Henri François de Racappé, the Marquis of Magnanne, was born on Sept. 21, 1664 in the diocese of Angers.



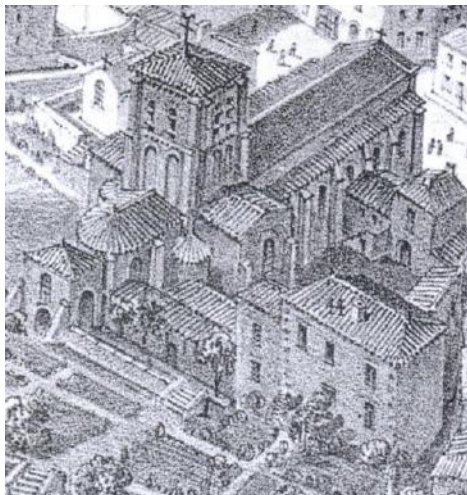
The Marquis of  
Magnanne

After his wife's death, he gave most of his property to his children and in charity. Fr. Montfort met him in Rennes in Mr. d'Orville's house. This Marquis was the first of the greatest benefactors of the Montfortian family. He spent the evening of his life with the missionaries. He was an influential protector who, with the simple prestige of his presence, was capable of warding off the storms. He used

to spend long hours before the Blessed Sacrament. He died on March 15, 1750 and he was buried in the church of St. Laurent, close to Fr. Montfort's tomb.

**First Biography of Fr. Montfort:** In 1724, Fr. Joseph Grandet published in Nantes a biography of Fr. Montfort.

**Death of Bishop Champflour:** On Nov. 25, 1724, at the 79 years, Bishop Etienne de Champflour expired. He helped a lot Fr. Montfort and Sr. Marie Louise. \* \* \* \*



St. Laurent parish  
church during the 18th  
century

## Chapter 5

### Foundations from 1724-1739

**A Charitable Institution in Rennes:** In January 1724, Sr. Marie Louise received a letter from Miss Elizabeth Dauvaise inviting her to take charge of a Charitable School in Rennes. Fr. Montfort had appointed Miss Dauvaise superior of the Hospital of the Incurables in Nantes. The Marquis of Magnanne had started a charitable school in an old building known as Orchard House at L'Evêque in the suburb of Rennes. He entrusted this school to Miss Dauvaise. In 1720, Miss Dauvaise bought the building. Agathe Sylvins from Nantes was appointed directress of the school. The school did not function well. Agathe Sylvins used to absent herself often from the school. Further, she kept on announcing her resignation. Hence Miss Dauvaise wrote to Sr. Marie Louise requesting her to take charge of the school.

Sr. Marie Louise chose Sister of the Angels (Madeleine Renou) and both of them left for Nantes. At Nantes they met Miss Dauvaise and then the three of them left for Rennes. On reaching Rennes, Sr. Marie Louise had a close look at the charitable school. The classrooms had a deserted look; there were neither furniture nor any equipment. The walls were crumbling. The storage sheds were rented out to small business men. As the three were discussing things, Agathe Sylvins met them. Forgetting her letters of resignation, she claimed the ownership of the house and property. She had the support of President de Montigny's

wife. At first, Sr. Marie Louise insisted upon either Agathe Sylvins or the Daughters of Wisdom. Then she agreed that the former Directress could continue till she was ready to leave.

Sr. Marie Louise struggled hard for months to clean up the Orchard House. Finally she placed a cross at the front door and a little bell to awaken the community at 4.00 a.m. People started appreciating the Sisters and depositing little gifts in front of the door. After six months, Fr. Mulot requested Sr. Marie Louise to return to St. Laurent and the latter returned to St. Laurent after appointing Sister Saint Joseph superior.

Sister Saint Joseph was even-tempered and well balanced. "Her piety was to be admired; she always gave good example, especially of patience in every trial. Her disinterestedness was of the greatest. Very severe with herself, she was very charitable to others. She practiced mortification to the point of not eating what pleased her, choosing only food that was poorly prepared and that others did not want." (Besnard, No. 205) After giving much trouble, Agathe Sylvins left Rennes for good.

After Agathe Sylvins' leaving, Madam de Montigny sent a message threatening to remove the furniture, which she had given to the house. Sister Saint Joseph, from her sickbed, answered calmly, "Tell the lady that she owns everything in the house. She can take back even the bed that I am lying on. I would be happy to die on straw." With this answer, Madam de Montigny's attitude changed and she became a faithful friend of the Daughters of Wisdom.

Sister Saint Joseph was given Sister of the Angels (Madeleine Renou) as companion. Sister of the Angels proved to be an excellent teacher for 12 years and she died

around Easter, 1736. In 1725, Sr. Catherine (Marie Peraugeau) joined the community at Rennes. She was from La Châtaigne and she had made her first profession on June 25, 1725. She was in Rennes for five weeks. She was very pious. Unfortunately she died on July 24, 1725 and she was buried in the cemetery of St. Stephen's parish church, Rennes.

**A House for the poor in Dinan:** Mr. Claude, Count of La Garaye and his wife were converted by Fr. Montfort. They transformed their castle into a hospital and took care of poor sick people. In 1724, the Count invited the Daughters of Wisdom to open a house for the poor in Dinan.

**Madam Bouillé's leaving Green Oak House:** While Sr. Marie Louise was in Rennes, Madam Bouillé spent money as she liked. She started using the dowries of novices and borrowing money from the Brothers. She bought a pig and a milch cow. Sister of Calvary had to look after the two animals. The cow was old, miserable and starving. Madam Bouillé interfered in many areas. She sent two Brothers to La Rochelle to teach poor children. She even started sending Bro. Joseau to Machefolière to buy hay or coal. The work of the Sisters and that of the Brothers got doubled.

Madame de Bouillé, in her enthusiasm, wished to participate in this community life, but her two young children's natural exuberance was a constant obstacle to what little calm was possible. Her strongly expressed views, far from being the same as those of the superior, were often more in line with those of the Dean. It became necessary that she should depart. The Dean even suggested that she could be appointed superior.

Fr. Mulo, the Marquis of Magnanne and Sr. Marie Louise met secretly. All agreed that Madam should be asked

to withdraw and Sr. Marie Louise should speak to her while the two men be present. They met Madam Bouillé and Sr. Marie Louise told her about the ambiguity of her position, her duties as mother and about her first commitment to her daughters. Madam Bouillé listened in stunned silence. The lady understood the situation and replied, "I see that you want me to leave! Well, I will. It is not difficult to settle the accounts; here are six francs, it is all I can give you." (Besnard, No. 187) Madam Bouillé left the community very gracefully and she remained a good friend till her death.

**New Novices:** Four novices joined the Daughters of Wisdom and they were Anne Meurier de Vieullauzay, Madeleine Goujard, Marie Peraudeau and Marie Guerin. One of them had a dowry, which provided some assistance to the community's finances. Sr. Marie Louise trained them with patience which produced progressive growth in them. The first profession took place on June 25, 1725.

With the dowries provided by certain novices, a piece of land was acquired that produced a certain amount of revenue. This, too, however, brought new problems in the form of hostile neighbours, who denounced the Sisters to the authorities as landowners evading taxes. Fortunately the case was dismissed.

**The La Rochelle group:** When Marie Louise left La Rochelle in 1719 for Poitiers, she left behind two Sisters from that town, Sister of the Incarnation (Marie Valois) and Sister of the Cross (Marie Regnier). The separation, intended to be temporary, became protracted and came close to developing into a full-blown schism. The two Sisters, ill advised by successive directors and colleagues, abandoned both the grey habit and the name of Daughters of Wisdom. While continuing to observe the Rule given by Fr. Montfort,

they functioned as an autonomous Institute, even receiving postulants.

Madam Bouillé had paid a visit to La Rochelle and while there she stayed with Mrs. Valleau, mother of Sister of the Incarnation. The younger sister of Marie Valleau (Sister of the Incarnation) expressed her desire to join the Daughters of Wisdom. Mrs. Bouillé took her to the convent to meet Sister of the Incarnation. Sister of the Incarnation expressed her desire to accompany her younger sister to St. Laurent. After spending a few days in St. Laurent, Sister of the Incarnation returned to La Rochelle. As her younger sister had no religious vocation, Sister of the Incarnation had to make another trip to St. Laurent to bring back her younger sister to La Rochelle. At St. Laurent, she met Sr. Marie Louise and then returned to La Rochelle with her younger sister.

In 1725, the La Rochelle group had eight Sisters and these were staffing the schools of Saint- Nicholas, Esnandes, and Chaillé. Their director, Fr. Bourguine, acting in the name of the hospital board, offered them the administration of the general hospital of La Rochelle. On hearing this news, Sr. Marie Louise left for La Rochelle to meet the Sisters. She straight went to the little convent in the parish of St. Nicholas. The Sister, who was doing cooking, recognized the visitor. Later Srs. Marie Valleau, Marie Boissonière and Marie Moreau arrived. Sr. Marie Valleau recognized the visitor and embraced her. Sr. Marie Louise talked to Sr. Marie Valleau several times. A few weeks later, the latter declared that she was ready to leave for St. Laurent.

**Mrs. Trichet's death:** In April 1725, while Sr. Marie Louise was getting ready to return from La Rochelle to St. Laurent, a letter from her brother Julian announced the death of Mrs. Trichet. She had been ill for some time. She was living in

Poitiers and her son and daughter-in-law looked after her. This death caused much pain to Sr. Marie Louise especially as she could not reciprocate her mother's love for her. She wrote to her brother, "I am in great sorrow about my dear mother, especially since she suffered so much. Be assured that God alone separated me from her, and this was not the least of my sacrifices. I am unable to write at present, my great sorrow prevents me from saying any more." (Papasogli, p. 189)

**Taking charge of the poor at the hospital of La Rochelle:**

As Sr. Marie Louise was getting ready to return from La Rochelle to St. Laurent, Fr. Tellot, whose residence faced the hospital, brought an offer from the hospital administrators requesting the Daughters of Wisdom to assume the care of the poor. Sr. Marie Louise informed the matter to Fr. Mulot and the latter authorized her to deal with the matter. Sr. Marie Louise personally studied each clause of the contract, which was signed on June 13, 1725. She insisted that Miss Augeard, the outgoing directress vacated the hospital enclosure and this was done without any difficulty.

Five Sisters: Sister of the Conception, Sister of Calvary, Sister of the Nativity, Sister Madeleine and Sister of the Sacred Heart, came from St. Laurent to La Rochelle, to form the new community there. Soon the cleaning work started along with reform. Sister of the Conception felt rejuvenated. "When it came to caring for the sick, she was courageous to excess. She did everything she could and never spared herself. Twice or thrice a day, she was seen going to wash the infected linens of the sick with such joyful air that it edified everyone who saw her. She would even have spent the night nursing them, if obedience had permitted this. She did everything so graciously and happily that smiles of joy appeared on the faces of the saddest and most dejected patients." (Besnard, No. 247)



The chaplain was not cooperative. But fortunately, during the summer of 1725, Fr. Vatel, the first priest to join Fr. Montfort, replaced him. The atmosphere in St. Louis Hospital, La Rochelle, completely changed for the better. "God and nature had given Fr. Vatel what he needed to be esteemed, respected and loved. Learned and pious, he was so open, good, and compassionate that he was loved by all who knew him." (Besnard, No. 233)

**A Community on the Island of Ré:** During the summer of 1725, Sr. Marie Louise sailed to this island receiving an invitation to serve the people. She signed a contract. Two Sisters would settle down on this island to take care of the sick, teach children and distribute alms to the poor. The Sisters took charge of a Hospice and a school. This community was established at La Flotte-en-Ré. Sister of the Incarnation (Marie Valleau) was a member.

