



Pernet Spirituality for Lay People



Prayer of the Little Sisters of the Assumption

My God grant that this Fire which is you
May transform us and make each one of us as a burning coal
You have taught us the wonders of your Wisdom
You have communicated to us the flame of your love
Our lives should be that of Christ:
It is His love that we should radiate
We will communicate from one person to another
The warmth that we receive
And under the action of the Holy Spirit we will end
by transforming those who are around us
Of ourselves we are nothing in the humble awareness of our weakness
We will become strong and powerful
Burning coals setting alight all that touches them
Producing the love of God

Fr Etienne Pernet 1824-1899

Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....Founders:

- Etienne Pernet
- Antoinette Fage
- Augustian Philosophy

Chapter 2Thy Kingdom Come

Chapter 3.....Servant and Saviour

Chapter 4.....Apostolic Prayer

Chapter 5..... Lived expression of the Charism:

- Mission
- Family
- Social Justice
- Spirituality
-

Forward

Acknowledgements

I would like thank all who contributed in any way to the publication of this booklet "Pernet - Spirituality for Lay People".

From the outset, lay people have formed the backbone of our congregation without this support; even the tenacity and determination of the first sisters may not have been able to fulfill the dream of the founders.

This dream continues to unfold with the energy and commitment of the following sisters who contributed to this publication. Nellie Curtin, Provincial who wrote the forward to the booklet, Bride Counihan, Irene Bailey, Ann Thomas and Imelda O'Sullivan for their articles on the Lived expression of the Charism.

The individuals who wrote chapters; H. Meade, B.Sc., M.A. who worked with Imelda when she was in North Clare and continues to work with her in the PLANT education sub group in Galway, Marian Meade, B.Ed, M.A. Learning Design Consultant who designed, researched and wrote the booklet.

David Keane produced and narrated the reflective CD which accompanies this work.

The many who reviewed the booklet – thank you for your time and effort. Thanks too, to the financial sponsors without whom this could **not** have happened. We are indebted to each one of you for your contribution.

May the Lord bless you in abundance for your generosity.

Introduction

We live in a very complex world where spirituality has very little influence and sometimes God is forgotten in the pursuit of material gains. In our society we need a consistent clear way of thinking about spirituality which makes sense and has a place. In order to do this we need an open mind to deal with the things around us, an open heart to be able to empathize with others in need and an open will to know our deepest values.

The goal of this booklet is to promote the spirituality of Etienne Pernet cofounder of the Little Sisters of the Assumption so that lay people can gain insight into the living spirituality of the Little Sisters and carry the mission on into the 22nd century.

After reading the booklet the reader will be able to:

- describe Pernet's spirituality
- identify and demonstrate how it can apply in their own lives
- practice leading the life so that others will follow
- evaluate how best to take the spirit of Pernet into the next millennium

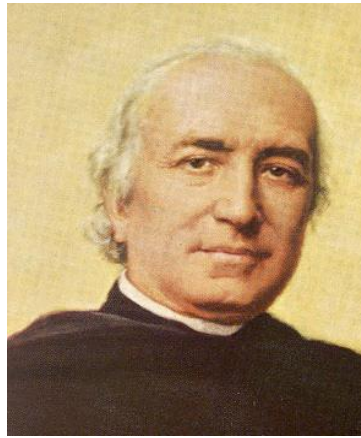


Introduction, *continued*

The 20th century brought the decline of religious vocation. What fills this void? Pernet after the transformation of the industrial revolution and all the change and rebirth in France wanted more for the working class. He cofounded the **Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA)** and with great foresight set up fraternities with lay people to help, spiritually, financially, physically. From an intuition going beyond the foundation of the L.S.A., Father Pernet, in loyalty to the Holy Spirit and to the needs of the world, created various lay groups. Can this be done again? According to Bobbi Moore we need a passionate awakening.

Let's look at the lives of the co founders to understand how they succeeded in their goal of serving the poor - how they adjusted to the changes in the society around them which led to the foundation of the **Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA)**, both religious and lay organizations.

Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet



Claude-Étienne Pernet-Cordelet:

He was born on the July 23, 1824 at Velleuxon, a small village in Franche-Comté (in the east of France), into a Christian family, country people of humble background.

