

## Association of Colleges of the Sisters of St. Joseph (ACSSJ) Holds Pilgrimage in Le Puy and Lyon



Energy. Enthusiasm. Excitement. Exploration. Just a few words to describe the 17 students from the nine SSJ colleges located across the USA who came to Le Puy June 12-15. Even the long flight from the USA did not dampen their spirit of adventure as they sought a deeper understanding of and connection to the Sisters of St. Joseph charism and spirituality. They were a group on the move through the city of Le Puy with climbs to St. Michel, the Rue des Tables, the Cathedral, and the Blessed Mother statue. They also visited the Kitchen and walked the same streets as the founding sisters did nearly 400 years ago. In the evenings the students took time to share their heart-felt reflections.

On their last full day in Le Puy the students were up for breakfast at 5:45 am and a 30-minute walk to the Cathedral to participate in the Pilgrim Mass at 7 am. Bishop Yves Baumgarten presided. Pilgrims begin their 700-mile journey on the Camino to Compostelle, Spain, from the Cathedral. Several students walked the first few miles after the Mass.

The group went to Bas-en-Basset to see the birthplace of Mother St. John Fontbonne and on to Lyon to visit the Origin & Evolution Centre, which features the bedroom of Mother St. John. The students also spent some time at the Basilica of Notre Dame at Fourvière and St. John Cathedral in Old Lyon. They stayed at the John Bosco Centre near the basilica.

Leaders of the pilgrimage included Sr. Joan Lescinski, President Emeritus of St. Ambrose University; Sr. Carol Allan (ret.) Assistant to the President on Mission and Legacy at Elms College; Joan Horgan, Director of Campus Ministry at the College of St. Rose; ACSSJ Executive Director Martha Malinski; Dr. Ryan Murphy, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Chestnut Hill College. For more photos of the students' pilgrimage, [click here](#).



For more information about the ACSSJ, [click here](#) to see its website.

## Mount St. Mary's University Annual Student Pilgrimage

Fifteen young women from Mount St. Mary's University in Los Angeles visited Le Puy March 5-9. They visited the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Kitchen, Église de Collège (where Fr. Medaille preached), and the Tree of Martyrs (where three sisters were guillotined during the French Revolution—1789-89).

Each day the young women focused on a particular theme or the history and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph. In the evening, they shared their reflections about what inspired them or connected them to the founding sisters as well as their experiences of community. They also had opportunities to eat in French restaurants, stroll through the Old City, go to outdoor cafés, visit Martine's lace shop and local stores.

The pilgrimage program is sponsored by the MSMU Office of the President. Meredith Lynch, associate director of the CSJ Institute, accompanied the group as well as Alison Halpern, associate director of wellness, and Laura Gomez, assistant director of campus ministry and spirituality.

[Click here](#) to see more photos.



## Mount St. Mary's University Annual Faculty, Staff & Board Pilgrimage



Faculty and staff of Mt. St. Mary's University spent June 1-4 in Le Puy as part of their annual pilgrimage to explore and be inspired by the history and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

MSMU President Ann McElaney-Johnson accompanied the group and Shannon Green, director of the CSJ Institute, presented a history of the Sisters of St. Joseph to orient the group to the various sites they would see. The group also traveled to Bas-en-Basset to see the birthplace of Mother St. John Fontbonne and to have a delicious French picnic lunch there.

[Click here](#) to see more photos.

MSMU purchased the Mother St. John birthplace in 2019.

[Click here](#) to see a blog on the opening of the house.



## Fontbonne University Celebrates 100-Year Anniversary in Le Puy



A group of 24 sisters, alumni, board members, faculty, and staff celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of **Fontbonne University in St. Louis (USA)** by going on a pilgrimage to Le Puy, Bas-en-Basset and Lyon June 4-7. The group also went to Paris and Rome. They are pictured here at Mother St. John Fontbonne's birthplace home. Dr. Nancy Blattner, president of Fontbonne, (center) led the group with Sr. Joan Lescinski, SSJ-Carondelet, president emeritus of St. Ambrose University (left). Fontbonne University is sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

For more photos, [click here](#).

## Orange Sisters and Lay Partners Make Annual Pilgrimage

The **Orange Sisters of Orange, California (USA)**, made their annual pilgrimage along with several lay persons who are associates and partners in mission during their May 17-22 visit to Le Puy. The group also went to Carcassonne, the birthplace of Fr. Medaille, as well as Bas-en-Basset, the birthplace of Mother St. John Fontbonne. Sr. Mary Beth Ingham, president of the Congregation, and Sr. Jane DeLisle, director of the Center for Spiritual Development, led the group.

For more photos, [click here](#).



## Institute Sisters Converge on the International Centre



Twenty-two French sisters of the **Institute of St Joseph** (the original Le Puy congregation) spent Wednesday, June 21 at the International Centre for a community meeting. Like sisters everywhere, they were very disciplined in arriving at the same time, starting their meetings on time, and finishing all business on time. Of course, their loving presence permeated the whole house in their joy of being and working together. There's nothing like the spirit of the Sisters of St Joseph—and it is evident in every congregation throughout the world!

For more photos, [click here](#).

