

SISTER MARIE BERNADETTE VIGIER

Born :	Etampes (Essonne) France	09.07.1912
Postulant :	Lyon	18.02.1936
Novice :	Lyon	08.12.1936
First Vows :	Lyon	08.06.1939
Final Vows :	Lyon	03.07.1946
Died:	Accueil des Buers, Villeurbanne	24.10.2016



The Lord called to Himself the oldest Sister in our province at the end of a long and very full life (104 years).

Yvonne Vigier was born on 9 July 1912 at Etampes, in the former Seine and Oise region which is today called Essonne. She often spoke about the mediaeval churches and the royal dungeon of the 12th century. During her childhood, her parents and their four children left the Beauce district to move to that of St Etienne-St Chamond in the Loire valley. Her eldest sister, Suzanne, went to the Lord before her, at the age of 103 years, and her younger sister, Simone, is still living at St Jean de Luz; their brother, Jean-Claude, had died before any of the girls.

Yvonne never did higher studies. At the age when she was looking for a professional activity, she quite naturally chose to join a metal factory in St Etienne. With a group of friends she took part in the parish choir, and was often at the centre for Marian pilgrimages in Val Fleury. Little by little her call to the religious missionary life took shape; she contacted the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions which had just reopened its novitiate at 14 Chemin de Montauban in Lyon. She entered as a postulant on 18 February 1936 and on her holy habit day received the name of Sister Marie Bernadette of Lourdes; she was delighted with her name as she had a great devotion to Our Lady which she kept up all her life. She made her first vows on 8 June 1939, on the eve of the Second World War

Sister M Bernadette's first mission was to Toulon, the naval port in the south of France on the Mediterranean, where our Sisters had a school. She was in charge of the young boarders. Sometimes she would recall the night of 27 November 1942 when the French fleet was scuttled in the Toulon harbour so that it would not fall into the hands of the Germans. As a young religious she lived through the difficult times of the occupation, particularly in Lyon where she found herself in charge of the kitchen at St Odile, the House for Blind Ladies. It was there that she made her final vows on 3 July 1946. For many years she was also busy in the large garden around the Provincial House which she lovingly cared for. The novices sometimes had a few confrontations with her when they wanted to get flowers to decorate the chapel. They had to guarantee that the flowers would be well cared for and watered!

As a consequence of her devotedness in every trial, Sister M Bernadette was often called on to give a hand in other communities. In 1956 she was at St Rambert helping with the Eurasian girls; she also stayed several times at Fribourg to help with the boarders. During the summer she would accompany the groups of children from Toulon and Lyon going to their holiday camps in Alsace. In 1968 she was sent to Charenton where the new Directress, Sr M Danielle entrusted to her the bookkeeping for the canteen which was already welcoming several hundred children for meals every day. In this new mission, which was being established in the buildings of the former Minor Seminary of Paris, Sr M Bernadette was involved in the works needed to renovate the Sisters' quarters, and in the school

holidays visiting RNDMs would often find her at the top of a ladder painting in the classrooms along with Sr M Danielle, and Sister M Lucie's nephew, Mr Chuitel and his wife.

A great desire for missionary life in Africa or elsewhere was always in Sister M Bernadette's heart. In 1982 she had the joy of being sent to Senegal where she was happy to help with the sewing groups for the village women. But at 70 years of age it was a risk! The sub-tropical climate affected her health and she had to return urgently to France. After a few months of treatment in the clinic of the Saint Redempteur in Lyon, and a stay in the Abbaye at St Rambert where the good air of Bugey got her back on her feet, she was ready to resume an active life.

The Hospitality House at the Abbaye offered her new activities: welcoming groups, responsibility for the linen and the laundry without forgetting works like painting and stripping the old doors of the chapels. Along with Sister M Laurent and still intrepid she did not hesitate to climb the scaffolding in the park chapel. And of course upkeep of the gardens did not escape her attention – gathering the dead leaves in autumn and planting bulbs etc. She was always happy to welcome her nephews and nieces, grand-nephews and-nieces who were faithful in visiting her. She was also very welcoming to anyone who came to look for time out in our hospitality house. After a short time away (2 years) in Toulon where she had the joy of meeting up with her novitiate companions - M Angèle Démeocque and Maryvonne Vial - she returned to St Rambert in October 2006. Heavy work was no longer possible for her so she devoted her time to prayer, embroidery and reading. In 2008 at 96 years of age, she embroidered a banner for the General Chapter of the Congregation celebrated in Thailand, to the great amazement of the delegates.

In May 2011, because of her difficulty in climbing steps, she agreed to leave the Abbaye and to go to the Accueil des Buers (rest home) where joined a group of five of our oldest Sisters. She adapted perfectly to life in her new residence, always ready to help her new companions and to accept their help with love and discretion. A year later, on 9 July 2012, she had the joy of celebrating her 100th birthday at St Rambert, surrounded by all her family and the Sisters of the St Rambert community and the province.

We cherish the memory of Sister M Bernadette's courage, generosity and fidelity. Always welcoming and smiling at each one of our visits, she took an interest in the life and missionary works of the province and the whole Congregation. She frequently asked for news about the groups who stayed at the Abbaye, about the renovations of the buildings there and the projects under way; three days before her death she was phoning the community for news! She fell asleep in the Lord peacefully on the morning of 24 October 2016

Each one of us could say "If I have to live as long as Sister M Bernadette, I hope to have the grace to be as peaceful and trusting as she was in the grace of God." May the Lord welcome our Sister M Bernadette into the Light and Joy of Eternity!