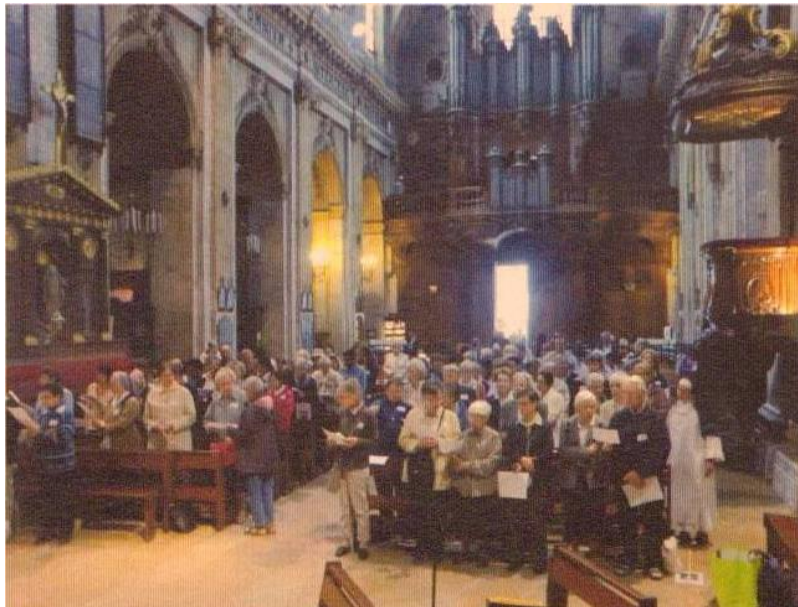


His father was an agricultural labourer and also worked at the blast furnaces attached to the ironworks in the region. His mother, Magdeleine Cordelet was the village midwife. Étienne was the second of seven children, of whom only four survived.

Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet, continued

As a child, he wanted to become a priest. He was fourteen years old when his father died. In spite of the difficult financial situation they were in, his mother encouraged his vocation and he entered the seminary at nineteen. After his first year of theology he left the seminary for a time of reflection. For four years he worked as "supervisor in a school".

In 1848, like so many other young country people, he had to go to Paris to find work. There he experienced the difficulties of all immigrants who arrive in a big city without experience, without friends, feeling homesick for their own home place. He fell ill and got very depressed. Every day he went to the Church of Our Lady of Victories to ask for light about his vocation. He continued to question himself about what God wanted of him, and was thinking of going on the missions to distant countries



Pilgrimage in Paris – “In the footsteps of Etienne Pernet” Dossier
No.1, July 2013

Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet, continued

A series of events led to his meeting Mother M. Eugénie de Jésus, foundress of the Religious of the Assumption, who suggested that he go to work at the College of Father Emmanuel d'Alzon at Nîmes.

This priest, a man with very strong convictions who had just founded a new Congregation - the Augustinians of the Assumption - helped him to clarify his vocation and communicated to him his passion for Christ and his love for the Church. He found his way in life as an Augustinian of the Assumption. A long maturing journey lay ahead of him.

In 1850, aged 26, he took his first religious vows. In 1858, on April 3, he was ordained a priest.



Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet, continued

He then taught at Nîmes and looked after a club that cared for some 200 children from working-class families.

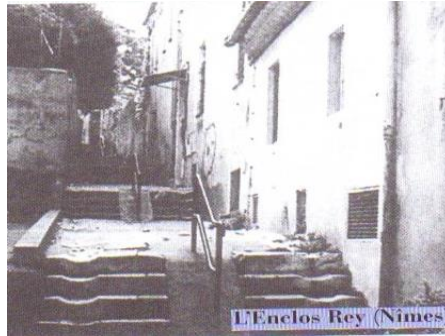
Pernet's Experience:

"I've always had a love for the poor in my heart. Coming from a working-class background, my parents were rural workers, I already had some inkling of it ; however, I wasn't in the family home very much. It was at Nîmes, when Fr d'Alzon was at the height of his activity as a man initiating charitable works, that I really understood what you call "the hardships afflicting workers" and a possible response to bring to them."



Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet, continued

The poor people told him about their hardships and worries, the women of the Enclos Rey in particular showed great confidence in him.



