

Brief history of our Congregation

The name of our Congregation is **Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition**



St. Emilie de Vialar
(foundress of SJA)

founded by St. Emile de Vialar in 1832, in Gaillac, France.

St. Emilie de Vialar was born in Gaillac (south-west of France) on the 12th September 1797. She was the eldest of four children. From a very early age, this intelligent and lively girl, daughter of Baron de Vialar and Mrs. Antoinette Portal, felt an attraction to God.

Her mother was her first teacher. Yet Emilie frequented also a small school in Gaillac. At the age of 13, her parents accompanied her to a boarding school in Paris.

Unfortunately, her mother passed away on arrival.

Having finished her education Emilie returned to Gaillac, where she was often accompanying her father to social events of the time. Young and pretty she loved beautiful clothes and adorned herself with jewels. She was popular with boys and girls alike, and some proposed marriage to her. Emilie herself relates that at that particular period of her life she realised she had another vocation, but she was not sure what that would entail for her. Though she was interested herself in everything, she found that nothing really fully satisfied her.

At this time Emilie became aware of the situation of poverty and injustice that reigned in her native town and whole country of France caused by French revolution (May 5, 1789 - Nov 9, 1799). For Emilie, the poor took on human face, God had his dwelling in them. Only one response was possible: to love them- *“to devote oneself to the works of charity.”* Much to her father’s displeasure she began to distribute food and clothing to the poor that knocked at her door. Later with the help of other young girls, her friends of Gaillac, she would reach out to the poor, sick persons in their homes bringing them soup, warm clothes, food and medicines.

There were two divergent paths: the first is connected to her concrete experience during the long years past: *“The diligent care I gave to the sick poor in their homes gave me the idea of founding a work that would*

provide assistance day and night and the opportunity to prepare the necessary food and remedies". (Sr. Agnes CAVASINO SJA, Emilie de Vialar, foundress, p. 35)

Second path was *"I had great attraction for the foreign missions, and without realising it she experienced such strong feelings that my heart went out to those infidel regions every time I was in Paris and visited the church of the Missions, or in one of my own parish churches which gave special honour to St. Francis Xavier. "* (Sr. Agnes CAVASINO SJA, Emilie de Vialar, foundress, p. 35)

A "mission" was preached in a parish of Gaillac. This helped her to come to a decision: to give herself completely to God. Still, the bearing of this on her life was unclear for many years to come.

When she went to Paris with the family, she was very impressed and affected by "irreligious behaviour, which prevailed in that city," (letter to Françoise Pezet, 1826) and she would go pray in the church for Foreign Missions. In Gaillac, she did what she could "work for the conversion of sinners and heretics" (Account of Graces).

St. Emilie was sustained in her quest by her spiritual director, who encouraged her to believe in her Vocation. Little by little she understood that God was inviting her to found a Congregation to honour the Mystery of the Incarnation as revealed to St. Joseph, by carrying out the different works of charity, in particular in "infidel countries."

On the death of her grandfather Emilie inherited a fortune, which enabled her to buy a house, and on Christmas night 1832, together with three companions, she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition.

This name expresses the Mission and Spirituality of the Congregation: contributing to the saving plan of God, as Joseph has done after having been warned by the angel to take Mary who was with child (Mt. 1, 20-21).

At her death she was almost fifty nine, and during the brief period of twenty four years that her Congregation had been in existence and supplied missionaries for countries as varied as Algeria, Tunisia, France, Italy, Cyprus,

Malta, Syria, Greece, Burma, Palestine, Turkey, Crete and Australia, having made forty two foundations in all.

Her sanctity was officially recognised by the Church when she was canonised on 24 June 1951 by Pope Pius XII. Her Feast day is celebrated on 17th June.

The Decree of Praise, given on 6th May, 1842, established the Congregation as an Institute of Pontifical Right. Its Constitutions were approved by the Holy See in 1862 and definitively confirmed by a second Decree on 4th January, 1910.

The French State recognized the Congregation on 17th December 1855, thus giving it legal existence in France.

Brief History of our Congregation in Myanmar

The presence of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition
in Myanmar since 1847

The Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition is the first women congregation started the mission in Burma.

“I felt a strong attraction for the Foreign Mission, and my heart went out spontaneously to infidel regions.” (Account of Graces, Paragraph 24).

On 8th October 1845, Mother Emilie was in Malta. It was here that the plan for making a foundation in far - off Burma was to eventuate. At that time they called this part of the world “the Indies”. In Malta, Emilie met Fr. Bruno, a missionary from Burma (Myanmar), of the Congregation of the Oblates of Virgin Mary (OMV), who ardently desired to obtain the help of the Sisters of St. Joseph for the apostolate. He made known his desire to Mother Emilie who had a long cherished idea of sending her sisters under the patronage of St. Francis Xavier to missionary countries. She waited for a clearer manifestation of the designs of God, which was later indorsed by Mgr. Ceretti, the vicar apostolic of Burma, an OMV, entreating her to send sisters to Burma. Mother Emilie was requested to send 10 sisters to give service for the following apostolate concerns;

- To take care of orphans and abandoned children.
- To teach children and young girls in a boarding school and a day school.
- To found a home for the elderly women.

On the 17th June, 1847, the six SJA sisters who arrived at the sea port of Moulmein (Mawlamyine) Mon State, Burma (Myanmar) after six months of travel are Sr. Theresa Mac. Kenzie, Superior, Sr. Sidonie Bonneville, Sr. Marie Martin, Sr. Pauline Falzon, Sr. Louise Qutterie and Sr. Sophie Garrigue. They were given a very nice welcome by Rev. Fr. Balma and other missionaries. Remarkably, there were 20 little orphans waiting to be taken care of by the SJA Sisters. That was how the SJA Sisters started their mission in Myanmar.

