

Spain

The Sisters arrived in Spain in 1860 and their first school was established in Barcelona. Other schools followed and today Sisters work both in the schools and outside, involved in a variety of pastoral outreach activities. Communities are located in Madrid, El Ejido- Almeria, Bellvitge, Barcelona, Burgos, Bembibre (Leon), Las Ventas de Albares (Leon), Fonsagrada (Lugo), and San Sebastian.

The first community in another European country to develop in the Institute was Spain.

During the Civil War that ravaged Spain from 1835 to 1841, many families sought asylum in France. Among them were Señora de Argila and her two daughters. They were welcomed in Béziers by the community there and the two girls became pupils in the boarding school. Later one of these girls, Teresa, joined the Institute and was professed as Sr Leocadie in Paris in 1845. She and her family constantly begged Mother de Fautoas to send sisters to Spain.

At first, it did not seem to be what God wanted for them. There were already other congregations in Spain, though these were enclosed religious. Besides, the political climate was not favourable. Finally, towards the end of 1857, the persevering Señora de Argila went to consult the Curé of Ars. He encouraged her not to give up, saying that the Infant Jesus wanted a house of his Institute in Barcelona. He added: "This foundation will meet with contradictions as do all God's works but the Will of God will be made manifest". Mother de Fautoas could no longer resist and, in September 1860, Mother Aloysia Millet was sent to Barcelona to look into the possibility of opening a school. On her return she gave a positive report and the first group of sisters prepared to go to Spain. Sr Henri d'Andoque took charge of the new mission, together with three others, Sr Leocadie de Argila, Sr Maurice and Sr Luce. Accompanied by Mother de Fautoas and Sr Aloysia they arrived in Barcelona on December 12, 1860, at 8.00am. Meanwhile Señora de Argila was busy arranging a meeting with the Archbishop, Monsignor Palau.

When the sisters arrived in St Anne's parish they were informed that a letter had been sent to France explaining that there were some difficulties about their coming to Spain. Had they received this news earlier they would not have made the journey. However, seeing the hand of Providence in this, the Bishop invited them to stay and open a school. Such are God's mysterious ways.

In 1864 the sisters wanted to open another house in Zaragoza in answer to requests for a boarding school there. However, the Archbishop there requested to see the Constitutions approved by the Holy See. They had none!

[Approbation of the Institute by the Holy See – 1866](#)

As Nicolas Barré, in the 17th century, had set up communities without vows and without cloister in order to free the first sisters to go among the people and teach, now, Mother de Fautoas saw the necessity of seeking papal approval for the Institute so that its mission could continue and spread. She set out for Rome, where she stayed from May 31 to December 13, 1866. She did not achieve her goal without many difficulties. She was granted three audiences with Pius IX. Finally, on hearing that the Institute had remained faithful to its original spirit and inspiration without vows or cloister, the Holy Father granted the approbation saying: "An Institute that has stood on its own feet for 200 years deserves something better than a laudatory approval... and you shall have it".

On November 21, 1866, Mother de Fautoas received the Apostolic Brief definitively approving the Institute. By this brief, vows were permitted to those already in the Institute and became the norm for those who joined from then on. This involved the revision of the Constitutions based on directives from Rome. The new Constitutions were approved on June 29, 1872, *ad experimentum*, and finally approved in 1887.

Mother de Fautoas presented the new Constitutions to the Institute, saying: "It is the Love of God, which for two centuries took the place of vows for us. Today, may it also be the Love of God that helps us to put into practice what we have solemnly promised". The superiors who were present at the Chapter in Paris on December 3, 1872, professed the first perpetual vows in the Institute.

The way was clear for the Institute to carry on its mission in Spain. Providing this seemingly simple requirement was to have far-reaching effects on the whole Institute. It gradually led to a more conventual form of life, such as was common to women religious at the time. However, the spirit lived on.

The sisters continued their mission with the same daring and love, answering the call of God and responding to the needs of the times and places in which they lived.

The turning point in the story of the Spanish province stems from the impact of Vatican II on the Church. The sisters' lives and pastoral ministries took on a different focus from that time. However, initially no one could have imagined the extent of change that would take place.

In 1966, the first group of sisters who wished to follow the original inspiration of the Institute moved to a disadvantaged area in Buen Pastor, Barcelona, where they worked alongside the Marist Brothers. Here they desired to live out the spirit of the Institute in a different way, in what had previously been an unknown area for them.

In 1970, another group moved to a similar area in Bellvitge, Barcelona. This area had a high percentage of immigrants, for whom many problems arose owing to difficulties in integration.