Timid by nature, with frail health, he painfully bore this question for fourteen years : "*I had suffered, severely, for fourteen years to be certain of what God wished of me.*"

On October 17, 1863, he arrived in Paris. He identified with the poor and easily made contact with people, gained the trust of all by his kindness and understanding. He heard confessions, preached and visited the sick.

Chapter 1 - Co founders - Etienne Pernet, continued

More and more affected by the suffering and disarray of workers' families, especially when the mother of the family was ill, he felt an **apostolic call**. He thought of bringing an evangelical response to it, "*through simple acts of service, women, religious, apostles*" would testify to the love of God among them.

It was in this context that in 1864 he met two nurses who came to ask him find work for them and some months later met M. Antoinette Fage who became with him co founder of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption.

In 1896, Fr Pernet sought approval from Rome for the congregation. This he received in 1897.

Throughout his life, he worked to "*refashion a People for God*" and to bring about "*Unity of minds in truth and union of hearts in charity*".

After a two-day illness, he died on Easter Monday, April 3, 1899, the anniversary of his priestly ordination.



Antoinette Fage (Marie of Jésus)

"Humility brings it about that it is not we who are but God in us."



Paris - 1824

Antoinette Fage was born in Paris on the 7 November 1824. She grew up in a working-class area in Paris as distinct from Etienne Pernet who was reared in the French countryside. Her mother was a seamstress and her father, Jean Fage, a soldier, was away when she was born and never returned.

She spent her childhood in poverty and suffering. She was well below average in height as a result of a bad fall which was not treated properly, which stunted her growth.

Orphaned at the age of thirteen, she was taken in by neighbours. "I was so disturbed by this misfortune that my health was shattered. My mother was all I had had in the world... I was an orphan and that word caused me so such pain that I wept every time I heard it."

She **transformed** her suffering into a vital drive that opened her to others. Later, she decided to live on her own. She worked in a sewing workshop, earning her living by hard work. She integrated concern for her workmates, particularly the apprentices, for their situation and their future, into her professional and spiritual life. With them she lived out friendship and solidarity that extended to sharing.

Antoinette Fage (Marie of Jésus), continued

"In her capacity to love and her dedication, she tended above all towards the "unimportant" people, the weak the abandoned. The more you were to be pitied, the more you had a right to the tenderness of her heart to her services." Etienne Pernet

Antoinette did not receive much Christian education. But she went to listen to the Word of God in the churches. God "spoke to her heart". Towards the age of eighteen, she discovered the strength of a living faith.

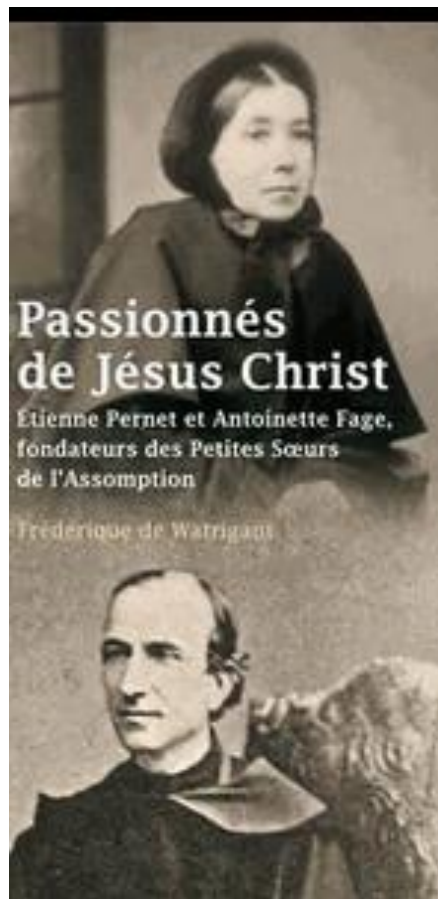
In 1853 she joined a lay association called "Our Lady of Good Counsel." From that time, Antoinette had a deep love for the Virgin Mary. In 1861, Antoinette was 37 years old. She agreed to run an orphanage for girls. She joined the Dominican Third Order. Despite her frail appearance she was full of life and was loved by the young people. A disagreement between her and the foundresses of the orphanage made life difficult for Antoinette. But Pernet seeing the danger of her situation and her potential helped her to move on so that she could reach her unrealized goal.