**Return to St. Laurent and sickness:** On Sept. 8, 1725, Sr. Marie Louise was back at St. Laurent. She brought with her Marie Valleau to St. Laurent to give her the grey habit. Only Sr. Seraphique and Novice Marie Guerin were there in the community. Sr. Marie Louise was completely worn out as a result of her eight months of toil. She was obliged to go to bed, struck down by a serious sickness. In the summer of 1726, six postulants joined the novitiate at St. Laurent. The Dean was not at all happy. A gentleman from the surrounding area accused the Sisters of becoming rich. He wanted the Sisters to pay tax from which they were actually exempt because teaching and nursing were given free of charge. The higher authorities judged in favour of the Sisters.

**Death of Sister of the Conception (Catherine Brunet):** Sister of the Conception was the superior at La Rochelle. She was very active. Nobody was aware of her serious sickness. She continued with her usual jokes amid physical pain and

accomplished with her great generosity the duties of superior of the hospital. A kidney disease weakened her greatly.

Shortly after Sr. Marie Louise's departure, Sister of the Conception was confined to her bed. She wrote a letter to Sr. Marie Louise expressing her desire to die in the motherhouse. Before that letter could reach St. Laurent, she died on Dec. 14, 1725. She was buried in the chapel of the hospital.

Sr. Marie Louise felt much the loss of her companion. She came over to La Rochelle to appoint a superior in the place of the departed. She decided to appoint Sr. Madeleine Gouyard, who made her first profession six months ago. To train her up, Sr. Marie Louise placed herself under the new superior as a mere member or even as a servant. Sr. Madeleine was asked to admonish her for mere trifles. Sr. Marie Louise knelt before her and received the admonitions.

**A community at Esnandes:** In 1726, Sr. Marie Louise established a community in Esnandes to take charge of a school.

**Attempt to start a community at Fontenay-le-Comte:** In October 1727, a request from a hospital came from Fontenay-le-Comte. Sr. Marie Louise went there with three sisters. But the administrators had contacted several congregations. Arriving at the hospital, they did not even find beds. The first nights they slept on the floor. The Sisters worked hard to clean the hospital. Sr. Marie Louise wanted a contract to be signed; but contract was getting postponed. When Sr. Marie Louise gave an ultimatum, the administrators announced their agreement with the Daughters of St. Vincent. These Sisters arrived in May 1728, and the Daughters of Wisdom withdrew.

**The period from 1725 to 1729:** During this period Sr. Marie Louise spent her time quietly at St. Laurent. She spent much time in prayer and entrusted everything to Mother Mary. She used to pray loudly, "It is your concern, Mother; they are your daughters, I do not want to worry anymore..." She spent much time with the poor children of the school. She practiced poverty, charity, adoration and communion. She also spent much time with the Sisters of the community and she was a model for them.

**A community at the General Hospital of Niort:** In 1729, the Daughters of Wisdom received an invitation from Niort. In June 1729, Sr. Marie Louise along with a young lady left for Niort to study the clauses of the contract to be signed. In the hospital she was given a room. That room was infested with insects and that night she could not sleep. The following day she noticed that the hospital was in a pitiable condition. Negligence and squalor could be noticed everywhere. The negotiations went on smoothly and the contract was signed.

Sister of the Visitation and two newly professed Sisters from St. Laurent arrived at Niort. Immediately they started to clean up the place. Piles of putrid straw used as beds for the poor were removed. Walls were scraped and whitewashed. Many of the poor people suffered from skin diseases.

"For a good ten months, Marie Louise fights on the front lines, not having the courage to leave her young daughters alone. With her talent for correcting desperate economic situations, she herself keeps the account book. She involves the charitable ladies of Niort in the project of renewing completely the hospital's linens and wardrobe. She bends over the suffering patients with such a maternal manner that she is given a tender name; the poor, who watch her with incredulous eyes call her 'Mother Jesus'."

(Papasogli, p. 202) In May 1730, Sr. Marie Lousie left for St. Laurent.

In 1730, Sister of the Visitation was the superior and there were three more Sisters at Niort. But unfortunately, on July 28, 1730, Sr. Françoise Génété (Sister of Silence) expired at Niort. Fr. Besnard in his biography of Sr. Marie Louise has remarked, "She died the victim of her own overzealous ardour, never sparing herself as she should have done to be able to serve the poor longer." (Besnard, No. 272)

On Aug. 28, 1730, Sister of the Visitation (Marie Boissonnière) expired. She was a loved and respected superior. Her death threw consternation into every heart. Sr. Marie Louise rushed to Niort to console the Sisters and the poor. After her arrival and on Sept. 02, 1730, Sr. Gabriel (Jeanne Chartier) died in her arms. The death of these three Sisters cast a gloom on the hospital.

Sister of the Sacred Heart, Sister of Strength and Sister Therese replaced the departed Sisters. Sr. Marie Louise continued to stay at Niort. Sr. Therese became seriously ill. She fell into a coma. Sr. Marie Louise rushed to the chapel, prostrated herself before the tabernacle and called in a loud voice Fr. Montfort to intercede for his daughters. Having prayed with deep faith of being heard, she returned to the room of the dying Sister and found her opening her eyes coming out of the coma and she said, "Mother, you have prayed to Father de Montfort for me... it seemed to me that you were presenting me to him... I do not feel sick any longer... give me something to eat, I am cured." (Besnard, No. 276) It was a miraculous cure and after a rapid convalescence, she restarted doing her duties. After spending eight months in Niort, Sr. Marie Louise returned to St. Laurent.

Sr. Marie Louise received the news that Sister of the Sacred Heart, superior at Niort, was seriously ill. She rushed back to Niort to bring the sick superior to the motherhouse for treatment and rest. In June 1731, she was brought to St. Laurent. Unfortunately she died most probably on July 02, 1731. Sister of the Sacred Heart (Anne Meurier de Vieillauzay) was the daughter of a nobleman of Fontenay-le-Comte. She was very pious and she based her love above all on the mystery of the passion of Christ. She died at the age of thirty. She was the first Sister to be buried in the small cemetery in St. Laurent.

Sister of Strength (Marguerite de l'Epinay) became the superior at Niort. She was daughter of a noble family of Nantes and in 1724, she came to St. Laurent to make a retreat preached by Fr. Mulot. She was 27 years old. After the retreat she decided to become a Daughter of Wisdom. Fr. Mulot gave her the religious habit and also religious name of Sister of Strength. She, after her first profession, worked in Niort. In 1738, during the famine, nearly 500 beggars used to come to the hospital for a meal. The Sisters had to work hard to look after them. Then Sister of Strength left for St. Laurent for a retreat. She suffered from a brain tumor. While at St. Laurent, she suffered atrocious pains and died on Oct. 12, 1739 at the age of forty. She served the poor with gentleness and patience.

**Decree of Royal Protection:** In 1732, Fr. Mulot and Sr. Marie Louise decided to request FOR Letters of Patent, i.e., official recognition of the congregations. They obtained recommendation letters from the Marquis of Magnanne and from the Count and Countess of La Garaye. Yet the Letters of Patent were not received. Finally, after some time, getting help from Madam Bouillé, the Bishop of Brancas and Mr. Le Naim, Intendant of Poitiers, an imprecise and benevolent decree of "Royal Protection" was received. It exempted the

community at St. Laurent from tax. Further, a letter signed by Minister Maurepas was received and it stated. "His Majesty has charged me to write... that he is very pleased with the services that you render to the poor... and that he will always be disposed to accord his protection as long as you continue to work with the same zeal..."

**Small communities:** From 1729-1733, the following foundations were made: St. Xandre (1729) and Doix 91731) in the region of La Rochelle, La Guerche near Rennes and Rochefort-en-Terre (1732) in the diocese of Vannes. In 1734, the Bishop of La Rochelle asked for two Sisters for the parish of Hermenault. In 1734, another community was started in Coron. Two or three Sisters settled down in the villages and were in charge of educating children and visiting the sick. They organized soup kitchens for the poor.

**A community at Montbernage:** In 1705, Fr. Montfort preached a retreat to the people of Montbernage and in 1706, just before leaving for Rome he wrote a letter to them. In 1733, Sister Rose and Sister Holy Justice arrived at Montbernage. Marquis of Magnanne introduced them to their new dwelling, which was a kind of hut, humid and dark, built in the rock and close to the little shrine of Queen of all Hearts, which was established by Fr. Montfort. The Sisters had just one room, which served them as bedroom, storeroom, classroom and kitchen. Mr. Jacques Giudeau and Madam Bouillé gave them some furniture.

Hardly could a ray of sun-shine enter into the room. Dampness seeped through the stone walls. The Sisters did not have enough to eat. Sr. Marie Louise could not accompany the Sisters to Montbernage as she was busy at Oléron. But she very much prayed for them. One day the two Sisters were surprised to be gifted with a good sum of money as a result of a collection initiated by an unknown lady. The

Sisters were able to renovate their dwelling and replace the barn with a stone chapel. The statue of the Queen of all Hearts was enthroned in the chapel. On Mar. 02, 1734, with the permission of the Bishop of Poitiers Holy Mass was celebrated in the chapel and Blessed Sacrament started to be preserved in the tabernacle.

The first two Sisters were replaced. Sr. Marguerite, who was transferred from Hermenault, was appointed superior at Montbernage. Once flames threatened to destroy the chapel. The Sisters shifted the tabernacle to the centre of the courtyard and placed it on two chairs and prostrated themselves before the Blessed Sacrament and prayed. The people who gathered managed to put out the fire.

Sr. Marguerite was superior at Montbernage for ten years and she served the poor wonderfully well. She was stricken with a deforming disease. For years, sitting in a chair and bent in two like an old woman, she continued to teach. Finally she could not even sit as her bones were wasted away from tuberculosis. Fr. Mulot wanted her to be brought to St. Laurent for rest. Sr. Honorée accompanied her during the journey. Sr. Marie Louise received her very affectionately at St. Laurent. All the medical help available there was given to her. For a short time she was able to walk with the help of crutches. Then she was forced to remain on the straw mattress. "When she moved, one could hear her bones rub against one another as if they were tied together by a wire." (Besnard, No. 305)

The Sisters who assisted Sr. Marguerite warned her of the approaching agony. Her face became bright; the next morning she herself insisted "that everything be ready for three o'clock in the afternoon..." Sr. Marguerite Tillier died at the age of forty-seven at the indicated hour on Jan. 10, 1755.

**Taking charge of a naval hospital on the Island of Oléron:** In 1733, on being invited to take charge of the hospital from where Sisters of Charity had withdrawn after forty years of service, Sr. Marie Louise and another seven Sisters left St. Laurent for the island of Oléron. The Departments of the Navy and of War wanted the Sisters to become administrators. Sick soldiers and sailors had to be looked after. The hospital had a debt of 1,500 pounds. The King paid thirteen pennies per day as board for each patient and the Sisters had to balance the books, replenish storerooms, cellars and dispensaries.

The flow of patients was irregular so that sometimes there were eight nurses for eight patients. Sometimes the eighty that the hospital had were not enough to receive the patients. The income was not steady and yet Sr. Marie Louise systematically looked after the accounts. Old soldiers, young sailors, and others came to hospital seeking treatment. Everyone, the most vulgar and the most passionate loved and respected Sr. Marie Louise. For them she was the 'Bonne Mère' (the good mother). She used to speak to them about God. Even the fishermen used to come to the chapel to pray the rosary. Some Calvinist soldiers were converted to Catholicism.

