



PROLOGUE TO THE CONSTITUTIONS

“Where are you going? I suppose to the church to mumble your prayers before the statues; and then you will be highly pleased with yourselves thinking you are very devout. You would do better if you would build a house for these poor girls who will be lost for want of direction and resources.” It was these words, spoken by Madeleine Lamy to St. John Eudes, which led to the establishment of the Order of Our Lady of Charity on November 25, 1641, in Caen.

St. John Eudes was an extraordinary priest for the role he played in the spiritual renewal of the Church of France in the 17th century. Permeated by the Holy Scriptures, influenced by the writing of women mystics, and touched by the suffering of his brothers and sisters, he came to know God as a God of compassion and a God of great Heart. He was the initiator and promoter of the liturgical worship of the Heart of Jesus and Mary.

As a missionary priest, he met many women who were exploited and trapped in situations of poverty and prostitution. They wanted to change their lives. He was convinced that every individual has infinite dignity and wanted to help them reclaim their inheritance as children of God. The mission of the Order was to offer refuge and new possibilities to these women. To emphasize the importance of this mission, St. John Eudes gave the sisters a fourth vow of “zeal for the salvation of souls.” He died on August 19, 1680 and was canonized on May 31, 1925.

Over the next 150 years, many houses were founded including a house in Tours. During the French Revolution, which began in 1789, all religious were disbanded and the houses were closed. Fifteen years later almost all of the communities had re-established themselves, including the one in Tours, which was restored in 1806.

It was in Tours that Rose Virginie Pelletier entered on October 20, 1814. She received the name Sister Mary of St. Euphrasia. During her years in formation, she nourished her spirituality through her reflective reading of the scriptures and the writings of St. John Eudes. She loved the young women and girls entrusted to her care; through her, they knew that they were loved by God and had a sense of their self-worth.

Some of these young women felt a call to give themselves totally to Christ. Responding to their heartfelt desires and in consultation with her community, Mary Euphrasia founded the Sisters of St. Magdalen on November 11, 1825, shortly after she was elected prioress of the Tours community. The sisters received constitutions based on the primitive Rule of Carmel, and lived within the same monastery and dedicated themselves, through a life of silence and solitude, to prayer for the mission.

In response to a request from Bishop Charles Montault, Mary Euphrasia established a community of Our Lady of Charity in his diocese in Angers, France, in 1829. She named it “Good Shepherd” after an institution that was dedicated to the same work which existed in Angers prior to the French Revolution. On August 28, 1831, she also established a community of the Sisters of St. Magdalen. Mission partners, Countess Geneviève D’Andigné and Count Augustin de Neuville, played a very active part in the establishment and expansion of the mission.

Women seeking to dedicate their lives to God through this mission also entered the community. Mary Euphrasia received countless requests for new missions. Reflecting on how to respond to them, she understood that a change of structure was needed in how the monasteries were to be organized. Thus, she wrote to Cardinal Carlo Odescalchi, Cardinal Vicar to Pope Gregory XVI, about establishing a Generalate. Her request was granted on January 16, 1835. Because of this, a

new Congregation came into being – The Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers. The Congregation rapidly spread not only in France, but throughout the world. At the time of her death on April 24, 1868 there were 110 houses worldwide. St. Mary Euphrasia was canonized on May 2, 1940. At the 1969 Congregational Chapter, the official name of the Congregation became: Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd so as to reflect its internationality.

The Sisters of St. Magdalen underwent several changes. In 1950 they began to take the fourth vow of zeal to be expressed through a life of prayer. They had name changes (Sisters of the Cross, Contemplative Sisters of the Good Shepherd). They grew in their identity as contemplative sisters within an apostolic Congregation. In 2003, Article One of the Constitutions was approved. It states that we...*express our charism of merciful love through an apostolic life or a contemplative life*. On August 19, 2009, the new Constitutions were approved, which recognized and incorporated both ways of life with all members having the same name – Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

Meanwhile, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity continued to respond to requests for the mission and expanded. Progressively, the monasteries united within the various countries and were established internationally as the Union of Our Lady of Charity in 1990.

Over the years there were many interactions between the two Congregations in relation to mission and spirituality. Programs and projects were created together. The ways of responding to mission developed in response to the reality of the times. Structural transformation, advocacy, justice and peace and reconciliation initiatives continued to be an integral part of the ministries.

By 2006, a process for considering integration of the two Congregations began. Through a Journey of Enrichment in which history, spirituality, and charism were shared, a decision was reached for reunification through merger. The merger decree came into effect and the reunification was celebrated on June 27, 2014.

Approved at the Congregational Chapter

24 June 2015