Antoinette Fage

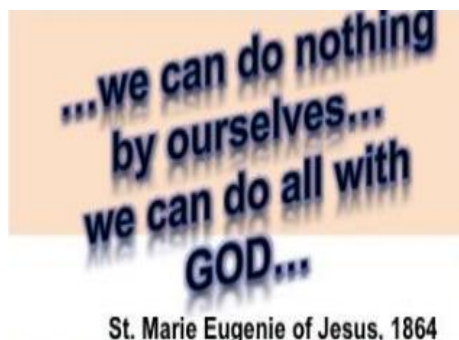
Antoinette Fage (Marie of Jésus), continued

In May 1864, she met Etienne Pernet. Even though they came from different backgrounds their passion and philosophy was similar and this allowed them to form the Little Sisters of the Assumption to serve the poor.



Antoinette Fage (Marie of Jésus), continued

The congregation was founded in Paris in 1865, by the Rev. Etienne Pernet, and Marie Antoinette Fage. Both had long been engaged in charitable work, Father Pernet while a professor in the College of the Assumption at Nîmes, and Mlle. Fage as a member of the Association of Our Lady of Good Council in Paris. They met in Paris and Father Pernet placed her in charge of the work of nursing the sick poor which he had inaugurated. Out of this movement the sisterhood grew, Mother Marie de Jesus being the first superior. The nursing of the sick poor was not the only or even the chief purpose of the Little Sisters.



Antoinette Fage (Marie of Jésus), continued

Their goal was to:

- bring about conversions
- regularize illicit unions
- have children baptized, sent to school, and prepared for first Communion and Confirmation.

They formed societies among their customers and patrons, and enlisted the aid of laymen and laywomen of education and means to further the work of renewal.

The congregation established houses in Italy, Spain, Belgium, England, Ireland, and the United States of America. The papal Brief approving the congregation was issued in 1897. By 1912, the sisters took simple vows and were governed by a mother-general, who resided in Paris.



Mode of Transport of LSA up of 1980

The Assumption Family - 'Physical geography'

“It is necessary to expand minds and hearts when dealing with the great question of the cause of God, to open broad horizons for the short-sighted, and to light a fire under those who are only looking to warm their feet and who are afraid of catching a cold if they are subjected to too much heat. Happy those superiors who embrace the entire world in their vision because they want to make Jesus Christ reign everywhere.”

The six original congregations of the Assumption, five of which originated in France have the common traits of a family, of character, and of apostolic involvement. All of them carry in their name as well as in their genes the official denominator “Assumption,” even if there existed already in their day and even before their time other religious families of the Assumption which were completely independent in their spirit and in their foundation.

Fr. Fulbert Cayré (1884–1971), believed in an Augustinian definition of the charism: the Assumption was born of Augustinian inspiration as evidenced, by its name, its rule, the institute it founded (Les Etudes augustiniennes), the number of references to St. Augustine in the founder’s writings (he once wrote that the City of God should be for the Assumption “a kind of second revelation”), and the many Assumptionist authors in the Augustinian tradition (Cayré, Edgar Bourque, Marcel Neusch, Goulven Madec, Ernest Fortin, George Folliet, Rémi Munsch, etc.). This interpretation, strongly founded on the facts, bears witness to the debt Assumption owes to Augustine.

Little Sisters of the Assumption

The **Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA)** were founded jointly by Fr. Etienne Pernet, A.A. (1824–1899) and Sr. Antoinette Fage, known in the convent as Mother Marie de Jésus (1824–1883). **LSA** was founded in Paris in July 1865. The first mother-house was located on Vanneau Street and quickly moved to St. Dominique Street. Finally it was established at Violet Street in the French Rue Violet in 1870.

Fr. d'Alzon greatly admired Mother Marie, who had been deeply affected by her encounter with Fr. Pernet. The congregation, from its foundation, has been dedicated to the home care of the sickly poor. They were first recognized in 1875 by Cardinal Guibert, the Archbishop of Paris, and by Rome in 1897 and 1901.