In 1974, in Madrid, some sisters left the school of Eduardo Dato and moved out to the margins in Vallecas, which at the time was one of the biggest shantytowns in Madrid. They sought to reach out to these people in whatever way they could. This also became the location for the novitiate, with the newer members beginning their formation in the midst of this reality.

The sisters who moved out of our own schools had to do some further studies to pass the state exams necessary to teach in government schools. They saw this as a means of offering a prophetic presence in the state sector, where they were very much with the local people. At the same time, the older sisters, who had initially remained in our big schools, were invited to move out to more suitable accommodation. Some houses suitable for retirement were prepared. The more active sisters moved from the school buildings to places where they could be closer to people. This proved to be a difficult transition for some as they sought to adapt to simpler living conditions in other environments. However, in a spirit of faith they accepted, realising that they were being invited to renew the giving of their lives to God, as they had been taught in their early days.

Gradually they adjusted and soon it became quite natural to be among the people in parishes, involved in catechesis and other forms of evangelisation, including much pastoral work with young people. Two sisters worked in a school for gypsies in Barcelona, at a time when it was not possible for them to be in a regular school. Gradually our big communities were replaced by a number of smaller communities, which enabled greater sharing of life, prayer and pastoral activities with lay people. Sisters commuted to the schools and continued teaching there. But as time went on, some moved out of teaching to other areas of pastoral need, such as prisons, soup kitchens, caring for abandoned children and Caritas groups. Living in smaller communities also gave the sisters more freedom to move on to another geographical area if and when it was felt to be appropriate.

In the meantime in our schools, there is a growing awareness that lay people are not there just to be employed by us, but that we are all working in partnership, and hence responsibilities are shared.

Given the Church and State relationship in the country, a sister is still head of every school. Reflection continues on other possible ways forward. All the evolution that has taken place over the years has involved much struggle and misunderstandings. Letting go of much loved establishments has brought sadness and challenge, while seeking to trust in God's providential guidance through all the difficulties.

In 1993, sisters moved to two more remote areas in the country, Almería and Galicia. El Ejido in Almería is an area that has attracted large numbers of immigrants, mainly Moroccans, as well as many local people from the smaller villages around. All of these people came to work in the immense greenhouses set up in the area. As they never had money and now earn it almost overnight, they face many consequent problems. There is a large number of gypsies in the area also, who live in rather difficult circumstances, which makes integration with the people as a whole very difficult.

In Fonsagrada, Galicia, the main problems are associated with extreme isolation in a mountainous area, where the climate can sometimes be quite severe. The remoteness does not offer a future for the younger generations and hence older people tend to be more isolated. In both places, the sisters teach in state schools and do various forms of pastoral work.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the search continues to find ways of being true to the spirit of creativity and daring that has characterised the history of our Institute. We trust that our way of being present and being involved with others may reflect the Gospel spirit, and the story that began in 1662 with a group of courageous women who said 'yes' to the realities of their time. So the sisters in Spain continue to dedicate themselves with energy and enthusiasm to their mission, always ready to go further.

Updates

United we stand – no more no less! A mixture of enthusiasm and responsibility - youth and elders - uncertainty and confidence - women and men - who wish to be clay in the hands of the best potter. Burgos will continue to pursue becoming like a child enjoying the presence of whatever gives meaning and colour to this image whenever we encounter our fragility.

The guidelines given by Nicolas Barré make it easier for us to live according to the spirit of the gospel. A small group of women in Burgos are already living this out in the field of education i.e. putting the human person at the centre – a pedagogy given 350 years ago. They are not alone. A group of colleagues have taken this up and are going ahead to plant similar seeds. In this process, apprehension and hope go hand in hand. However I feel drawn to continue planting these seeds with the women who are already so committed. They are setting a very high standard and I can't help asking: Are we really prepared for this? What should we really be doing? Will it work? Will we have a future?

The answer is in the person and the power is in the Spirit. It is God alone who can guide us to the right port.

A new school compels us to make a new start – to search for a way of responding to the challenges ahead without settling for what we have been doing until now. 2014 is a historical year – 350 years of a particular approach, 125 years of memory. The countdown begins to present this shared dream. Therefore I am glad to be part of this exciting moment with its uncertainty and hope.

I am more aware of my humanity and poverty, I feel more committed to the spirit that led to this step being taken: a way of life rooted in the Book of books, the Value of values, the Person of persons, in the Clay of clays, in the hands of the Potter.