"One time Marie Louise fears for a terribly sick soldier who is dying and who fills the ward with blasphemies. She has tried repeatedly to bring him to the Sacraments, receiving a 'no' as obstinate as the rocks of the island. Seeing the signs of agony on his face, Marie Louise tries again but, in reply, blasphemous words wound her. There is only little time and so Marie Louise, filled with anguish, hurries to the chapel. She closes the door behind her to be alone with her faith, which is stronger than the rocks of the island. She is unaware that behind a drape, Sister Elizabeth will be witness to the cries of her heart to the Lord.



She prostrates herself before the altar as she often does in moments of extreme need. She speaks to Christ and to Mary and Louis de Montfort. At this moment she is a shield against the forces of hell. Marie Louise will not permit that one of her sinful sons die blaspheming the name of the Lord. A few minutes later, the dying man awakes as if from a coma; his appearance has changed, and he looks like someone returned to his senses. He asks for the Sacraments and dies pronouncing the names of Jesus and Mary." (Besnard Nos. 311-315, Papasogli, pp. 213-214)

**St. Laurent during Sr. Marie Louise's absence (1733-1736):** Before leaving for Oléron, Sr. Marie Louise appointed Sr. Agnes (Jeanne Louise Antoinette de La Goussaye) as interim superior. She was the daughter of Lord of Chaulme and Louise de Bonchamps. She joined the novitiate on Sept. 29, 1731. She made her first profession after one year. Then she was sent as superior of the new community at Coron in Anjou. There she became sick and she was brought back to St. Laurent. Sr. Marie Louise chose her as interim superior because of her inner qualities. She was always busy doing charitable deeds. She was very mortified. She encouraged servants to approach the Sacraments. She was humble.

Sr. Agnes was exhausted by penance. She was sent to Coron as superior. As the people came to know that she was from a noble family, she did not want to stay there and requested Sr. Marie Louise to transfer her to St. Laurent. Accordingly Sr. Agnes returned to St. Laurent. When Sr. Marie Louise returned to St. Laurent in 1736, Sr. Agnes was thin and feverish. Though she was deformed by dropsy, her bright eyes shone brightly in her emaciated face. She had practiced much penance, and so her confessor obliged her to ask pardon of her own body. Thus reconciled even her own body, she died on Jan. 05, 1738.

**Sister Agathe (Françoise de Linax):** Her father was an English man settled in France to practice the Catholic faith more freely. In early childhood she lost her father and mother. She had an independent spirit and a slightly caustic humour. As an orphan she was educated in the convent of the Daughters of St. Anne of Providence near Saumur. She had an ardent desire to become a Daughter of Wisdom.

When Françoise was twenty five years old, she joined the novitiate at St. Laurent. In August 1732, she received the religious habit and she was given the name Sr. Agathe. This intelligent and spirited woman tried to adjust herself to the modest and simple lifestyle of the Daughters of Wisdom. At the height of her efforts to adjust, she was stricken by various physical illnesses. She led a hidden life in various houses of the congregation.

Finally, Sr. Agathe was transferred to St. Laurent. Here she dedicated herself to visiting the sick of the town and surrounding villages. She used to console the sick with words coming from her heart. "After three years of illness, she is reduced to a pitiful state with no possible relief. Day and night, she cleansed the pus from her wounds because her whole body was just one wound. Physical suffering are not the worst part of her martyrdom, since this soul thirsty for perfection also knows deep spiritual darkness. She lives on love and feels arid unto death, deprived of any palpable experience of love." (Papasogli, p. 220) One day, the aridity disappeared and peace was restored to Sr. Agathe. In this state on Oct. 16, 1757, she expired at the age of fifty-one.

**Preserving the Blessed Sacrament in the Sisters' chapel in St. Laurent:** Sr. Marie Louise desired very much to have the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel. But the Dean always opposed her and wrote letters to the Bishop to delay the event. Finally the Bishop appointed a commission to study

the condition of the chapel. Fr. Mérand, parish priest of Mortagne was appointed to be in charge of the commission. He visited St. Laurent and stayed with the Dean.

The Dean had many reasons to oppose the preservation of the Blessed Sacrament. Fr. Mérand wrote down all his reasons and then he himself paid a visit to the chapel, examined everything and wrote a very positive report. To the Dean, who did not like the report, he replied, "Sir, I did my duty, I have not put down anything that cannot be verified." The Bishop gave the authorization in a letter dated June 10, 1734. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist was fixed for July 15, 1734. Most of the Missionaries were present. A number of distinguished priests from the diocese of Angers also arrived. Fr. Mulot went to the Dean to request him to be the main celebrant; but he refused. Hence the Dean of Jalais was asked to be the main celebrant. A solemn High Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the Sisters and the Blessed Sacrament was preserved in the tabernacle. It was a very joyful day for the Sisters. At that time Sr. Marie Louise was on the island Oléron.

**A community at Saint-Loup-sur-Thouet:** In 1738, the Countess of La Boissière requested Sr. Marie Louise for Sisters for the town of St. Loup, where she had her castle. Two Sisters were sent there to look after sick people.

**A community at St. Jean de l'Hyversay:** Marquis of La Boissière had established a weaver's mill for the benefit of the peasants. In 1738, the Countess of La Boissière requested Sr. Marie for Sisters. Sr. Marie Valteau became directress of the mill. The priest there was not sympathetic. The working conditions were not suitable and hence the Sisters became sick and they were withdrawn.

**Sr. Marie Louise at St. Laurent from 1736-1739:** The Sisters were happy to have Sr. Marie Louise back at St. Laurent. It was not easy for the Sisters to survive, where the Sisters worked without pay. Life at St. Laurent was hard. It was a period of famine and many beggars used to come to the Green Oak House seeking some bread. Thus came a day, on which Marie Louise gave away the last penny in charity. There was no penny left to buy grain. Sr. Marie Louise knelt down and prayed before the statue of Our Lady of Wisdom, that was carved by Fr. Montfort.

About 50 kms away from St. Laurent, there was a lady, who had eight hundred pounds. During this period of famine, she could not sleep, as she knew that the Missionaries and the Sisters had very little money to buy bread for themselves and for the poor. She had nightmares; she felt as if the coins became toads crawling over her body. At that time a Montfort Brother came to her house and she gave her money to him and she was able to sleep well. The Brother handed over this amount to Fr. Mulot and Sr. Marie Louise. This brought much joy to the community and all thanked God.

**The people of St. Laurent defending the Sisters:** In 1738, some people made a complaint against the Daughters of Wisdom, stating that their presence in the parish disturbed the interest of the local Lord and that of the people of the parish. The Lord of Lilleroy decided to convoke the peasants in a plenary assembly and publicly try the Daughters of Wisdom.

The trial of the case took place in August 1738. "But today a surprise awaits them. All Saint-Laurent unanimously rises to defend the grey sisters; and when an army of Vandéen peasants rises for a cause, history itself teaches us that it would be difficult to make them change their minds.

In the unanimity there is only one discordant voice, that of a man whose name we do not know. He declares himself hostile to the Daughters of Wisdom. By coincidence, a short time later he becomes sick and falls into the merciful hands of Brother Joseau. He receives such forgiveness and kindness that, for the rest of his life, he will be a very faithful friend of the sons and daughters of Louis Grigninon!" (Papasogli, p. 225)

**House of the Penitents, Poitiers:** In 1739, Mgr. De Foudras, Bishop of Poitiers, sent an urgent message to the Daughters of Wisdom, concerning a place, where fallen women were shut up in a miserable, crumbling cottage under the care of Sisters who strictly observed the rule of enclosure. The rule of enclosure was not acceptable to Sr. Marie Louise. After months of negotiations, the Bishop did not insist upon the rule of enclosure. Sr. Marie Louise took four Sisters to the House of Penitents in Poitiers. Mr. Julian, Sr. Marie Louise's brother, paid Sr. Marie Louise a visit. They were meeting each other after twenty years. He spoke of his disappointment at not having been able to offer her hospitality. She promised him that she would pay him a visit.

Sr. Marie Louise and her four Sisters set to work in the House of the Penitents. It was not easy to bring about discipline among the women, who recently gave up their evil life or prostitution. The Sisters bestowed on them much care and love, maintained a constant vigilance and gave them daily talks, and helped them to participate in the Holy Eucharist in a meaningful manner. Slowly quite a few of these women really repented and changed their way of life. The Sisters managed to give them a better accommodation.

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## Chapter 6

### The period from 1739-1748

**A period of journeys and foundations, 1724-1739:** During fifteen years, i.e., from 1724-1739, Sr. Marie Louise travelled a lot from city to city, from village to village to lay foundations to new communities of the Daughters of Wisdom. Wisdom's whole edifice was erected on the firm, foundation of Providence. Except in the large hospitals, the Daughters of Wisdom lived on alms, without begging. Survival and expansion had to be looked into. It was not always easy. Sr. Marie Louise undertook several journeys. In nearly all the foundations, she accompanied the Sisters and stayed with them till everything was settled. In the Naval hospital on the Island of Oléron, she actually spent three years. She lived her life in evangelical service. Even in intense activity, she maintained a spirit of recollection.

" 'It was the love of Jesus Christ that impelled her to bear everything and undertake everything': schools, hospitals, problems close by and foundations at a distance. The love of Jesus Christ is the source of the zeal with which Marie Louise Trichet accomplishes 'great things'. That same love for Christ shines forth in her option for the poor. The spirit of faith made her see Jesus Christ in the poor and inspired her to consecrate herself to their service...' Therefore, Jesus Christ is the beginning and end of all her apostolic journeys, Jesus Christ wears the rags of the patients in Niort, Poitiers and La Rochelle. He is heard in the cry of the beggars who knock at the Green Oak's door when famine empties the bread bins of the Wisdom Community, Jesus Christ shivers in the nakedness of the poor people who force from Marie Louise that cry of compassionate folly, 'If I were a piece of cloth, I would give myself to the poor.' " (Besnard No. 524 , Papasogli, p. 232)

**A quiet period, 1739-1748:** Sr. Marie Louise had a desire for solitude and prayer. This desire could not be fully satisfied during the hectic period of the foundations. During these ten years (1739-1748), Sr. Marie Louise lived a recollected life between the walls of the Green Oak House. She did her simple domestic tasks and looked after the spiritual formation of Sisters and Novices. She was physically exhausted. Still she tried to improve the material welfare of the community. In 1742, the Sisters expanded the motherhouse property by buying the meadows along the river.

Sr. Marie Louise spent much time in prayer. She used to tell her Sisters, "My dear daughters, is it possible that we do not really love God, who loves us so much? We must admit that we do not have the heart, that we do not have the courage; myself most of all. Ah! My dear daughters, do all your actions with love and for love... The divine love with which she had fallen asleep awakened her in the middle of night. Novices who slept in her room were often witnesses of the conversations that she had with God and of her lively and ardent discussions with Him, unaware that she was being heard... Once, a novice, thinking that she had been called, asked her, 'Did you call me, Mother?' "No,' she answered simply, 'don't you see that I am speaking to my Jesus?' " (Besnard, No. 463) Sr. Marie Louise meditated on the Rule received from Fr. Montfort. She penetrated its spirit in an effort to transmit it fully to her Sisters. It was a time of deepening the understanding.

**A house of charity in Airvault:** In 1741, the Daughters of Wisdom started a house of charity in Airvault in Poitou. It was to help people of the locality.

**A house of charity in St. Denis d'Oléron:** In 1741, the Sisters started a house of charity at St. Denis d'Oléron in Charente Maritime.