Rue St. Dominique; July 17, 1865 - 1st Residence

Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA), continued

In 1946 they divided into provinces. In 1949 they incorporated the Servas dos Pobres of Portugal and in 1962 the Little Sisters of Champs, founded in 1844 in Gandalou (Tarn-et-Garonne) by Rev. Jean-Baptiste Marie Delpech (1807–1887). In 1993 part of the Italian province separated from LSA and formed the new congregation of the **Sisters of Charity of the Assumption (S.C.A.)**.

In a small booklet, entitled, “Origins of the Religious Families of the Assumption,” Fr. Pierre Touveneraud, A.A. (1926–1979), former general archivist of the congregation, summarized in 1972 the common patrimony of the six original branches of the Assumption which, while fully respecting their particular vocations, their autonomous governing structures, and their apostolic works, bears witness to their common history strengthened by spiritual friendship, apostolic support, and fraternal collaboration. Some of the traits they share are:

- An Augustinian spirituality,
- Christocentrism (special emphasis on the mystical Incarnation and the Kingdom of God)
- Love of the Church and the centrality of the Eucharist
- Love of Mary
- Strong common life
- Common prayer, and the role of study



Little Sisters of the Assumption LSA - continued

There are **other** aspects which they share:

- Their rules of life
- A missionary commitment
- An insistence on certain human virtues (openness, simplicity, warmth)
- A balance of the **three** constitutive elements of religious life
 - prayer
 - community
 - apostolate
- Collaboration with the laity
- The importance of belonging to an international family

In their global outreach all these aspects help them to be spiritually alive and vibrant in society today and have a broader appeal.



"To unite hearts in a spirit of family." Father Pernet

Mission and Values



Partnership America Latina (**PAL**) - Sister Mairead Linden

Pal Volunteer Group began when a Dublin couple, Fergus Roche and his wife Maura became interested in our mission projects in South America. Initially, they helped by translating fund application to Irish Aid. They also visited South America to see for themselves the involvement of the Sisters of the Assumption in the various projects with the disadvantaged families of Columbia, Peru, Argentina. Following that experience Fergus and Maura determined to make known the poverty of the people and the development work done by the sisters in these countries. They wanted to do something concretely.

Early in 2006 they organized a video of the filming they had done in South America to show to a group of invited friends. From that meeting the first **Partnership America Latina** or **PAL** volunteers was formed.

The main goal for which this body was established was:

- To support the life of the **Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA)** in their various projects in Latin America and other countries where they operate
- To honor their ethos part of which is Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.

Partnership America Latina (PAL), continued

The group continues the work of translation funding application and began a fund raising campaign to supplement the projects' needs as the government aid usually only provided a percentage of what is actually required. This demanded much personal volunteer time which they continued to give by corresponding with the Sisters and local people.

The groups are accountable for all funding received and provide reports on its use as required. They meet monthly to share the news from the projects and make decision about relevant support record monthly accounts and transfer funds as necessary.

Sr Bride Counihan who worked for 15 years in South America currently liaises with PAL and gives support as needed. Group members have visited many projects at their own expense. They are an extraordinary group of people who demonstrate God's Love in a very practical way.

...