Adapted from Mr Faustino Diez's account

Faustino Diez is a teacher in our school in Burgos (Spain). He is a married man with one child. Together with one of our Sisters, he is head of the pastoral department in the school. He has been working with us for fifteen years already, during which time he has got to know the spirit of Nicolas Barré. He is very creative. Using his musical gift, he has already made a CD of songs based on Nicolas Barré. They can be found in YouTube Faustino Diez.

Echoes from the Provincial Chapter in Spain

Since our provincial chapter, which took place on 27th-29th December 2013, each region in the province has been seeking ways of living out the General Chapter orientations.

With a heightened awareness of “being clay in the potter's hands”, we have a greater sense of an ongoing need for conversion and an acceptance of our fragility and vulnerability in order to live more fully.

Our Proposals

In the quality of our relationships:

Recognising that each person has something to give and something to receive,

This implies:

- that we seek to overcome our fears, be open to the initiatives of others, accept our limitations and, in a spirit of humility, learn to accept any shortcomings we may perceive around us.
- that we become artisans of peace, especially in situations of conflict, fear or lack of confidence.

We are called to:

- live with an attitude of respect, tolerance and deep listening.

In the call to live internationality:

- when we are open to diversity and build bridges of unity.

This in turn invites us:

- to focus more on working with lay people – having regional as well as province meetings for formation.
- to be open and inclusive in sharing the journey with others.

In the call to live co-responsibility:

- when we discern and are open to new ways of belonging.

This calls for:

- listening, information and formation to enable the new to emerge.
- a journey to be lived as a process, where we leave aside our programmes and build bridges with other countries where our sisters are – and thus get to know the realities better.

When we live in a more sustainable way – with others and with all of creation

This will lead us to

- a more ascetic way of life in existing challenging situations and
- lead us to take greater care in our use of basic necessities, such as water, light...

Sr Isabel Catarain Urteaga's experience of ministry in a Funeral Home

"...God supports us in our struggles, so that we are able to come to the support of others in every hardship of theirs because of the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the encouragement we receive through Christ". 2 Cor 1:4-5

Euskal Herria has been the cradle of many good priests. However, these times of crises: economic, social, cultural and religious, have impacted on priestly vocations. This was partly the reason when, four years ago, the Vicar General of the diocese, asked me if I could take part in the ministry of compassion in the Vascongada funeral home in Donostia, together with two other women religious. I accepted readily and with pleasure, thinking that I could now be part of a Christian community that gathers for worship, while, at the same time, showing compassion and caring for who are suffering – all of which would bring me closer to the life of Jesus.

Perhaps the most practical way to spread the kingdom of God and his justice, would be in the area of reaching out, listening and accompanying people in their suffering and desires. To share the suffering of people could help me to understand better one of our aims as Infant Jesus Sisters – to live a life based on the gospel and thus contribute to a more humane world.

One of the most deeply rooted calls for me from childhood has been: to be a 'rural priest' – a call which has now been realized, thanks to the pastoral task entrusted to me by the Bishop. For me, at this stage in my life, this is really about living the gospel, as modelled by Jesus, for all believers including us religious, whose mission is about healing and supporting those who suffer. Hence for me, as in no other place, this ministry of consolation and encounter, including affection, understanding, embraces...has become a very positive experience, where I receive much more than I give.

A quarter of an hour before the symbolic farewell in solidarity, I meet with the family to check on the language to be used for the final farewell and other organisational details. This is the first moment of experiencing giving and receiving; getting to know the families and close friends, feeling their pain as one's own, while at the same time getting to know, even if in a superficial and general way, the life and last moments of the person who has passed on. This is an important time for me, amid the great emotion and sorrow, when they express their feelings of pain, grief, hope, acceptance of God's will...

We then go to the Chapel - since they have chosen freely to say the last good-bye in this sacred place – where we meet together once more – family members and friends – with the body present, for a symbolic farewell in solidarity. It is then that the true friends recall the good times (joyful encounters, achievements...) and the not so good times (struggles, absence, disconnection...). This farewell is for those of all faiths and none – a farewell that is inclusive – where the person's gifts are recognised. We express our gratitude for the ways in which our lives have been touched by this person at the level of giftedness, work, commitment, care...all of which has helped us to become who we are.

We then move on to the prayer, much needed for those who continue the journey in this world, while at the same time remembering the deceased person. Such is the love of God who welcomes all of us to the bosom of God – filling us with happiness without counting the number of prayers that have been said.

My aim and strong desire for these occasions, amid different faiths and cultures, is to find very gentle ways of making visible the compassion of Jesus of Nazareth.

Sharing the Gospel Way of Life through prayer and with lay people in parishes is a continuous activity