

Profile of the French Province:

The French Province of Our Lady of the Missions did not come into existence until 1933, due to the historical situation in France during the nineteenth century. One needs to recall that France had lived through a turbulent period of revolutions, deposition of the monarchy, the Franco-Prussian War, a defeat for France, the emerging power of the Comunes and the establishment of the Republics.

Euphrasie Barbier, foundress of the Congregation, was born in 1829 in Caen her whole life was a struggle to cope, not just with the establishing of the Congregation, but with the ever-changing laws being imposed on the French people, the Church and particularly the Religious. At times, the Convent was subjected to searches by the revolutionary guards, with ever changing new regulations with regard to taxes, the threat of expulsion and/ or disbandment of the religious way of life in order to continue their ministry to the poor, the orphans, etc. To preempt the confiscation of property in the foreseeable future, Euphrasie removed valuable documents to the community in Deal, England.

The Republicans feared the growing influence of the Church, especially in the field of education, thus new laws and regulations were put in place over the years and the last step was the Law of Associations (1901) which virtually abolished the right of free associations of men and women religious. In effect it meant that Religious Congregations had to be authorized, if not they were regarded to be illegal and faced being dissolved or exiled. Authorization meant that their schools, orphanages would remain open and they could continue to teach but as seculars.

Faced with such a situation the then Superior General Mother M. of the Holy Rosary and her Council made the painful decision to leave France and move the administration and novitiate to Deal, England and it would be twenty years before the Sisters returned to France (1921) to again take possession of their Convent in Lyon. Another ten years would pass before the General Chapter of 1932 constituted the communities in Lyon, Toulon (1931) and Fribourg, Switzerland, a Province, in their own right. With the re-opening of the novitiate (1933) the Province was officially established.

The subsequent years saw the Province expand its missionary activity by sending Sisters to the French colony of Indo-China (Vietnam), Canada; on the home front by outreach to blind women in setting up Villa St. Odile (1936); establishing St. Rambert-en-Bugey (1949) which became a home for Eurasian women and girls as the political situation in Vietnam changed.

The universal Church had gathered in 1962 - 1965 for the Second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII in Rome. This Council was to have an impact on the Congregation and the Province. The General Chapter of 1966 saw the revival of the missionary zeal, which had animated Euphrasie and the first Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. The French Province, together with the other western Provinces took up the challenge of looking for new mission territory – Senegal, a French-speaking colony, was chosen by the Province. Missionary continued, in the 1990's Sisters went to Romania until 2004. There were other ventures for short periods of time.

As the Congregation celebrated 150 years since its foundation the French Province had changed in ways probably not foreseen by the first RNDM's. With the decline of vocations, not just in France, but in other western Provinces, the Superior General, Marie Benedicte (1972-1984) recognized a shift and encouraged what might be called "internationalization" of mission-sending. In effect, the mission in Senegal welcomed Sisters from other Provinces and in time France too, became a mission-receiving Province, which is still the case today.

Today the French Province, though small in number, remains very alive and pursues its mission with courage, listening to today's world in quest of meaning, justice and fraternity in communion with the whole Congregation.

Communities and their Mission

The French Province has never been a large Province in terms of the number of communities (convents). Euphrasie saw Lyon, the foundation House, as the formation center for her young missionaries. Upon the Sisters' return from England in 1921, this zeal for mission was still very evident with the first sending to Indo-China (Vietnam) in 1924, and in the 1960's sending Sisters to Senegal. Over the years, various factors affected the mission-sending potential of the Province eventually leading to becoming a mission-receiving Province. Sisters have come from New Zealand, Vietnam, England and today from Bangladesh, Myanmar, the Philippines, Kenya living the mission of our internationality, a gift that Euphrasie has left us. Besides the four active communities today there had been ventures into other areas of France, eg: Chateau-Chinon et [Givors](#) being a religious presence in this dechristenised region; La Courtine a shelter for poor and marginalized; Couzeix – living and working with disadvantaged young people; outreach to Romania after the collapse of the Ceausescu government, caring for orphans.

LYON, situated on the hill of Fourviere, is still the focal point of the French Province and it is from here that the mission, begun by Euphrasie, continues, if somewhat on a smaller scale. Hospitality is a very important part of the mission of this community, they welcome Sisters from across the Congregation who come to walk in the footsteps of our Foundress and for study purposed. The new missionaries, once they have acquired some knowledge of French, engage in pastoral and health care ministries which sees them visiting the elderly, sick, supporting migrants, etc



Lyon



Heritage Center inside the Chapel



Hospitality – Gathering of Vietnamese



Visiting people from Myanmar

TOULON founded in 1931 is situated in the south-east of France. Upon their arrival the Sisters began catechism classes, study circles, youth activities as well as outreach to the poor and sick, providing home health care. Today the Sisters continue in this pastoral ministry both in the school and in the parish.



Pastoral Ministry -



**Preparing meals
for the homeless**



**Arranging mass for the
vietnamease Community**



**Preparing children for the
Sacraments**

THE ABBAYE, St. Rambert-en-Bugey, a former Benedictine Monastery with the Church of St. Domitian (807) thus a heritage site. This Abbey can be found in the Jura foothills east of Lyon. It has a rich history of hospitality opening its doors to welcome Eurasian girls from Vietnam (1949 – 1979).

Today it continues to be a house of hospitality having been modified to cater for different groups of people who come to pray, rest, study attend seminars or just simply to enjoy the surrounding beauty of the area. The mission of the community is to be a welcoming presence to all who pass through its doors.



**Group gathering in front of the
Chapel of St. Domitian**



**Motorcycle Group:
“Motars Christians Notre Dame”**



Families with their children

CHARENTON (1955), a suburb of Paris near the River Seine. Here a small community maintains a presence in our large school by helping with English, Religious Education and enhancing the liturgical life of the school community. There is also outreach to the sick and house bound, part of the pastoral ministry of the parish.



**Teaching religious culture
and catechism**



**Visiting elderly and sick in
Rest Homes**

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