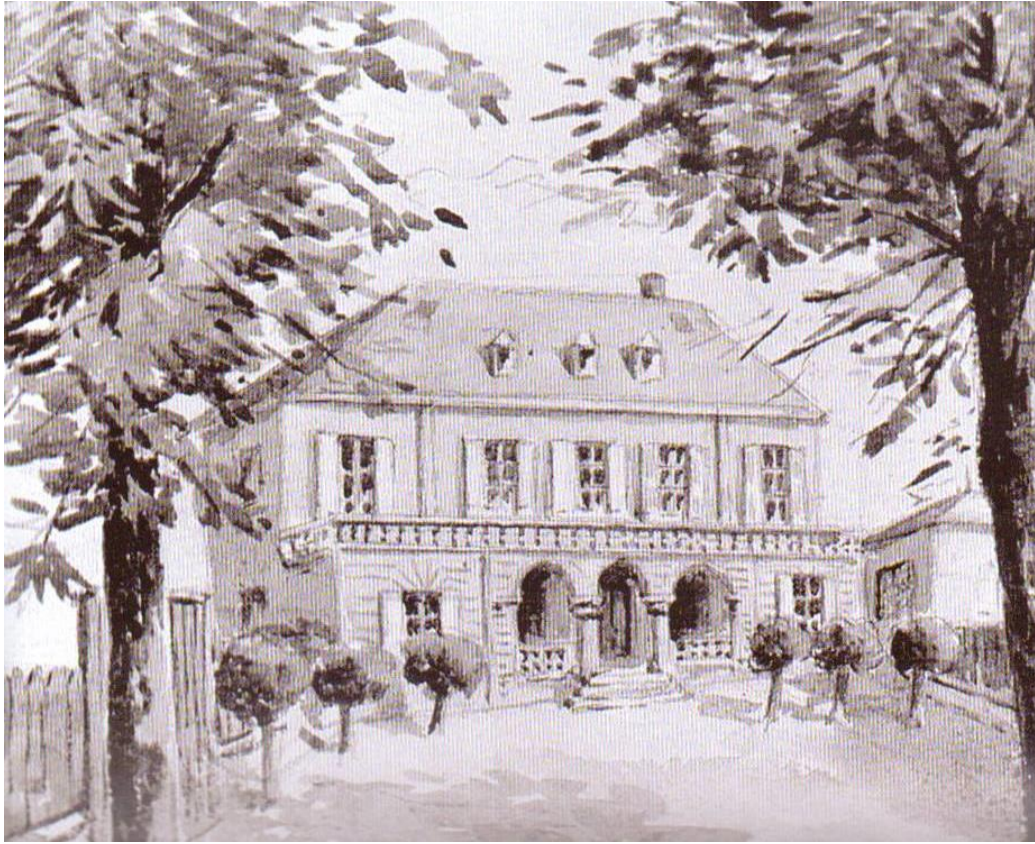
Mission and Values, continued

A non-profit organization, Little Sisters of the Assumption includes vowed members, lay professionals, and volunteers working together for the health and dignity of all people through home health agencies and family services. **We bring together the least advantaged and the privileged in a spirit of family to inspire everyone to participate in creating a just society.**



Nursing the sick at home

Mission and Values,



Grenelle - Mother House - Rue Violet, Paris

Mission and Values, continued

In 1891, Little Sisters of the Assumption followed the call to the United States to improve the lives of the poor and hurt with their social and spiritual services. Renowned in the field of community development, Little Sisters collaborate with public, governmental and other non-profit organizations to improve the physical, social and spiritual health of needy children and impoverished families.



Health Center in New York

Mission and Values, continued

The founders mission to unite hearts in a spirit of family remains unchanged over the years. The **Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA)** base their values on the Gospel and see Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a role model for the mission. Just as God raised Mary to a new life, they work to renew the whole person by developing communities that lift each other up -- physically, socially and spiritually.

This mission resonates with documents such as the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. Viewing society as one large family, Little Sisters promote social justice and human rights to **all** people, gradually improving society -- one person, one family, one community at a time.



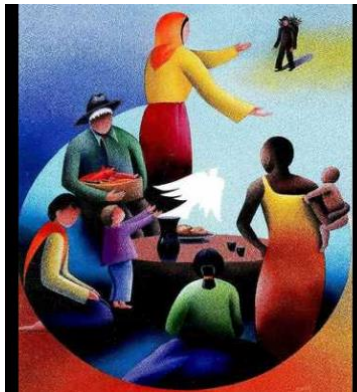
I have seen the affliction of my people...I have heard their cry. . .
Go, I send you. . . Exodus 3 : 7-10

The Little Sisters are sent to the poor, the workers and their families to bear witness to the love of God by **every** aspect of their lives.

May your actions speak Jesus-Christ...

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come

What did Jesus actually teach, how did he teach it and how does it help us understand how the Kingdom of God is within us? Many of us have grown up with Jesus, we have heard the gospel, we know the basic tenet of his message but do we know Him? How do we see him in our minds eye when we hear his name? Do we see Jesus as a long haired guru swaning around the Holy Land with his disciples? Much of our perceptions come from videos that portray Jesus in this light. Or does what we know of his teachings lead us to conclude that ‘Jesus is nice and he wants us to be nice’?