In May 1866, Msgr. Bigandet brought two SJA sisters to Mandalay to establish a Convent to render similar service, which was being carried out in Mawlamyine for the people of Myanmar. Queen Su Phaya Latt and the Prince always helped the Sisters whenever they needed funds. The Sisters were happy to teach English and French to the Prince and Princes in the palace for twice a week.

The SJA Congregation has sponsored the much flourishing Diocesan Sisters of St. Francis Xavier, after 50 years of their arrival in Mawlamyine in 1897, being requested by Bishop Alexander Cardot.

During Second World War while Japanese were in Burma (Myanmar), the sisters opened their own clinic with the help of a doctor. When the Japanese hospital reopened, Sr. Bridget (SJA) and Sr. Bridget (SFX) worked with nurses took care of the patients and injured. They worked in the refugee camps too. These two sisters worked charitable works together. They also assisted in the refugee camps. Thanks to the efforts of these nuns, smallpox, which was rampant in the city, was eradicated. (History of SFX Sisters, p. 22)

On the occasion of 150th anniversary of their missionary presence in Myanmar, the SJA Congregation accepted the request of Bishop Nicholas Mang Thang to kindly sponsor the religious Community of the Little Way Sisters of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, in 1997 in Kalaymyo.

There are (35) Houses of SJA, in the two Arch-dioceses (Arch-diocese of Yangon and Mandalay) and in (6) Dioceses (Mawlamyine, Hakha, Kalay, Myitkyina, Lashio and Loikaw) and (5) communities in Philippines and one in Singapore with (225) SJA Sisters.

Logo (picture)



S for Sisters, **J** for Joseph, and **A** for Apparition

The Cross is always there and is part of life but there is no figure on it which means Christ is risen.

Motto: “Devotedness unto Death”

Charism: “Witnessing Incarnated Love”

Spirituality: “Incarnational Spirituality”

Vision of Myanmar Province

We, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition aim to achieve the holistic growth towards becoming the Spiritual and prophetic servant leaders according to the Charism of the Congregation.

Mission of Myanmar Province

We, the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition commit ourselves to;

- To support the needs of all different Commissions for their implementations
- To energize the dedication and commitment of the Sisters according to the capacity
- To empower the Leadership skill in becoming the spiritual and prophetic servant leaders
- To revitalize the Charism of the Congregation among the Sisters Provincialate

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Information on the different stages of the formation program

There are five stages:

1. Aspirant

A time of first contact with the sisters as a student or who desires to become a sister after she finishes her matriculation /college. She is in touch with one of the communities of the Congregation or with one of its members.

1. Pre-Postulant

“Teacher, where do you live?” (Jn 1:38).Time to get familiar with the Congregation.

-To have the initial encounter with Jesus.

-To get the necessary preparation before beginning the Postulancy.

Time: Those who have finished matriculation and over 18 years old. The duration is according to the candidate’s condition on preparation of Human and Spiritual formation.



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2. Postulant

“Come and see” (Jn 1:39).The Postulate is the first stage of initial Formation in a strict sense. Time to stay together and to grow deeper in knowledge and relationship. As well as discovery of self and others. Mutual understanding between the Postulancy and the Institute. Clarification of the call of Jesus; preparation to make a free choice. Discernment of the call to Consecrated Life

within the Congregation, growth in human maturity, deepening of Christian living.

Time: This period must last a year. It can be lengthened to adjust to the growth and development of the person. The Postulate is done in an apostolic community or a formative community within the Congregation.



Place

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3. Novice

And they stayed with Him” (Jn 1:39). This is the central stage of Initial Formation. Time to experience faith and love that shows a deeper awareness of her call and following of Jesus. The novice gets to know and to experiment the new life style that the Congregation offers her, to enable her to live a deep experience of God, to become integrated in the community and to participate in its mission.

- Deepening the relationship with Jesus through prayer.
- Understanding of charism and mission of the Congregation.
- Deeper knowledge on the 3 evangelical counsels.

Time: The Novitiate lasts two years. However, for serious reasons, the competent Major Superior can, on the advice of the Formator of novices, lengthen the period, but not for more than six months. (Constitutions art. 37)



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4. Junior

“To be with Him and to be sent...” (Mk 3: 14-15). Deepening relationship with God and others. This is the last stage of the Initial formation and it ends with the profession of Final Vows in the Congregation. This is the time to consolidate, deepen and unify through a solid and integrated formation, all that the junior sister has received during her Novitiate, so that she may become an apostle, **a Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition.**

Time: For the length of the Juniorate is five years. Nevertheless, the Superior General, with the consent of her Council, and for particular reasons, can extend the period of temporary profession, but not beyond the limits laid down by Church law. (Constitutions art. 41).

Place: The Juniorate can be followed either in an Apostolic Community and in international Juniorate for two years.

Address of International Juniorate:

Cté St. Joseph

16, Place émilie de Vialar

81600 Gaillac

Email : emilisja@yahoo.es

Tel : 5 63 57 36 36



5. Senior

“Formation must sustain conversion at every stage of life.” (Const. 18)

The fundamental values of Apostolic Consecrated Life do not change, but the manner of incarnating them must be adapted to the exigencies of the world, which demands that we be inventive and creative. The Christian life, and in a particular manner the Consecrated life, is a way of becoming Christ-like; and for us, this has a particular approach as sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. This goal is never perfectly attained. The conversion process whereby we become new creatures is the work of a lifetime. Hence, ongoing formation must be an integral part of Consecrated Life. (cf. Constitutions 44 and *Vita Consecrata* 69)