**Death of Fr. Jacques Le Valois:** Fr. Valois was a sickly person. He was learned and prayerful. He was made for the confessional, not for the pulpit; for personal relationships, not for crowds. "He had a great attraction for the interior life and dedicated himself to it entirely. He made so much progress in prayer that he was often found in a state of union with God that suspended all the powers of his soul and often seemed to take away the use of the senses. Several times he was seen as if in rapture, paying no attention to exterior objects. This happened not only during Mass or the recitation of the Breviary but also during meals and in conversations. A Brother who lived a long time with him affirmed that sometimes he had to pull on Father's coat to make him come out of ecstasy," (Biography of Montfort by Besnard, Vol. II, p. 304)

Fr. Valois was the confessor of the Daughters of Wisdom in St. Laurent. One day, he retired to bed with a fever that soon got worse. A Brother attending on him tried to console him and spoke about the heart of Jesus. To him, Fr. Valois said, "I am thinking of Jesus and we are united in Him, that is why there is no need to say anything.." At that time two missionaries returned to St. Laurent after the mission at Foueray. They knelt down by Fr. Valois' bed and intoned the prayers for the dying. And Fr. Valois, peacefully on July 14, 1742, surrendered his soul to the Lord. His face became brighter than ever before. This death made much impression on the people of St. Laurent especially on Sr. Marie Louise. Fr. Croissant replaced Fr. Valois.

**A Little Hospice on the island of Oléron:** In 1743, the Daughters of Wisdom started a small hospice on the island of Oléron.

**A House of Charity at St. Georges d'Oléron:** In 1744, Sr. Marie Louise went to St. George of Oléron to accompany



three sisters who would remain there to run a house of charity.

**Return to the Poorhouse of Poitiers:** The Poorhouse of Poitiers was the cradle of the Daughters of Wisdom and Fr. Montfort had predicted that the Sisters would return there. In 1748, the Poorhouse was in utter disorder and the administrators felt obliged to take some drastic decisions. Discord reigned supreme among the governesses. During a meeting of the administrators, an administrator proposed, "In the place of the governesses, why not recall the daughters of Marie Louise Trichet?" The proposal was greeted with silence. It was not easy to execute the proposal, as the governesses, who had powerful patrons, would not easily allow themselves to be ousted.

Among the Administrators, there were two groups, one supporting and the other opposing. An invitation was sent to Sr. Marie Louise and she came all alone to study the contract and to sign it. She stopped at her brother, Julian's home and then went to the convent of the House of the Penitents. She fell sick and she was forced to taken rest for eight days. Her presence was noticed by the people of Poitiers and a new gossip started and she had to face a storm. Her weapons were silence, decisiveness, and abandonment to God's inspiration.

One fine morning, the governesses unexpectedly received notices of dismissal. The ladies, who were their patrons, signed a petition to the Mayor of Poitiers, pointing out the reasons why they considered the dismissal illegal. The Mayor ordered that the governesses should remain in their post and forbade Sr. Marie Louise from accepting the post of Directress of the hospital. By that time the contract with Sr. Marie Louise was already signed. The

Administrators took a quick decision and issued a more peremptory order to the governesses to leave the hospital.

The governesses left the hospital and Sr. Marie Louise and three other Sisters, gathered from Montbernage and the House of Penitents, entered the hospital. They proceeded to the chapel at the end of the courtyard and thanked God. The room, where she had slept for ten years, was close by. She had left the hospital in 1719 and after thirty years Fr. Montfort's prophecy was accomplished.

The Mayor was very unhappy about the events and he sent a circular letter to all the agencies of the city, the clergy, the magistrates, the municipal representatives, the spoke persons for the arts and crafts and the five citizens belonging to cathedral chapter. All Poitiers was convoked to judge the return of Sr. Marie Louise. Then the Mayor came to know that only the court of France could give him the right to convoke a plenary meeting. Realizing his mistake in overreaching his power, the Mayor, by a second letter, cancelled the convocation of the assembly.

Five Sisters from St. Laurent arrived and they took possession of the hospital. For some time, Sr. Marie Louise stayed with them. The Sisters worked hard to clean up the place. The poor started getting better food and better attention. Before returning to St. Laurent, Sr. Marie Louise paid a short visit to her brother. Julian's eldest son was ordained a priest ten years ago; his second son would be a attorney like his grandfather; and the younger children as well as the older ones loved and venerated Sr. Marie Louise.

**Death of Fr. Adrien Vatel:** Fr. Vatel foresaw his own end. Towards the end of 1747, he paid a visit to his family in the diocese of Coutances and bade farewell to his dear ones. In his parish, he preached a mission. After that he came back to

Orchard House, Rennes on April 18, 1748. The next morning, he celebrated Holy Eucharist in the chapel of the Wisdom community. During the Mass he experienced a sharp pain in his chest and he vomited. He went to bed. He was keen on going to St. Laurent. He wrote a letter with the request to send a Brother and a horse to take him to St. Laurent. When the Brother arrived the funeral and burial were getting over. He died in Orchard House on April 22, 1748.

Fr. Vatel joined Fr. Montfort in February 1715 and some months later, Fr. René Mulot joined Fr. Montfort. After Fr. Montfort's death, Frs. Mulot and Vatel came to stay with the parish priest of St. Pompain. During 1718, they started preaching parish missions. In June 1722, they came to St. Laurent. Fr. Vatel was a great help to Fr. Mulot and Sr. Marie Louise. Revered as a saint, he inspired their confidence. They received this news with great consternation.

Fr. Mulot took Fr. Vatel's death as a warning for himself. First of all, he named Fr. Audubon as his successor. He sent Frs. Hacquet, Albert and Besnard to Rome taking the Rules of the Montfortian Institutes to present them to the Pope in order to get his blessing and approval. They left for Rome on July 28, 1748 and returned on November 13, 1748. While in Rome, the Fathers had an audience with Pope Benedict XIV. Since the Rules were approved by the Bishops of France, the Pope approved them and gave them his blessing. He told them to continue preaching parish missions. He also gave them an Apostolic Mandate.

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## Chapter 7

### **Further Foundations from 1749-1756**

**Fr. René Mulot' death:** On April 13, 1749, Fr. Mulot and the missionary team left for Questembert in the diocese of Vannes to preach a retreat. The people of the parish used to bury the dead in the church making the floor of the church squalid and unhealthy. Fr. Mulot preached against the habit and the villagers agreed to bury the dead in a cemetery. They planned to enlarge the cemetery and transfer the tombs there in order to provide a good flooring for the church. Fr. Mulot and other priests joined the people in this work.

As the above mentioned work was going on, a rusty nail pierced the sole of Fr. Mulot's one foot. The wound caused much pain and Fr. Mulot was forced to remain in bed. Tetanus set in and his last words were "In You, O Lord, I trust; I shall not be confounded forever." Fr. René Mulot expired on May 12, 1749. He was sixty-six years old. He was a living gospel of humility and meekness. His heart was removed and preserved in spirit, to be taken to St. Laurent. He was buried in the cemetery of St. Michael's Church, Questembert. At his death there were 12 Fathers, 6 Brothers and about 100 Sisters in the Montfortian Congregations.

The news about Fr. Mulot's death was brought to Sr. Marie Louise and she for a week kept this very sad news to herself. "She had never imagined that this superior, so kind and so devoted, would die before her. For eight full days, she kept complete silence regarding her inner distress and she took great pains not to let it show. But when a Sister suddenly asked her, 'Reverend Mother, when will Reverend Father come back?' she could no longer restrain herself." (Agnes Richome, *Uncommon Wisdom*, p. 142)

Sr. Marie Louise and the Sisters wept greatly over the great loss. A few days later, all the people of St. Laurent lined up on the road to welcome the dismal cortege of missionaries who returned bringing Fr. Mulot's heart in a leaden urn. The heart was kept in the chapel of the Wisdom Community.

**The Dean's condolences and reconciliation:** As the Montfortian family was gathered in the intimacy of its sorrow, Fr. Rougeou de La Jarrie, Dean, came in and expressed his condolences and regrets, "Take heart, I am sure that the Lord sustain you. Now I know that the finger of God is on these two Communities. I thank the Lord a thousand times for having called you here and for having used me for the first steps, though some people have done everything possible to turn me against you. I recognize clearly that it was the devil doing this work..." (Besnard, Nos 393-394, Papasogli, p. 246)

**Fr. Jean Nich Audubon, Superior General (1749-1755):**



After a retreat, on May 24, 1749, Fr. Audubon was elected Superior General. In 1742, he came to St. Laurent to pray at the tomb of Fr. Montfort. He celebrated Mass in the chapel of Wisdom and then met the Sisters. At the advice of Sr. Marie Louise, he joined the Company of Mary.

**Death of the Marquis of Magnanne:** Mr. Henri François Racappe, Marquis of Magnanne, spent twenty-five years in the Long House at St. Laurent. In 1728, he went on a pilgrimage to Rome and had an audience with the Pope. He

used to spend long hours before the tabernacle in the parish church of St. Laurent. In March 1750, he was sick for a week. Fr. Croissant, Sr. Marie Louise and a nurse were by his bed side. In the early morning of March 15, 1750, the Marquis breathed his last. The Dean and Fr. Croissant decided to bury him in the parish church, right in front of Fr. Montfort's tomb and thus his tomb now is located just in front of the tombs of Fr. Montfort and Sr. Marie Louise.

**Sr. Florence (Marianne Ladoux), Asst. General:** In 1749, Sr. Marie Louise appointed Sr. Florence as Assistant General. She was forty-one years old. She was intelligent, and candid. She had rectitude and creativity. She kept a Chronicle marking the history of the Daughters of Wisdom.

**Sr. Marie Louise's longest journey:** Sr. Marie Louise wanted to pay a visit to all the communities of the Daughters of Wisdom and to meet all the Sisters. She prepared a project and got approval from Fr. Audubon. She wanted to make this long journey on horseback, escorted by Bro. John. She wanted to take leave personally of each one of her daughters.

In April 1750, Sr. Marie Louise left St. Laurent with Bro. John. She had a clear idea of the route she would follow. Including St. Laurent there were twenty-two communities of Wisdom. Seventeen of them were 'houses of charity', where the Sisters dedicated themselves primarily to the instruction of poor children. Three were general hospitals and one, a house for penitents. The foundations in Rennes, Rochefort and La Guerche were excluded because of distance.

"The Sisters received Sr. Marie Louise with great trust. They spoke to her of their spiritual and community life, of their work and of their observance of the Rule and their vows. They were all happy to have Mother Marie Louise

among them and did not know how to show their gratitude. They could not see her leave without tears. They were consoled by the hope of making their annual retreat at St. Laurent in order to spend a little time of recollection in the company of their dear Mother, who encouraged them more by her example than by her words." (Besnard, No. 402)

Sr. Marie Louise stayed with the Sisters in each community for a few days, listening to their problems, sharing their joys and sorrows. She did not teach them nor admonish them; she was just with them. She consoled them by her simple presence. At Poitiers, she visited her brother Julian and his family. Actually Julian died in 1753. After four months, on Aug. 24, 1750, Sr. Marie Louise returned to St. Laurent. She was relatively in good health.

**A house of charity in Dinan:** In 1750, the Count and Countess of La Garaye were elderly and exhausted from their years of service to the poor. They were anxious to entrust their knowledge of medicine to the Daughters of Wisdom. Fr. Audubon appointed Sr. Dorothy, who was almost disabled, superior, and selected Sr. Genevieve and Sr. Emerence, newly professed, for the project in Dinan. The three Sisters on Dec. 12, 1750 left for Dinan. The tiresome journey caused a gangrene in Sr. Dorothy's arm.

The Sisters went to La Garaye and met the Count and Countess. The Count was shocked to see Sr. Dorothy's arm discoloured. He made incisions in several places of her arm as a treatment. For six months the Count daily sent one of his surgeons to Dinan to bleed sister's arm. The house in Dinan was not quite ready to receive the Sisters. After six months, Sr. Dorothy got healed and she was superior for a long period. On Jan. 3, 1751, Fr. Audubon signed the Contract for the Dinan foundation.

