

RNDM Renewal- A pilgrimage to our Roots 25 April to 20 June 2018

1- Newsletter

Dear Sisters

Greetings from St Rambert where we have been gathered for the last number of weeks for our RNDM Renewal program. We thank Marie Laurent and the community for their hospitality, generosity, love and kindness in making us feel so much at home. We would like to share with you some news of our time here and to wish you a very happy Feast of Pentecost.

The purpose of our renewal is to discover our call anew as RNDMs and a time to visit and experience our heritage places in France, UK and Rome.

The group consists of 21 sisters from 11 Provinces across the Congregation: two Sisters from India North East, three from India South, and three from Central India, three Sisters from Bangladesh, one from Kenya, one from South Sudan and two from Vietnam. One Sister from Peru, two from New Zealand and one from Ireland.



Being from many different countries, our journeys to L'Abbaye, St. Rambert en Bugey varied. For some it was straightforward while others had challenges en-route such as flight delays, cancellations and lost luggage. The challenge of the flight cancellation did not deter the enjoyment of our two Kenyans, who benefited by experiencing hotel hospitality and a luxury swimming pool which they made the most of to refresh themselves.

On arrival at St. Exupery Airport in Lyon, sisters received a very warm welcome from Sister Marie Laurent, Community Leader. Other Sisters of the community, Marie Benedicte, Elizabeth, Rebecca and Kim and Helen were there at L'Abbaye, and Sister Lucy our CLT member who is also responsible for the Programme with other participants who had arrived already, to greet us.

On the first day at 2.30 pm, our group assembled outside in the warmth of a beautiful spring day getting more acquainted with one another and admiring with awe, the beauty of creation, while waiting for our Opening Liturgy.

The prayer began with music, Holy Ground. We lit candles, the first held facing North, while we prayed for the spirit that comes from the north winds to breathe on us as we put our hope in God.

Facing the East, we prayed for light to see our faults so that we can have a better understanding of everyone-the Church and world peace. We prayed for our Congregation all over the world, for our sick Sisters and for vocations.

Turning South, we asked God to give us warmth of heart, love and kindness, for those who suffer from oppression and threat, for refugees and displaced people, for world leaders to become instruments of light and healing, banishing violence and injustice from the face of the earth.

Facing West, we prayed and asked God to remove the stones that entomb, enslave in bondage and inhibit, so that freedom, peace justice may prevail in the hearts of each individual on earth. We ended with the song, Companions on the Journey.



We journeyed to the hall where we continued with the rest of the prayer. Sister Patricia Boyd, Province Leader of France, extended a very warm welcome and declared our Programme open.

On day two, led by Sr. Lucy, we reflected on the previous day's pilgrimage and how it touched us, the meaning it had for us, the enlightenment we received. Our group sharing also continued by getting to know one another and where we came from. We shared our expectations, inspirations and

hopes and sieved through the roots of our Congregation in order to become more enriched with our charism.

Sister Kathleen then introduced us to RNDM Mission and intercultural challenge. The saying goes, 'The best Teacher teaches from the heart not from the books.' This can most certainly be applied to Kathleen whose aim was to instil in us a deep awareness of our cultures and awakening a new respect for one another and our Earth while journeying together in song and dance while proceeding on our journey. RNDM Mission is about bringing the Reign of God to all people and to all creation, of bringing peace, love, joy, justice, mercy and hope, for we are all one community of life. During our sharing on culture with the use of proverbs and drawing pictures of our families, we received new insight about our places of origin, our differences and what we have in common, thus strengthening the bond of our journey together.



On Sunday, 5th May, we visited Taize, one of the most popular centres in Europe for ecumenical prayer, worship and reconciliation. Its influence has spread throughout the world. Brother Roger, a Protestant pastor, helped those who were affected by poverty. In 1940 he settled in Taize and began sheltering Jews and other war refugees fleeing from the Nazis. In 1942 he was forced to flee. He returned in 1944 and formed a small group. Many people, especially the youth, were attracted

by a new style of worship and singing. There are now about 100 Brothers from Protestant and Catholic traditions.

We were fortunate to be there at the Mass, praying together with thousands of young participants. Unfortunately, about ten years ago while Brother Roger at prayer, the terrible tragedy of his death

occurred. He was stabbed by a woman who was mentally disarranged. The Community forgave the woman and her family, which brought about a powerful example of peace and reconciliation.

After lunch we met an Indian Brother who kindly explained the history of Taize and the life story of Brother Roger, the beginnings of the community, which operates mainly through the bond of brotherhood, unity, sharing.

We continued our journey to Ars to visit the tomb of St. John Vianney who is the patron saint of priests. He spent long hours hearing confessions and is known to contribute to numerous healings both spiritually and otherwise. We visited the house where he lived. John Vianey was poor, in this worlds' goods, but rich in the things that matter.

for the next two weeks Sister Susan Smith helped us to discover how to be missionary women today by introducing to women in the Old and New Testament and by leading us through the congregation history.

