

“From the Archives to History” – an International Workshop for Sisters of St. Joseph July 29 – August 2, 2019 in Le Puy, France



“From the Archives” workshop participants at the CSJ International Centre in LePuy France July 26 – August 2, 2019 This program at the CSJ International Centre in Le Puy France was for CSJ archivists who have no professional training but who are in charge of or just starting an archive and for persons who have an interest in archives. Thanks to a USA benefactor, ten scholarships were offered to Sisters from Congregations in Africa, India, South America, the US and Canada. Sister Mae Kierans, CSJ was invited as the Canadian participant. Her travel, accommodation and registration expenses were covered by a scholarship.

The workshop presenters, both Sisters of the Institute of Sisters of St. Joseph in France, were Soeur Catherine Louis, steeped in the history and spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph and Soeur Nadia Boudon-Lashermes who teaches history and geography. Both Sisters had participated in the recent and extensive development of the modern historical scenography display in the Le Puy Motherhouse museum.



Workshop presenters: (L) Soeur Nadia Bourdo-Lashermes and (R) Soeur Catherine Louis

The presenters spoke in French for the Sisters from France and some African countries. There was simultaneous translation into Portuguese for the Brazilian Sisters, Spanish for the Argentinean Sister and English for the Sisters from Canada, the USA, India and some African countries by three Sister translators and using headphones.



Morning presentations emphasized the importance of archives as a tool of remembering the patrimony of our past; what makes up their composition (records, artefacts, etc.), and the important role of the archivist as guardian of the historical present day realities so that we can advance knowledgably into the future.

Actual historical documents were given to the participants for critical analysis in order to establish the facts of past events. For example, we were given two differing historical accounts of the foundation of a women's congregation. Which one was true? Another paper for small group analysis was the documentation by a local parish priest of the succession of superiors in the CSJ Community at Bas en Basset from the mid 1600's to late 1700's, illustrating the evolution of governance styles. The participants worked in the four small language groups to assess the value of these documents and their veracity in the case of competing narratives and then reported findings back to the large group.



Afternoon field trips out to LePuy, the well-preserved medieval city birthplace of the Sisters of St. Joseph were rich in history: Romans once occupied the city which was a religious centre. Today it is the beginning of the French *Compostela*, whose museum also we explored.



Following a map, participants walked the narrow streets in the footsteps of Jesuit founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Jean Pierre Medaille (1618 – 1689) visiting the Jesuit house where he stayed in Le Puy, the nearby St. George’s Jesuit Church where he offered Mass and also visiting the first convent.



Original 1650 Le Puy Convent Kitchen. Sr. Mae, centre with Sisters from Burkina Faso, Brazil and India

In the Motherhouse, they visited the original seventeenth century convent kitchen. The recently updated historical scenography in the museum space of the Motherhouse was captivating with its modern multi-media exhibits and historical artifacts.

The experience of being with other CSJ archivists and living an international experience for a week deepened our appreciation of the blessed 350+ year history of the Sisters of St. Joseph. There were 26 Sisters of St. Joseph from Mexico, Madagascar, Brazil, Argentina, Congo, France, India, Lebanon, Egypt, Burkina Faso, USA and Canada sharing how in different cultures, their charism of unity and reconciliation is creatively and faithfully expressed.

The expert simultaneous translation was key to the success of this shared multilingual workshop.



The importance of carefully preserving the blessed history in Congregational Archives was brought home to each participant in this outstanding international workshop experience!

Sr. Mae Kierans CSJ Museum with mural illustrating the global expansion of the Sisters of St. Joseph

LePuy Town Square – “Martyrs Square” - where five Sisters of St. Joseph were beheaded during the Reign of Terror.



Participants tour the historical Scenography in the Le Puy CSJ Motherhouse Museum