**A house of charity in Louvigne:** In 1751, the Sisters started a community in Louvigne in the diocese of Rennes. The Sisters took charge of a school and did charitable works. The lady who signed the contract gave a lot of trouble to the Sisters.

**A house of charity in Angoulême:** In 1751, the Sisters established a house in Angoulême. Some Sisters had become experts in bleeding and good at prescribing medication. This gave rise to jealousy of doctors, surgeons and pharmacists. They filed a case in the court against the Sisters. They even came to the Sisters' house to take away all the medicines. But that did not take place. Further the authorities who enquired the case, certified that the Sisters could continue treating patients and testified to their "radical skill in curing ringworm and epilepsy".

**A community in the State Hospital at St. Lô:** In 1755, Mrs. Deszercy, sister-in-law of the elderly dean of St. Laurent, suggested to the Administrators of the hospital at St. Lô to invite the Daughters of Wisdom. The Dean himself came to the Green Oak House to invite the Sisters. In the summer of 1756, Fr. Audubon designated six Sisters for the hospital of St. Lô. When Fr. Audubon arrived here, the Sisters had not come; while he went in search of them, they arrived by another route. Finally Fr. Audubon also came back. The Sisters faced a stiff opposition as the governesses did not want to leave and the people supported them. Fr. Audubon returned to St. Laurent. On his way he paid a visit to Trégavou near Dinan and agreed to start a small foundation. Later the opposition at St. Lô was overcome and the Sisters rendered great service at the hospital.

**Death of Fr. Audubon:** Fr. Audubon returned to St. Laurent completely exhausted. He confided to one of the Sisters, "It is all over for me. I cannot go on any longer." Still as an



urgent call from La Rochelle forced him to undertake a journey, he got ready to leave. He was having fever. He told a Sister, "Ah, my dear daughter, how hard it is for me to leave. I do not know what is happening to me!" Sr. Marie Louise came to bid him good bye and he told her the same words.

After his visits to La Rochelle and to the island Oléron, Fr. Audubon returned to St. Laurent weak and tired. Then he left along with a missionary team to preach in nearby parishes. The first mission was at La Verrie. Then the team left for Poiré. They had to cross a river. While getting into the boat, Fr. Audubon slipped causing a painful hernia. Earlier when he was twenty-two he had another hernia. In spite of much pain, Fr. Audubon started preaching the mission in Poiré. On Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he climbed the pulpit to speak of Mary, his good Patroness. He could only begin the sermon, he was forced to stop because of pain. He had to be taken to bed for treatment and rest.

Fr. Charles Besnard from La Rochelle came to meet Fr. Audubon. The latter designed him to succeed him as Superior General. Both the physician and surgeon, who were called to attend on him, decided that a surgical operation was needed. Fr. Audubon accepted to be operated upon. Dr. Dulatiers, an expert surgeon, performed the operation which lasted five to eight hours with various interruptions. The patient suffered immense pain. The doctors were trying to correct which involved probing sensitive intestines. During the long operation, Fr. Audubon often prayed, "Jesus, have pity on me. Ah, my God! Ah, my God!" (Ref. Papasogli, p. 292)

The Doctors did not succeed in retracting the hernia; they sutured and bandaged the wound. In spite of much pain,

Fr. Audubon abandoned himself to God and said, "Ah, how happy I am. Ah, how happy I am. Now I am on the cross. Ah, how happy I am to die during a mission. It is a grace that I do not deserve." He received Holy Viaticum. Then he was very recollected.

"About three hours before dying, when the Fathers wanted to speak to him, Fr. Audubon replied, 'Leave me alone, leave me alone.' He raised his eyes to heaven and remained immobile for a long time, like someone seeing something marvelous. That state lasted an hour. He could hardly speak and yet they heard him pronounce these words, 'In pace in idipsum domiam et requiescam.' About two hours before dying, he was strangely agitated, as if he saw something that disturbed and frightened him. He moved his head as if to say that what he saw displeased him very much... When this agitation ceased, he returned to his peaceful state. Dying slowly, he expired an hour after midnight on Monday, December 15, the octave day of the Immaculate Conception." (Papasogli, p. 293) He was forty-five years old. He was buried in the cemetery of Poiré. When this news reached Sr. Marie Louise, she shed tears as she had done when she heard the news of the death of Fr. Montfort.

**Fr. Charles Besnard, Superior General (1755-1788):**



In December 1755, the Missionaries met and elected Fr. Charles Besnard as Superior General. He made attempts in vain to get patent for the Company. Finally he was forced to give up religious vows to get the patent. He wrote the biographies of Fr. Montfort and Sr. Marie Louise.

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## Chapter 8

### **The great trial, illness and death (1756-1759)**

**A painful trial:** Sr. Marie Louise was seventy years old. She tried to practice self annihilation more and more. She led a very simple life. Just a very few Sisters, especially two, started thinking that she was no longer capable of leading the congregation. The same people felt that the poor Green Oak House should be replaced by a better one. The Sister who aspired to become the Superior General, expressed her views bluntly, "Ah, when I see this poor house, my heart bleeds..." Sr. Marie Louise wanted to preserve the house where Fr. Montfort died. Fr. Besnard, the newly elected General, liked to have a new building. Sr. Marie Louise said clearly, "I fear that the Lord will withdraw his blessings if we become rich..." She accepted humiliations and reproaches in silence while continuing to govern the congregation with gentleness and self-effacement.

The two Sisters referred to above started to whisper here and there, "Our poor Mother is really sick." The gossip went on and even reached the ears of the Missionaries including Fr. Besnard, who actually did not have time to know Sr. Marie Louise in any depth. The gossip started to spread here and there and sometimes these things were even told to Sr. Marie Louise directly.

"Besieged by more and more complaints, Father Besnard 'reprimanded the superior when the community was gathered in full assembly, 'ordering her (as was the custom of those days)' to kneel down in the middle of the novitiate.' Perhaps, he had some faint hope that she would refuse all the false accusations... Marie Louise remained silent. Dumbfounded, the Sisters did not know how to interpret that silence; was it perhaps an admission of guilt? (It is hard to

understand how they, nourished as they were by the gospel, failed to make the obvious connection with Jesus silent before his judges.) Then one voice was raised, vehemently protesting against the treatment inflicted on the venerated Mother-Foundress. Father Besnard was taken aback for a moment, but he was not altogether convinced of her innocence, for he has been thoroughly indoctrinated to the contrary. He sought the advice of one of his confreres, doubtless Father Croissant, who was at time Marie Louise's confessor, and his eyes were opened. The Sisters who had caused all the trouble lost all their influence, and peace and harmony finally returned to the community. But the terrible trial had lasted for two whole years.

"It is, perhaps, needless to add that the victim had remained both calm and firm throughout the ordeal, neither allowing herself any critical remarks nor yielding to the most insidious attacks. Surely, to hand in her resignation, would have been, from many points of view, a relief to her. But she knew full well that to do so in these circumstances would be harmful to the general good. For this reason, she held fast, and yet managed to maintain perfect humility within her heart. Did she not go so far as to say to Father Besnard some time after these events, 'Those people were right; I am not annoyed with them, for a Superior ought to have many qualities that I lack.' We are tempted to cry out in reply, 'If she does not have them, after all the amazing proofs of them that she has given by her very life, then nobody in the world has them!' " (Agnes Richomme, *Marie Louise Trichet and the Daughters of Wisdom*, translated by Sr. Ann E. Nielsen, D.W., *Uncommon Wisdom*, p. 155) From this trial during the years 1756-1757, Sr. Marie Louise emerged greater in virtue than ever. The Sisters once again renewed their trust in her and peace returned to the community. Fr. Croissant suggested that the two instigators could be transferred from the motherhouse to two different communities and this was

done. Sr. Marie Louise saw them off with the utmost charity and consideration.

**Living like a novice:** Sr. Marie Louise asked Fr. Croissant to choose from among the Sisters a superior on whom she would depend for everything that concerned her personal life. The latter chose Sr. Saint Raphael, who was bilious and melancholy in temperament. Sr. Marie Louise had to suffer because of Sr. Raphael's treatment. Later another elderly and virtuous Sister replaced Sr. Raphael.

Sr. Marie Louise wrote to Fr. Croissant concerning her inner self., "I am full of confusion because I have experienced so much repugnance in doing what God asked of me, and I have corresponded so badly with all the goodness He has shown toward so weak a creature, especially in opening my eyes to the state of blindness I have been until now. I have known for a long time that this good Master wanted me to place myself completely under obedience, but I have not reflected seriously on this until today. What a loss I have sustained in resisting so many graces! I ask you with confidence to help me with good prayers and kind assistance.

"I ask you never to tire of furthering my perfection. As a great favour, I ask you never to spare me. Allow me to say that I believe that God is asking you to make me die to self-will. Up to now, I have followed my own will too easily and it is time to destroy it entirely. I must make reparation in some way for the faults I have committed in always acting as the one in control, I who am the least of all. I believe, as I have already told you, that my sins deserve greater punishment. I earnestly beg you to kindly make me do all that you know God requires of me. Please do not listen to the rebellion of my self-love which penetrates everywhere. With the help of God's grace I will work to destroy all in me that

displeases my good Jesus, so as to have the happiness of enabling God alone to reign in me...

"Yesterday morning, after meditation, I spoke to Sister... I knelt at her feet and begged her not to regard me as her superior but as the last of the novices, to try me, to have no consideration for me, to refuse to allow me to receive Communion when she judges it to be appropriate and not to hesitate to treat me in the way she feels that God desires. I ask you in your charity and as a great favour, to impose this task on her." (Letter No. 6, Papasogli, pp. 307, 308)

Sr. Marie Louise was ready to undertake anything as long as it was pleasing to the heart of God. In another letter she wrote to her confessor, "I feel obliged to make known to you my interior dispositions and the state of soul in which I find myself. I consider myself as a victim in three different ways, and I feel that this is how my dear Jesus wishes it. First of all, a victim of silence, speaking only when it is absolutely necessary. I thought that this would be a way in which I could adore the silence which God has preserved during an eternity when He contemplated His infinite perfection, and adore the silence my dear Jesus observes in the Blessed Sacrament, in spite of all the outrages committed against Him, and those which I am guilty of myself.

"Secondly, victim of obedience; I have not merited this excellent quality, but in order to obtain it, all my actions must be under obedience, but an obedience which is both interior and exterior, without argument, without questioning what I have been ordered to do... Ah! I experience so many interior struggles, some of which come from the devil, some from nature, and some from self-love. It would be impossible to overcome these if I did not remember that my dear Saviour died on the Cross in order to fulfil His Father's will.

I make every personal sacrifice for this dear virtue of obedience...

"Thirdly, victim of the cross, both interior and exterior; in these three states I am deeply grateful for God's goodness towards me, who am unworthy of so many favours because of my sins and my ingratitude. I beg of you to thank my good Jesus for all the blessings He has bestowed on me and ask Him to forgive my lack of courage in responding to His desires. I trust that you will do this for me." (Letter No. 7, Papasogli, pp. 309, 310)

Sr. Marie Louise accepted the many interior crosses she had to face. She wrote to Sister of Calvary: "My dear daughter, Remember that your beautiful name is Sister of Calvary. There should never be a time when you have no crosses and you should rejoice in them every day, remember that Calvary had the honour of being the place of the tree of life on which, for love of you and me, our good Jesus was crucified. Ah! If we were more deeply penetrated with this divine love, we would avoid complaining of our little infirmities and sufferings. On the contrary, never to be a moment without suffering be our greatest satisfaction." (Letter No. 22, Papasogli, p. 311)

Sr. Marie Louise wanted to make herself a dwelling place for Jesus. She wrote, "My beloved Jesus, give me the grace to practice what You have had the goodness to inspire in me, which is to work at building in myself an oratory in which You may dwell. Dear Saviour of my soul, help me because I am only weakness. How crushing is the weight of my infirmities! My beloved Jesus, have compassion! Humility will be the foundation of this edifice; to that end, with the help of Your holy grace, I patiently accept all the little humiliations that present themselves, without complaining to anyone; and I wish to do so with joy... In

this little oratory there will be four columns. The first will be obedience, the second, detachment from all created things, the third will be love of suffering and the fourth will be prudence...