**“Look at the world with the eyes of the heart”
Little Sisters of the Assumption**

As we scratch the surface of this question we will find there is a whole lot more to Jesus than meets the eye.

For the past 1600 years Christianity has put more emphasis on knowing about Jesus. We are lead to believe that we must have a series of beliefs as the appropriate way to relate to Him. All the time we are skirting around Jesus, instead of knowing Him. How do we see through His eyes? How do we feel through His heart? How do we learn to respond to the world with the same wholeness and healing love with which He responds?

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come

In the book *'Putting on the Mind of Christ'* by Jim Marion, a Washington lawyer asks the question how do we put on the mind of Christ? This is a reference to St Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:5: 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' He suggests that we no longer admire Jesus from afar. He suggests that we get to know Jesus well rather than admire him from afar.

Marion notes that throughout the gospels the word 'the kingdom of Heaven is like this' jumps out at you at almost every angle. Check it for yourself in the gospels. Whatever this kingdom of Heaven is, it is fundamental to all that Jesus taught.

Where is it then? Jim Marion suggests that the Kingdom of God is really a metaphor for a state of consciousness; it is **not** a place you go to but a place you come from. This state nowadays is called a **nondual consciousness**. The hallmark of this awareness is that there is **no separation** between God and human and not between human and other human.

No separation between God and human.

The truth is that as we flow into God then God flows into us because the nature of love is flow. An example of this is John Chapter 15 "I am the vine; you are the branches, as the Father loves me I also love you. Abide in my love".

No separation between human and human.

'Love your neighbour as yourself'. You see with the eyes of Jesus that each is equally precious and necessary; laying down ones life for another is not loss of oneself but an expansion of it.

The good news is that Jesus offers us the opportunity to upgrade or rewire to the non dualist way/heart way if we so choose.

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come, *continued*

The dualist (egoist) system is a way of perceiving the world by dividing the world into subject and object, inside and outside and we learn from the world around us how to operate in this system from the time we are born. We are taught how to distinguish ourselves from others and how we have qualities and attributes which define us. This system based on duality (me and you, inside and outside) cannot possibly perceive oneness; it can't create anything beyond itself only more duality and trouble.

We **can change**, we **can choose** to shift to a whole different basis of perception to the **nondual system**. This allows us to operate out of the heart. The heart has a very different way of perceiving. The heart can pick up signals from all levels of reality, from intellect, rational perception, proportion, intuition, images and archetypes. It is highly attuned.

Jesus challenged all those who came to him. He wanted them to move out of their limited minds into a broader grander place, where they could see no distinction between themselves and others.

The 'them and us' duality mentality the first person in got the same reward as the last then you have missed the wonder of this parable. A good example of this is Matthew 20, 1-15 the parable of the landowner who chose to give the same wages to those who started early in the morning and late in the evening. The dualist mind always comes from a sense of loss and scarcity and keeps track of the score through comparison and contrast. While the nondualist mind always asks 'is there enough for all'

When we come to Jesus humbly ready to find him, we find that the kingdom of God is at hand and Jesus is there to lead us into it.

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come, *continued*

The Path of Metanoia

We must move out of where we are and move into Christ. It is through coming to Christ acknowledging you are a sinner before Him and accepting the exchange, his life given freely on the cross for your life as it is now. The pathway from death to life is open for us. Hope is set before us and we change the way we are. In terms now familiar to us all we can be rewired, we can stop operating from black and white or them and me perspective in everything and instead move into the heart of God and so can see and live from the perspective of wholeness.

Thomas Merton a Christian mystic wrote 'At the centre point of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and fantasy, a point of pure truth, a point of spark which belongs entirely to God'. Michelangelo's fresco 'the creation of Adam' in the Sistine chapel illuminates this point in a striking way and shows that we come to life only when God touches our hearts.



It is only when we come to the end of ourselves and we leave aside the familiar and walk the road less travelled that we find the kingdom of God.

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come – The Beatitudes

Let's take some passages from scripture Matthew 5, 1-12, The Beatitudes and use them **not** as a moral lesson but as a radical **call to transformation**, to live with a new viewpoint. These wonderful teachings lay out Jesus's core wisdom in a wonderful concentrated and compelling format.

