

SISTERS OF ST. LOUIS WORLDWIDE

A Chance Meeting

If you are walking along certain streets in Ulster, or indeed in other parts of our island, you may well meet a young student -girl or boy -wearing a jacket that sports a badge. If this badge has two inscriptions on it -one in Latin repeating the prayer of Jesus to the Father, 'May they be One' (Jn. 17 : 21) and one in French uniting our lives and actions with God's desires, 'God Wills It', then you are surely meeting with a St.Louis student, a student at one or other of the St.Louis Schools run by the Sisters of St.Louis. If you are still in doubt, see if the badge has a design composed of a fleur-de-lis, a castle, a sword and a v-shaped chain. These signify, in turn, our place of origin (France), the home of our patron, St.Louis (King Louis IX of France), the Crusades and the chain of friendship and love that binds us together as a community and with the rest of Creation.

Beginnings

While St. Louis, our patron, lived in the 13th Century, our Founders, on the other hand, lived in 19th Century France. Chief among them was Abbé Louis Bautain who saw a great need at the time for the education of the young there along Christian lines. Others among them saw a need for ministering to prisoners and for other works of charity -as Bautain put it, for 'all that Christian charity can do in the service of Jesus Christ'. These activities were based on Abbé Bautain's founding inspiration -the prayer of Jesus for his disciples and for all who would come after them (you and me) -'That They may be One'.

Geographical Spread

If our place of origin is France, and our beginnings as far back as 1797 , how did we get to Ballymena, Bundoran, Clones, Middletown, Kiltimagh and a variety of centres in Belfast, Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk ? As they say,. 'It's a long story', in fact many stories, which may be read at your leisure if you visit our website. It makes fascinating reading and you will see there that we can stray beyond the confines of the afore-mentioned places, as, for example, Sr.Mary Jo.McKeefrey of Co.Antrim has done and now runs a Retreat Centre and gives Retreats in Antigua in the West Indies , as a member of our St.Louis community in England ! An account of our founding and growth can also be found in detail in a medium-sized volume entitled 'God Wills It', soon to be followed by the story of more recent times.

What are we about ?

So much for time and space, but what are we about ? Basically, we are about seeking God in the depths of our being and in the whole of Creation, and sensitising others to the great Treasure they too hold within themselves, and reverencing God there. Our motto or catchphrase (call it what you will), is the aforesaid 'May they be One' (remember the student-badge). These words are part of the prayer of Jesus to the Father near the end of his days, when he was about to take leave of his disciples. This is our special page of the Gospel, as it were. To get the full impact of these words, it is good to read the whole of Chapter 17 of John's Gospel. It is a wonderful piece of writing (i.e. Scripture) -would that we could pray like that in our turn ! Jesus had this uniquely deep interior life -this unique bond with the Father, and, out of that, he was a person for others. We seek the same deep union with God, immanent and transcendent, and, out of that, we seek too to be people for others. We have a Mission

Statement telling us what we aspire to, and it is very challenging. (This too is on our website).

What do we Do ?

In our schools and in all our workplaces and communities, you will find us giving priority to the God-quest (that search for God Who is One with us), and following through with mutual and collaborative conscientization and work in the areas of justice and peace (as for example in Northern Ireland), ecological awareness and awareness of the cosmos (as in ecological projects at inter-Church level), with a healthy interaction with others whether it is by way of accompanying our St. Louis Associates, or facilitating Scripture groups, or Lectio Divina, or helping weak or disadvantaged students, (often immigrants), or being inclusive and ecumenical in spirit and in truth, or promoting the New Universe Story, or working with the People of God in the local parish, or counselling, or giving Retreats (as for example in Dromantine, Newry) or working with the 'Friends of St. Louis' who take a practical interest in our work in Africa and Brazil, sometimes going there to 'see for themselves', or 'telling the beads' towards the end of a well-spent life, or in pain on a sick bed, or ministering to the sick, or bearing the burden of leadership or administration... We see all this as part of the fulfilment of the prayer of Jesus, That all may be One. God is One and all Creation (that is you and me and all things) -all Creation -groans to be caught up in this Oneness than which there is no greater joy.

Enjoyment

We enjoy many events together. Some years ago we 'cut a disc' entitled 'Sacred Memories' -where a choir of our Sisters sang Motets and Canticles dear to our hearts. It is well worth listening to. Recently, we put together an anthology of our favourite poems, saying why we liked them -there were some original poems too. We also held an Art and Craft Exhibition of our own work -this was truly recreative. We went on pilgrimage to Faughart and South Armagh, honouring Celtic roots and places of historical interest. We have two St. Louis magazines, one for Ireland, called *Seo is Siud*, to keep our wits sharpened; the other our International Newsletter to keep us up to date with what is happening in the rest of the Congregation. All in all, 'it is good for us to be here' but we do not intend to build tabernacles, as in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 17.

Perhaps these few lines from the pen of Margy Piercy sum up our Mission Statement:

We stand in the midst of the burning world
Primed to burn with compassion, love and justice
To turn inward and find holy fire at the core,
To turn outward and see the world that is all
Of one flesh with us.

If you would like to know more about us, you will find us at www.stlouissisters.org