"Piety will be the spiritual curtains of this tabernacle, and the curtain rods will be firmness to undertake all that God will ask of me. The hooks will be vigilance to accomplish my duty; the tabernacle veil will be gentleness. To obtain this virtue, I will carefully watch over my tongue so that it does not pronounce any harsh words. Helped by the Holy Spirit, Who rests only in humble and contrite hearts, I will also watch over my heart to stop any impatient reaction that may arise. If I commit any fault against gentleness, I will do penance by rising during the night to make an act of reparation for a quarter of an hour. I will do these acts of reparation only with the permission of my confessor. What a joy it is to be able to build a pleasing dwelling to lodge my God by means of all these little practices!" (Papasogli, pp. 312, 313)

**Death of Sister of the Blessed Sacrament:** She returned to St. Laurent after a failed attempt at a foundation in Villedieu. Then she worked for a short period at La Flotte and then returned to St. Laurent. Soon after, fever struck her down and she died in 1756. She was only twenty-two years old.

**Death of Sister Saint Michael:** She returned to the Castle of Oléron as superior. Her stay was not long and she died most unexpectedly in 1756.

**Death of Sister of Calvary:** Sister of Calvary (Louise de Bel) was one of the early Sisters and a friend of Sr. Marie Louise. She was sick for a long time confined to the infirmary of the motherhouse. She was the daughter of the Lord of Fosses. She worked hard in the Green Oak House



and then for the poor of La Rochelle. Finally, as she was sick, she came to St. Laurent. She died on March 22, 1758. At her death Sr. Marie Louise wept for a long time.

**A community at the hospital of Valognes in Normandy:**

In March 1758, six Sisters started their ministry in the State Hospital of Valognes. It was an important hospital and the Sisters went there at the invitation of the Bishop of Coutances. Shortly after the arrival of the Sisters, the English army captured Cherbourg, which was a few kilometres away from Valognes. Sr. Angèle, who had left the island of Oléron because of them, thought she would die of fright when she heard that they had come to find her. She fell into a coma and she remained delirious for many days. While the English soldiers were preparing to capture Valognes, the French reinforcements arrived and so the English soldiers withdrew. Sr. Angèle regained her health after that.

**The Annual Retreat of 1758 and the Constitutions:**

In October 1758, about 20 Sisters gathered in St. Laurent for the annual retreat. During this retreat, Fr. Besnard presented the Constitutions of the Daughters of Wisdom. "In her last years, Sr. Marie Louise worked on them with the Sisters who were closest to her: Sisters Honorée, Agathe, Flavie, Martine... They have written and revised; they have studied the customs of other religious orders, comparing, discussing, praying. They have translated their own experience into directives in order to entrust the living tradition of the Congregation to the Sisters who will follow. Marie Louise commits herself to these meticulously written pages, which to modern readers seem to contain antiquated details. These precious pages must preserve and interpret correctly the Rule received from Father de Montfort." (Papasogli, p. 318)

**A community at the Hospital for Incurables in Piotiers:**

In the place known as the Garden of the Four Faces in

Poitiers, there was a shady, solitary place, which was frequented by the most undisciplined youth of Poitiers. In 1706, Fr. Montfort started spending nights there in prayer. One night he found a man abandoned on the street. He took him to a miserable vacant house. A young woman looked after him. Later some more homeless sick people joined. Other women also started to offer their services. Later, an illustrious gentleman, Philippe de l'Emery de Choisy, Grand Prior of Aquitaine of the Order of Malta, started a hospice, which became a Hospital for Incurables. In 1758, the Daughters of Wisdom were invited to take charge of it and they were happy to take charge of the work initiated by Fr. Montfort.

**Sister of the Cross appointed to be in charge of the community at St. Laurent:** As a young Sister, Sister of the Cross (Marie Regnier) was with Marie Valteau in the small school at Esnandes near La Rochelle. She was a part of the little schism of the Wisdom community. She took care of the sick, taught in the school and took care of altar linen. She was the superior. She was very much appreciated by the people. She was happy to come to St. Laurent in 1748. As Sr. Marie Louise was obliged to leave for Poitiers to start a new community, Sister of the Cross was appointed to take charge of the community in St. Laurent. She accepted the new appointment and obeyed like a child. "I would throw myself into hell if my superior were to command me," she used to say. When she was freed of that charge, she was happy to return to La Rochelle. She bade good bye to all.

In 1758, Sister of the Cross came to St. Laurent for the Annual Retreat. It was a very important retreat during which the Constitutions were examined and finalized before printing. Then she returned to Esnandes near La Rochelle. While in Esnandes, she had a fall and she broke her arm. Further, other infirmities forced her to stay in bed. She died

on Jan. 12, 1759. A month later, Sister Saint Françoise also expired.

**Invitation to start a community at the civil and military hospital of Lorient:** Invitation was received; but Sr. Marie Louise could not realize this project.

**Sr. Marie Louise's fall and its effects:** "On December 14, 1758, Marie Louise is praying in the motherhouse chapel. She is informed that Sr. Patience is about to depart for Hermenault, and she hurries to her room for a letter that she wants to give to the traveler. She does not see a piece of wood lying in the dark corridor, and she bumps onto it. She falls hurting her right shoulder badly. Heedless of the pain, she walks to her room, signs the letter, and gives it to the departing Sister along with her last farewell. After Sr. Patience's departure, her daughters notice the grimace of suffering on their Mother's face." (Besnard, No. 428, Papasogli, p. 320)

The following day, a surgeon came and performed a very painful operation. Four men pull on her shoulder, while the surgeon pushed with all his strength to make it take its normal position. The operation lasted one hour and all the while the patient suffered a lot. Then the surgeon bandaged her arm and shoulder in thirty yards of bandages. He asked her not to remove the bandage for fifty days. The following fifty days of immobility, fifty nights of sleeplessness or of sleep interrupted by pain were hard to endure. Sr. Florence asked one novice to assist Sr. Marie Louise during three nights and she did well.

Then another novice was sent, who used to sleep off instead of helping Sr. Marie Louise. Sr. Marie Louise practically stopped going to bed and spent her time in an old armchair. In winter the room was very cold and Sr. Marie

Louise shivered. Later, Sr. Florence brought a warm cloth and told her, "My dear Mother, you must put this piece of cloth that I have here on your arm," and bandaged the numb arm with much kindness. Sr. Marie Louise was grateful. After fifty days, the bandage was removed and the arm was firmly in place. Movements caused much pain and she limited her movements and walked only to the community room, a few yards away.

**Sr. Marie Louise's preparation for death:** Sr. Marie Louise knew that death was approaching her. She prepared herself for death by thinking of Jesus, remaining with Him and speaking to Him alone. She limited herself in her conversations and spoke only a few words needed for administration, foundations and for the formation of novices. "One day, the sisters are gathered around her, talking of this and that, and suddenly, someone realizes that Marie Louise is not participating in the conversation! 'What are you thinking of, Mother? You are not saying anything.' 'I was with Jesus,' she answers simply. One night, hearing her voice, the Sister who sleeps in her room awakens with a start and asks her if she needs anything. She hears the gentle answer, 'But do you not see that I am with Jesus?' "( Besnard, No. 432, Papasogli, p. 323)

**Sister Saint Raphael's death:** She was in the motherhouse infirmary and her long suffering was coming to an end. She was restless and fearful of everything. She suffered a lot. Then she was freed from the psychological bonds. During eight days of agony, the Sisters heard her repeat only, "Come my Jesus, why do you delay so long?" Bro. John went on horse back to inform her family about her agony. But before that news could reach, she expired on April 3, 1759. One day after her burial, when Sr. Marie Louise was alone in her workroom, Sister Saint Raphael came to her and said, "Let us go, my dear Mother, it is time that you come." (Florence,

pp. 73-74) Dream or vision, Sr. Marie Louise considered this event as a warning and she herself told about it to Sisters.

**Death of Bro. John:** Sr. Florence in her chronicle spoke about Bro. John. "He was a simple youth from a village, who when very young entered the community, entrusting himself to Providence. He was strong and robust and never refused to do anything that would benefit the two communities, whose interests he defended with all his might.

"His zeal for the two communities was so ardent that he sometimes exaggerated, this being his only fault. .. He was extremely mortified and after having worked for long hours, he was unconcerned about where he was to sleep, as long as the Sisters were well taken care of. He often slept on hay or straw and even on boards and sometimes in the barn with his horses. To practice poverty, he lodged in the poorest inns, ate poorly, and was shabbily dressed. He did not care for his body any more than he would have cared for one of his animals. He would walk fifteen miles fasting. He was seen to set out in any kind of weather and at all hours, to carry the equipment for the missions, to guide Sisters or to go and meet them. He bought supplies very economically to the advantage of the community. He cultivated a few tracts of land in such a way that much more hay was harvested than could have been expected..." (Florence, pp. 74-77, Papasogli, p. 326)

Four days after he started his trip for Sister Saint Raphael's house, Bro. John returned to St. Laurent completely worn out and very sick. The doctor who was present when he returned, examined him and ordered complete rest. He asked the priests to give him the last sacraments. Sr. Marie Louise came to see him and he asked her, since he was serving the community of Wisdom for so

long, could the Sisters say the same prayers for him that they said for deceased Sisters? Soon after Bro. John died.

**The final sickness:** On April 20, 1759, the first symptoms of Sr. Marie Louise's final sickness manifested themselves. Fr. Durocher, a missionary and a surgeon, examined Sr. Marie Louise and prescribed two bleedings. Two emetics were administered. The pain on her side decreased; but the fever rose. The doctor could come only after two days. Fr. Besnard, who postponed his journey, came to visit Sr. Marie Louise and the latter was very happy and said, "What happiness to die in the presence of my superior!" The same day, she made her confession.

On April 23, 1759, Sr. Marie Louise fervently received the Viaticum. After that she sent away those who were present, closed the curtains around her bed, and remained a long time in solitude. On 25th, she asked Sr. Florence to sing the hymn which she liked very much on the will of God. Sr. Florence sang this hymn composed by Fr. Surin,

"O Holy Jesus, Christ my Lord,  
I seek Your will alone,  
In heaven and throughout the earth  
It's all I call my own.  
I long for God, for God I seek,  
For nothing else I yearn,  
Throughout my life, I do His will  
So heaven I may earn."

Compared to God, I am but dust.  
His will alone I seek,  
He may assign me life or death,  
Make me be strong or weak,  
Grant me great riches, grant me none,  
Great joy or darkest night.

Throughout my life I do His will,  
My Peace, my Love, my Light."

The whole day Sr. Marie Louise spent speaking to God. She spoke with Jesus as if he were standing next to her, "Ah! My dear Jesus, when in my life had I such great love for You? My God, I give You my heart. But it is no longer mine, I gave it to You long ago. How can I give it to You now? I have only to submit to Your will! Ah! My God, who has given me this peace, this calm that I feel, if not You, my God? No matter what happens, I do not want to lose this peace anymore. You may do whatever You please with me, but I will never leave you again." (Besnard, No. 444, Papasogli, p. 330)

On Wednesday, April 25, Sr. Marie Louise dictated her Will and Testament, "In the name of Jesus Christ and as the moment approaches when I shall render an account to my Creator of the way in which I have dealt with the Daughters of Wisdom, having had the happiness of being the first one to wear the habit and seeing clearly fulfilled all that Father de Montfort foretold; that I should one day be at the head of a numerous community and in the course of time many candidates would present themselves to be trained as Daughters of Wisdom, I feel obliged to recommend to all of them in the present and in the future, never to deviate from the primitive spirit of our holy Founder, which is a spirit of humility, of poverty, of detachment, of charity and of union with each other.