## Short Visits



Several Indian and African sisters from the **Annecy Congregation** (France) made a whirlwind tour of SSJ historical sites in Le Puy, Bas-en-Basset, and Monistrol on May 12-13. They spent a night at the International Centre. Sr. Viannay Thanniath who is on the Annecy leadership team sponsored the two-day excursion. Sr. Viannay is also vice president of the International Centre Board.

For more photos, [click here](#).

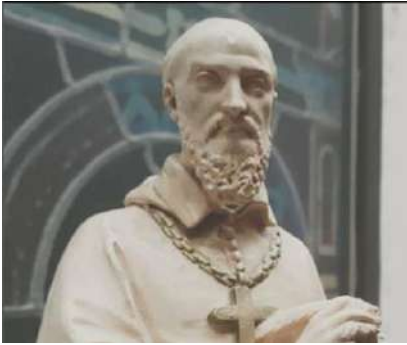
**Sister Cynthia Comiskey, a Sister of St. Joseph from Baden, PA (USA)** spent May 8-15 in Le Puy after her retreat at the Bonnevaux Center for Peace in southeastern France. Bonnevaux was an abbey re-founded in 1119 by the disciples of St. Avitus. Its earlier origins go back to 6th century monks who followed St. Martin of Tours (316-397). It is currently the spiritual home for the World Community for Christian Meditation of which Sr. Cynthia is a part. Sr. Cynthia had never been to Le Puy so we gave her the “royal tour” of SSJ historical sites, which she enjoyed very much.



Several sisters from the **Chambéry Congregation** visited Le Puy on May 6 for a day visit in the Old City. Among their fascinations was the lace shop where Martine, proprietor, demonstrated the way lace is made. Since 1407, Le Puy has been a major center of lacemaking. It was done by hand before machines took over in the late 18th century. St. Francis Regis helped many poor women abandon life on the street by seeing to it that they learned how to make lace in order to earn money to feed their families. The bishop at the time tried to put a stop to lacemaking because he feared people were supporting the frivolous tastes of the wealthy. St. Francis, however, persuaded the bishop to allow the lacemaking to continue because it helped women survive the poverty of the times. This is the reason St. Francis is known as the “Saint of Lacemakers”.



## St. Francis de Sales – A Saint for Our Time



**By Fr. Jack Loughran, OSFS  
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This past week, on January 24, the entire Salesian family, including the Oblates, celebrated the Feast of St. Francis de Sales. As our patron, all Oblates revere his goodness, faith and insights into the human heart, intelligence, the prolific body of written material on the devout life and his selflessness in caring for the spiritual journey of thousands and thousands of people.

One of the traps of honoring any saint, though, is that we may find it easier to *admire* them than to *imitate* them. Their lives and philosopher, circumstances seem so removed from our own that we quickly distance ourselves from them. Simone Weil, a French thoughtfully wrote, "It is not enough to merely have saints; we must have saints for our times."

While I agree with Simone Weil's insight, I believe St. Francis de Sales *IS* a saint for our times, even though he died over 400 years ago. One example of his relevance is a sobriquet attached to St. Francis de Sales in the title, the Gentleman Saint. It does not come from his position in society as a nobleman but his profound belief in the power of Christ's words in the gospel, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart." Our patron believed the gentleness of Christ was the way not only for social interchange but also the way to confront conflict, violence and evil.

Throughout his life, St. Francis de Sales was immersed in a Catholic community grappling with the Protestant Reformation and the violent religious wars that resulted. He was attracted to a group named the Acarie Circle, a Catholic group who desired to rekindle devotion to the Catholic faith in France. Some members of the Acarie Circle proposed a militant vision that sanctioned the use of force and violence to accomplish this goal. St. Francis de Sales, while cordial and respectful of the Acarie Circle, was not attracted to this method. Instead of a vision of coercion and force, he embraced the gentleness of Christ as the way to lead others to devotion and a relationship with God.

In this belief, he developed a theology of non-violence seen in the first sermon he gave at his induction as Provost of the Cathedral Chapter in the Diocese of Geneva. St. Francis de Sales wrote, "It will be by charity that the walls of Geneva must be shaken; by charity that the city must be invaded and by charity that it must be recovered. I propose to you neither iron nor powder whose odor and taste call to mind the infernal furnace. I am not forming one of those armies who soldiers have neither faith nor piety. May our camp be the camp of God whose trumpets proclaim with accents all of gentleness, this song, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of armies. It is on this camp that you must fix your gaze...we will conquer only with prayer and love." Violence is an overwhelming presence in our lives. It impacts almost every facet of our world and society, graphically illustrated by the horrific fact that in the first 24 days of 2023, there have been over 40 mass shootings in the U.S. Indeed, fear dominates as a response to this reality, and often, fear itself leads to violence.

The words of Christ that prompted St. Francis de Sales to choose gentleness over violence must be rooted in every heart of faith. As we cope with our world's disdain for peace, let us pray for peace and embrace a gentle heart and a gentle way to confront sin and violence in the spirit of Christ and example of St. Francis de Sales.

*This article was originally published in De Sales Weekly, a digital publication of the North American Provinces of the [Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales](#).*