She taught about the significant role of prophetic and courageous women in the Old Testament beginning with Exodus 2:1-10. We discovered that many women took roles that in patriarchal society belonged to men. We see the need to reclaim our identity with courage.



Following this, we looked at colonisation. Trade followed the flags of European countries and the missionaries followed them. Many women entered missionary life in the 19th century. This in itself was a revolutionary step because women were everywhere second class citizens. The clergy did not make life easy for people like Euphrasie, our courageous, valiant woman. The 19th century was linked with expansion, as well as poverty.

We continued with Euphrasie's journeys and learned about the difficulties of the early stages of the various missions, the poverty and the hardships that our Sisters had to face, and the roles of choir and lay Sisters. We then continued to look at RNDM Documents including the constitutions. We looked at the different places of RNDM mission, beginning with France and saw photos of the early sisters and houses. We learned something also of the challenges that were faced in India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Myanmar, New Zealand, Australia, British Isles, Canada and also looked at the missions in Kenya, Senegal, Peru and Bolivia, Samoa and the Philippines, Taiwan and Laos, and also Papua New Guinea, where we no longer have a mission. Especially around World War II there were lots of hardships to be faced.

We then traced the journey of our sisters to the 21st century. We discovered that when the European sisters had to leave certain countries because of war and political unrest it was a challenging time for the sisters who were left. They had to assume leadership and other responsibilities very quickly. Many lessons were learned at this time and now local Sisters take leadership in their own countries as well as being part of Congregational Leadership.

Many Chapters have taken place along the line, and we are continually learning through awareness of Earth situations and environmental studies how to keep our charism alive and active in our own times.

Now in the 21st century, our recent Chapters inspire us how, as part of Earth Community, we are One and we are Love. Susan took us through the RNDM world, without ticket or visa. It was indeed really interesting to travel with her.

On May 11th we celebrated the birthday of Sr. Irine with a song, and Sr. Frances on behalf of the group wished with few words of appreciation. We blessed Irine and wished her joy and happiness in her ongoing Mission.

We also had the privilege of welcoming Sister Jo, our Congregational Leader, who stayed with us for a few days, spent time with us, and also joined in our classes.



May 12th we visited Lyons Heritage House, known as Mother



House. This was a very happy occasion for us to visit the beautiful city of Lyon. We got a tremendous welcome from Sister Patricia Boyd, Provincial Leader, and the Sisters of the Lyon Community. They provided a most delicious lunch prepared by the Sisters. Patricia, being our guide, explained about the history of the house. We also visited the Cathedral of St Jean Baptiste with its beautiful windows and famous clock, and then were taken by bus up the narrow roads to the Basilica of Notre Dame of Fourviere where Euphrasie used to regularly attend Mass. We joined the Mass in the Chapel and took photographs of the wall plaque, which was erected by our Sisters. From the Church we travelled 560 steps while we recalled the steps of Euphrasie during her early days.

In our Mother House the stone floors and even the house itself gave the feeling of Euphrasie's presence. There is a wonderful display of the history of our Congregation including Euphrasie's office book, rosary and crucifix as well as many maps and photos. Her two missionary journeys were cleverly mapped out around a lighted globe of the world in the middle of the circular table. There was also a good collection of artefacts from the different missions.

We prayed in the Chapel for all our Missions and our sick Sisters and for world peace. We had photos taken with the community before we left and we all sang the Euphrasie song, Woman of Faith. The Mother House helped us to revitalise the vision of our Foundress and to keep our vision alive.

On 13th May, two women from the media came to interview us about our RNDM. International Mission in the different countries. They are going to write an article about us for the newspaper! They were very interested to learn about our Congregation.

On Thursday 17th May our morning prayer began with a reading and reflection on the life of Blessed Josephine Bakhita, patron of South Sudan. When Josephine was nine years old she was sold into slavery where she experienced excruciating hardships. After many sufferings through the grace of Divine Providence she was released from slavery. She finally became a Religious Sister. On one

occasion, when she was elderly and confined to a wheelchair, a Bishop asked her what was she doing all day. Her reply was, ‘exactly what you are doing –the will of God.’ She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1992 because he was keen to show that sanctity and holiness did not belong just to European religious and priests, but is universal as the beatification of Josephine Bakhita shows.



Following the prayer, Sister Josephine, who is missioned in South Sudan, gave us a brilliant account of her mission and the horrendous sufferings and injustices the people of Sudan are still encountering. Josephine, our valiant RNDM woman, hopes to return to South Sudan following our renewal course. We wish you well Josephine and our prayer, love and thoughts are with you.

Finally, we express our sincere gratitude to our tutor sisters, Lucy, Kathleen and Susan, who, during these few weeks, imparted to us a deeper knowledge, appreciation and a new awareness of our charism and way of life.

We will remember you all in prayer as we continue on our onward Journey and Mission.

May God Bless you all.

Your loving sisters on Renewal in L'Abbaye, St Rambert