"In the name of Jesus Christ, I also recommend them to have an unreserved dependence on the community established at Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre; to regard it as the centre of the Congregation and to accept the Superior and all those who will succeed her in this responsibility, as the Superior General.

"To respect and obey the Superior of the Missionaries residing in the House of the Holy Spirit, also founded by

Father de Montfort, and his successors in the same place, as the one given to govern them in general and to vigorously maintain the rule throughout the Congregation; to have respect and gratitude for the missionary who has the charity to be the confessor of the Daughters of Wisdom.

"In doing so, they will follow my wishes and will do what God has given me the grace to put into practice while I was on earth. They will fulfill the last wishes of a Mother who has always loved them, who loves them now and will love them and not forget them even after death.

"Being unable to write these last wishes because of my great weakness, I have asked Sister Honorée, mistress of novices, to commit them to writing and I have signed the document with my own hand, in Saint-Laurent, April 25, 1759.

Marie Louise of Jesus, Superior General." (Besnard, No. 451, Papasogli, pp. 331, 332)

During the last three days, Sr. Marie Louise had great pains and she was in delirium sometimes. Fr. Besnard asked her concerning her successor. She replied, "I do not want to be involved in that choice... A superior must have great prudence, great humility, great meekness, great condescension for her sisters. How many times I sought them out, when I knew they were troubled to make them recognize their little miseries! And they immediately knelt down and acknowledged their weakness; and that was the end of it. That is how a superior must act; she must reach out to her sisters!" (Besnard, No. 445, Papasogli, p. 332)

On Friday, April 27, Sr. Marie Louise was involved in uninterrupted colloquy revealing the tension of a soul struggling against the weakness of human nature. Fr. Besnard gave her a statue of Our Lady and she said, "Ah! My dear Mother, I have always loved you. I have always desired to die between Jesus and Mary." That evening she



received the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. She kissed the crucifix saying, "You died on the cross for me; is it not just that I should die for You and with You?" That night, she had to face restlessness. Sisters heard her exclaim, "Return to hell, that is your dwelling! As for me, for a long time my thoughts and all my desires have belonged to my Jesus!"

**Sr. Marie Louise's death:** On Saturday, April 28, 1759, Sr. Marie Louise enjoyed peace and serenity. Fr. Besnard asked her to bless with the statue of Our Lady all her daughters, present and absent, the novices kneeling around her and all the future members of the Congregation and she did so. Then she sent for a lady who used to help the poor of St. Laurent, and when she came, Sr. Marie Louise asked her never to forget the poor and the latter promised to be faithful to that work of charity.

All the day, Sr. Marie Louise repeated the words of the Magnificat, the Salve Regina, and the Regina Coeli. She also repeated the words "Alleluia, alleluia!". After saying alleluia, she fixed her eyes on the crucifix and said, "My Lord and my God." She died a short time later, at about eight o'clock in the evening, in the same place, at the same hour, on the same day of the same month, forty-three years earlier, Father de Montfort had died. She was nearly seventy-five years old.

Fr. Besnard informed all the Daughters of Wisdom about the death of Sr. Marie Louise and said, "In her you lose a Mother, a true Daughter of Wisdom, a Foundress, and a living copy of Jesus Christ, Eternal Wisdom."

**Sr. Marie Louise's funeral and burial:** On April 29th a portrait of Sr. Marie Louise was painted. The funeral and burial took place on April 30, 1759. A decision was arrived

at to bury her in the chapel of Our Lady in the Parish Church of St. Laurent next to the tomb of Father de Montfort. The news of Sr. Marie Louise's death was received with universal sorrow. On Sunday a great crowd of people hurried to St. Laurent to pay respects to her mortal remains and to participate in the funeral. But the funeral was deferred until Monday.

The funeral services took place in the parish church on Monday, April 30, 1759. Fr. Rougeou de la Jarrie, the former Dean of St. Laurent celebrated the Holy Eucharist and blessed the tomb. He had recovered from his old prejudices.



**The burial:** As already mentioned, Sr. Marie Louise was buried next to the tomb of Father de Montfort in the chapel of Our Lady in the parish church of St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre.

Pope John Paul II praying  
before the tombs of St.  
Montfort and Blessed  
Marie Louise Trichet

\* \* \* \*

## Chapter 9

### Sr. Marie Louise's spirituality

#### 1. Her Faith

Talking about the virtues of Sr. Marie Louise, Fr. Charles Besnard, her first biographer tells us, "I will begin by faith, the first virtue. Sr. Marie Louise has been granted this gift in great fullness, which made her faith lively, pure and simple. It was lively that she decided to give herself to God in her youth and to find a guide among the ministers of the altar, who might lead her according to the rules and spirit of faith. This same spirit of faith made her see Jesus Christ in the poor, and ask Montfort to go and live in the Poitiers hospital. This same spirit of faith, led her, as Abraham of old, to leave region, her parents, and worldly comfort to follow God's voice in the person of a poor priest, who was unknown, despised and scoffed at, who had her change the dress of a rich daughter clothed according to her social rank for a dress of the poor, despicable by the world's standards; that made her keep that habit for years against the will of the whole town, preferring to be deemed ridiculous and pig-headed than to go against her vocation through lack of faith. Her faith made her undertake so many trips, journeying across several provinces to open institutions, trusting only in the goodness of Providence." (Besnard, No. 461)

Sr. Simone Lepers, DW, in her article on Marie Louise tells us, "A woman of faith and courage: such was Marie Louise of Jesus during the twelve years spent in the service of the poor in Poitiers, in the education of the young at La Rochelle, and especially in the formation of the first Daughters of Wisdom. Her faith sustained her through the trials of the first foundations, through solitude, poverty, and contradictions. Her meditation was, her biographer assures

us, based on pure faith; she made it well, 'humbling herself and becoming lost in the presence of God.' Her constant admonition to her Sisters was: 'Have faith... We have not enough faith... Let us renew our faith.' Her repeated warning was against a sentimental piety that sought spiritual consolation: 'Let us nourish our souls with the truths of faith without aspiring to visions or other extraordinary means that may lead us away from pure faith. Pure faith is the sure way to avoid falling prey to illusions'." (Montfortian Dictionary, pp. 681, 682)

Fr. Besnard says that Sr. Marie Louise managed "never to leave the center of her heart, where she had made herself a sort of interior cell." She prayed constantly in her "Spiritual Oratory." She sought nothing but God's will. She practiced to the end of her life faithful obedience to the will of God manifested through her superiors and through events. A few days before her death, she asked a Sister to sing for her some verses of a hymn to Divine Providence by Father Surin: "Blessed Will of God / You are my sole delight / in heaven or on earth."

## **2. Her search for divine Wisdom**

"Jesus Christ Eternal Wisdom must be the end of all your desires. Desire Him, seek Him, for He is that precious pearl for the acquisition of which you must sell all you possess... Whoever wishes to find this precious treasure of Wisdom should . . . search for him early and, if possible, while still young; purely and spiritually as a chaste young man seeks a bride; unceasingly, to the very end, until he has found him." (LEW 54) From her youth at the school of Montfort, she desired and sought Divine Wisdom, single mindedly, with complete renunciation of her own will, constantly and courageously with an ardor that increased with age.

"Marie Louise worshipped Christ as God's Wisdom who became man to save all men. Narrating all she did for the love of this divine Wisdom would be impossible. We can only say that, from her earliest years, she was enraptured by her beauty and fascinated by her charms. This can be easily admitted now that we see it clearly confirmed by the very name of the community of young women she had to teach and train. We all know what Montfort had her do to acquire this divine Wisdom. What she did afterwards is no less admirable." (Besnard, No. 482)

Fr. Montfort introduced Sr. Marie Louise to the contemplation of Jesus Eternal Wisdom and the mysterious ways of the Incarnation and the Cross. He led her to leave her family and enter the hospital in the company of a group of poor women of whom he had formed a community named "Wisdom," placing her under the authority of a blind woman. Following the guidance of her director, she gave herself to meditation and sought delight in a life hidden, poor, and abandoned. She was the first to live the charismatic vocation of a Daughter of Wisdom.

### **3. Her humility**

Sr. Marie Louise had a deep horror and fear of sin, together with an awareness of her own sinfulness. This was what gave rise to her humility. She had a clear vision of her own nothingness before God. In total sincerity she considered herself to be nothing at all, and less than nothing. She used to help people in kitchen by peeling vegetables, scaling fish, carrying firewood, or washing dishes or doing the laundry. She repeatedly affirmed her unworthiness: "I was placed here in the post of superior general for my sins, and because of my sins they leave me here." Towards the end of her life, when two Sisters accused her unjustly, suspected and humiliated by her superior general, she

remained calm and gentle. "Her real humility, however, was manifested in her everyday conduct, her gentle affability towards her Sisters, the respect she afforded them, her readiness to assume the most menial tasks, her preference for the company of the poor. Sr. Florence tells us of her readiness to give up her own opinion for that of others when neither principle nor the truth was at stake." (Sr. Simone Lepers, DW)

#### **4. Her obedience**

"Whoever places his vocation under the sign of Wisdom cannot do other than surrender his liberty to the Divine Obedient One. Religious and ecclesial obedience simply becomes in each person the sign and the means of the renewal of His mystery. In Marie Louise the passion to obey assumes an aspect of 'folly'. She would obey even the novices, if she could. She would obey children in order 'never to act through self-will', and the adjective 'self' here indicates everything that is egoistic in the human will of the individual." (Papasogli, p. 278) At the Poitiers hospital, when she was talking with her mother, Fr. Montfort asked her to go for her work, she immediately obeyed him. Further, Fr. Montfort forbade her from speaking to her brother, Fr. Alexis and here she obeyed Fr. Montfort. (Ref. Besnard Mo. 531)

In her letter to the Daughters of Wisdom, Sr. Marie Louise wrote, "The little recommendation I am going to make seems to me to be important for every Daughter of Wisdom; these are to be very obedient, very humble and full of charity. I believe that these are the virtues you should work for, and in doing so you will draw down the blessings of God on yourself and on your humble works, and obtain peace of heart. I have always experienced this myself, and the obedience I give to my superiors is a source of comfort in

all my little troubles and difficulties." (Letter No. 9) To a Sister, she gave this advice, "Above all I advise you to obey without a word all that your superiors judge to be advisable. Simply present your reasons, but if the decision is not changed, be satisfied and accept their point of view. Be assured that in this way you will have peace of soul and you will be very pleasing to God, who asks only your obedience. My desire is that you should possess this great virtue in all its perfection." (Letter, No. 10)

Three letters written towards the end of her life to Father Croissant, her spiritual director, show us the lengths to which her passion for obedience drove her. During her great time of trial, she had asked her director to assign her a superior whom she would obey as God Himself, naming as the person she envisaged "the one whom she would find to be most repugnant to her own refined nature, someone who would be brusque, bizarre, anxious, and scrupulous . . . the most likely to make her suffer." "I wish," she declared, "with God's grace to destroy all that which within me is displeasing to Him that I may have the joy of having God alone reign in my heart."

### **5. Her love of poverty and of the poor**

Poverty was a personal trait of Sr. Marie Louise. "She suffered privations from the various circumstances of her life, the utter misery of the early days at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre led to this conclusion. At the end of her life with tears in her eyes, she lovingly recalls those early times of heroic deprivation., During her last years at the motherhouse, she tells the novices of the adventures of the early times and sighs, 'We were ever so happy, nor so fervent'. During her life, she experienced all kinds of poverty. She knew the black bread and the baskets of leftovers in the hospital of Poitiers, but at least there was something to eat. At La

Rochelle she went through the ritual of putting back in the cupboard bowls that had remained empty. At Laurent, she endured the long starvation that blanched the faces of her daughters, as well as the farmers' difficult struggle against famine. Her trust in Providence never failed. Now that the Daughters of Wisdom own a few meadows, they might think of enlarging, and of building, were it not for the resistance of Marie Louise, who is alarmed at the idea of modifying their austere life-style. 'She always feared that God would withdraw His blessings if they became rich'." (Papasolgi, pp. 274, 275)

Sr. Marie Louise was very much attached to material poverty. "I am happy to have taken the poverty of Jesus Christ as my heritage. Like Fr. Montfort, she loved the poor and went out of the way to help them. "She provided alms, medical assistance, catechism classes, and basic instruction to the poor. To describe adequately what she did for the poor would mean to narrate Marie Louise's life all over again from its beginning." (Besnard No. 524)

"Sr. Marie Louise was above all the missionary of the poor. Her predilection for the poor predated her entrance into the hospital, where she took them to her heart, dressed their wounds, washed their dirty linen; no service was too small. As bursar, her administration was wise and just. One severe winter, with the supplies exhausted, being approached by some beggars in rags, she was heard to murmur: "I wish I were clothes, so that I might clothe them." The famine of 1739 found her, having depleted the supplies of the mother house, begging the authorities to come to the relief of the hungry population of the district.

"Practicing, as she had learnt from Montfort, abandonment to Divine Providence, she admitted all to the novitiate, poor and rich alike, daughters of nobles or



daughters of peasants. She would quote Montfort: "God will always bless the house which helps the poor." She remembered them still on her death-bed, calling one of her benefactors and begging her to continue her care of the poor of the parish. Her option for the poor assured her of a place with the saints both of her own time and the present." (Montfortian Dictionary pp. 685, 686)

### **6. Her devotion to Mary**

Concerning Sr. Marie Louise's devotion to Mary, Father Besnard tells us, "She acted and spoke, gave commands and gave thanks through her. Through her she received communion, considering herself unworthy to receive Christ. She offered Him Mary's preparation and through Mary's thanksgiving she made her own." The life and mysteries of Mary were her daily meditation as she recited her Rosary. It was she who introduced the hourly Hail Mary into the community, and she loved to repeat: "Everything in the house belongs to Mary; for this reason we must spoil nothing and keep everything in order." Confronted with problems, she would turn to Mary: "Good Mother, you only need to make this your business. They are your daughters; take care of them for me."

Sr. Marie Louise had from her childhood the habit of having special devotion towards Mary on 72 days to mark the 72 years that Our Lady spent on this earth. On each day she recalled one chronological year of Our Lady and meditated on her. At each hour, he recited a Hail Mary and she never started any work without reciting a Hail Mary. She deprived herself something during the meals and gave the same to poor in honour of Lady. She recited the Rosary with great devotion and offered the same for a particular intention. She used to say that Our Lady was the real superior of the community. She had great confidence in

Mary. She prayed and obtained the grace of dying on a Saturday. (Ref. Besnard, Nos. 494-502)

### **7. Her mortification**

Sr. Marie Louise was a perfect example of the universal mortification prescribed by Montfort in LEW and into which she had been initiated in her early years. Frugal at meals, she never ate in between. She sought no comforts during her long and arduous journeys, nor relief from the hard work of moving to new foundations. Frozen in winter in an unheated chapel, she avoided the fire when entering the community. Corporal penance also had its place. The discipline, spiked bracelets, and prayers with arms extended were all means of renunciation and of opening her soul to divine grace. These were means that she also permitted to Sisters whom she considered capable of practicing them. They were considered the supporting pillars of her "Spiritual Oratory," where she communed with God. The principal support, however, was obedience resting on the sure foundation of humility. (Ref. Besnard, Nos. 504-509) .

### **8. She as Co-Foundress**

Marie Louise was first and foremost Montfort's disciple by the way she lived. She followed fervently the spiritual path traced out for her by the saint in LEW. Perhaps this is the book which he sent to the first Daughters of Wisdom, saying to them: "Here is a book written for you." The desire for Wisdom, continual prayer, universal mortification, dependence on Mary: Marie Louise made all these means pointed out by Montfort her own way to salvation. She kept faithfully, from the time of her harsh novitiate in Poitiers until her death, the rule of life mapped out by the founder. She taught its spirit and practice to the religious placed under her guidance. She defended it against

all the abuses and softening with which even holy priests would try to dilute it, priests like Father Vatel or the dean of Saint-Laurent; against the suggestions of Madame de Bouillé, or the requests of the bishop of Poitiers: "That is not what Father de Montfort wanted," was always her irrefutable argument.

"She looked upon herself," says Pauvert, one of the biographers of Saint Louis Marie, "as a compliant worker putting into effect the plan of the master. If she had thought for a moment that the idea was her own, she would never have had the courage to fight all the obstacles that the nascent project was to encounter. She would have left it alone, believing that she had dreamed the impossible. But her burning faith in the holiness of the priest whose virtues she had seen gave her a trust in his promise and enabled her to hope beyond all hope." She was indeed, then, the disciple, to the point of heroism, of the one from whom, from her earliest youth, she had received teaching, example, and formation. That is why we could not imagine Marie Louise without Montfort.

"RW, which he had dreamed of since 1702, would not be officially approved until 1715, by the bishop of La Rochelle. RM was only put together little by little, during his successive meetings with the seminary of the Holy Spirit in Paris in 1703 and 1713. It is true that the texts of these two are very precise, their spirituality is solidly based, and they bore much fruit; their harvest would be very great. Yet, it was not he who would gather in this harvest.

"It was thanks to Marie Louise and the Marquis de Magnanne that the male disciples of Montfort found themselves gathered around the tomb of their founder. It was thanks to her that the Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom got well started. This was not only because his

death prevented the founder from completing his work but perhaps also because he himself, with his passionate temperament, was not really the right person to establish on a firm foundation a female Congregation. Pauvert was not mistaken when, while attributing to Montfort "the creative idea," recognizing in Marie Louise "the admirable instrument of its realization."

"Montfort reflected on, composed, and edited RW. But it was Marie Louise who founded the mother house, opened the novitiate, formed the first Sisters, established communities, and governed the Institute for more than forty years. Even during the lifetime of Montfort, we can see the discreet influence of Marie Louise on the definitive edition of the Rule. Several corrections in the manuscript give this impression, and we know that among other suggestions, she gave it as her opinion that a superior general appointed for life would present serious difficulties. "Montfort gave in to her advice." On the other hand, she gave very careful attention to the least little details, a tendency that would be accentuated in the Constitutions of 1760, which were drawn up under her guidance and control. Her femininity allowed her to escape a certain rigor and strangeness. In codifying a certain number of customs, it seems that she gave a more monastic style to the Institute." (Montfortian Dictionary p. 677)

### **9. She as a teacher**

"More remarkable than her aptitude for governing was her extraordinary talent as a teacher. We find her at both La Rochelle and Rennes establishing, or reestablishing, discipline in large schools with a large enrollment. Her gift of discernment was employed in the formation of elite groups formed from among the older students.

"The hospitals also profited by her talents. Not content with just ministering to the physical needs of patients, she and her Sisters always tried to introduce a modicum of peace, joy, and piety into the establishment. Documents from the hospital of Château d'Oléron, where Marie Louise stayed for nearly three years, testify that "never have the sick been better cared for, recovered more rapidly, or been more devout."6

"Not unexpectedly, it was in the formation of the first Daughters of Wisdom that her gifts as educator were most evident. Relying always on the Holy Spirit, she nevertheless employed all her own personal gifts and intuitions, permeated with gentleness and goodness. The program was well balanced, with periods allocated to work, prayer, instruction, and relaxation. Temperaments also were taken into account. An admonition to her successor states: "Novices should be treated like fragile plants, but recently transplanted."

"She knew how, following the advice of Montfort, to employ sterner measures, especially with the proud. When, however, necessity did require that she reprimand, "this was done only in private, in her own room or that of the recalcitrant novice whom she always sought out. Her speech on such occasions was so persuasive and gentle that it was impossible not to conform."7

"She had a horror of duplicity. A novice pretending to fast while concealing bread beneath her mattress was promptly dismissed. At the same time, her reply to the singular penances of another novice that frightened her Sisters was, "Let her be; she has her reasons." (Montfortian Dictionary pp. 677, 678)

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## **Chapter 10**

### **Sr. Marie Louise's glorification**

#### **Biography by Fr. Charles Besnard**

Fr. Charles Besnard, Father General, who was misled by the campaign waged against Sr. Marie Louise, repented of his misjudgment and wrote her biography almost immediately after her death. He completed the biography on Oct. 10, 1759, just a few months after Sr. Marie Louise's death. He made use of the Memoir, 53 pages, written by Sr. Marie Louise in obedience to her spiritual director. She concluded the writing on Feb. 7, 1750. Fr. Besnard collected testimonies from people, who knew Sr. Marie Louise. The materials collected got lost during the French Revolution. Fr. Besnard knew her during 18 years. He wrote this biography to edify people by presenting the life of an exceptional person, a soul specially chosen by God. He depicted her as a model for religious life in order to glorify God. The manuscript was written in six note books, the last one being on her virtues.

The above mentioned Biography was sent to Rome along with the one on Fr. Montfort, for the latter's beatification. It remained as a manuscript for a long time. A copy of it was made use of by Fr. Charles Allaire to publish an abridged biography of Sr. Marie Louise in Poitiers in 1768. Finally Fr. Besnard's work was published by Centre International Montfortian, Rome on May 07, 1985.

#### **The Process of Beatification**

Miss Benedetta Papàsogli in her biography of Sr. Marie Louise has spoken about the Process of Beatification on page 339. "On November 15, 1947, soon after the

canonization of St. Montfort, the Bishop of Luçon issued the decree for the nomination of the commission for historical research in view of the beatification of Sr. Marie Louise.

On Dec. 9, 1952, the diocesan process in view of Sr. Marie Louise's beatification was officially initiated in Luçon. The process lasted from May 2, 1953 to March 6, 1954. The process of non-cult took place in May 1954.

On Nov. 30, 1955, the required documentation was sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. A favourable decision was arrived at concerning her writings and it was confirmed by Pope Pius XII in the decree of May 29, 1958.

The "Positio super virtutibus" was completed in 1986 and it was studied by the six historical consultants of the Congregation on Nov. 11, 1986. They gave a unanimous approbation and expressed great praise. The theological Consultants also examined and approved the Positio.

On Feb. 5, 1987, the General Relator, Msgr. Giovanni Papa, expressed the "most fervent and heartfelt wish for the rapid progress of the Cause, anticipating a favourable conclusion."

On July 10, 1990, Pope John Paul II declared Sr. Marie Louise Venerable.

On March 7, 1992, the sudden, complete and lasting cure of Sr. Rosa della Sapienza at St. Laurent-sur-Sèvre on Aug. 9, 1944, was declared a miraculous cure attributed to Sr. Marie Louise by a Decree of Pope John Paul II."

### **The Beatification**

The cardinals responsible for examining her life for the cause of beatification recognized this. "The Servant of

God," they wrote, "offers an example of how to work for the development of the whole human person in a spirit of sacrifice, looking for no reward, ever open to read the signs of the times with a serene and humble spirit." After lengthy investigations by teams of experts into her life and writings, Sr. Marie Louise Trichet, the first disciple of St. Louis Marie de Montfort, was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome on May 16, 1993.

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