"The Beatitudes take our human reality into account. Jesus tells us that the human identity, the one that is called to proclaim an alternative to our globalised society, has **three characteristics**:

1. poor
2. just
3. peacemaker

This is the door for entering into the Kingdom of God, through the Beatitudes"

The International Secretary of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The 'poor in spirit' are **not** as needy souls but instead it designates an inner attitude of openness and an ability to receive and one is blessed because only in this state of need is it possible to receive.



Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come – The Beatitudes

Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted:

Ken Wilber in his book *Grace and Grit* a story of loss and transformation encourages us to 'Practice the wounds of Love' If we remain open and **we must remain open to God and to his tender touch**, we will find that a 'mysterious' something reaches us.



Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth:

The joy is we **no** longer need to grab at things. We begin to flow and in that flowing we move into things we always longed for. The message bible says 'you are blessed when you are content with just who you are no more no less.'



**Health Center - New York -
Looking after the vulnerable**

Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come, *continued*

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled

Michael Brown in his book 'The Presence Process' puts it very succinctly, "Giving is receiving is the energetic frequency upon which our universe is aligned."

Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

In this beatitude, Jesus again returns to the idea of flow. If we give mercy we will receive mercy. Jesus invites us to participate in this wonderful exchange.



Chapter 2 – Thy Kingdom Come, *continued*

Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

'You are blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart put right. Then you can see God in the outside world'. When our hearts are gentle and single then we no longer grasp and fight then we become peacemakers.



Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called the sons of God.

This verse follows on logically from the other beatitudes. When our hearts are gentled and single there are no more bad or good days or people there is harmony internally and externally then we become peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

We will have times of trouble but we don't have to remain in this trouble. We can step into a great space and then we become free, free to let go and entrust ourselves to the Divine Mercy.

When we finally pick ourselves up from the dust of been persecuted then this can become a great teaching tool if we have the courage to use it that way.

These sayings of Jesus beckon us and call us into a radical way of life, embraced through an attitude of inner receptivity, a willingness to enter the flow, a commitment to domesticate the passions we possess and a desire to be single hearted. It's a radical calling and ***it's ours for the choosing.***

Chapter 3 – Servant & Savior

“Jesus who was utterly free, became a Servant and laid down his life for the salvation of all..... “(Rule of Life, No. 64)

“Go with all your strengthAm I not sending you myself” (Jg 6:14) Little Sisters and Laity, sent on mission in a changing world, creating together a universal family, sign of the reign of God.

There are people who rise up, free themselves and commit as servants of the community feeling that they are included and inclusive. Leaders who speak out and take initiatives and who in turn discover the meaning of life.

.

How can this be achieved? According to Bobbi Moore we need to live the following:

- Holding the space ~ listen to life's call
- Observing ~ attend with mind wide open
- Sensing ~ connect with heart
- Presencing ~ connect to deepest source of self and will
- Crystallising - access the power of intention
- Prototyping - integrating head, heart and hand
- Performing - co-creating with shared values

Chapter 3 – Servant & Saviour, continued

The Little Sisters of the Assumption are called to be both prophets and prayerful sisters in today's world. Following Jesus Christ Servant and Saviour they are sent to the poor and those on the margins of society **“may your actions speak Jesus Christ”**

“Service is transformed into simple actions that facilitate and support life that is broken, into supportive listening, into closeness, into protest on behalf of voices that are silenced..... as was the case with Jesus Christ the servant”*

The Little Sisters of the Assumption adapt their Charism to each cultural context. Their apostolic activities vary from country to country, are carried out among people who are impoverished. For example in Ireland & England the Little Sisters work in the following areas:

- Health Care
- Counselling
- Social Work
- Youth Work
- Parish Work
- Child Care
- Community Development
- Chaplaincy
- Women's Groups

Through this work, the Little Sisters:

- help people to experience trust friendship and solidarity, within their families and communities.
- find their voice so that with support they can address injustices locally and globally.

Chapter 3 – Servant & Saviour, continued

The LSA live in communities in geographical areas of different sizes. They seek to transmit the joy God gives them. Mary, in her Assumption strengthens their hope. They support one another in carrying out this mission.

The vocation of the Little Sisters is to the Family. They take **three** vows:

1. poverty as solidarity,
2. celibacy as living fraternally
3. obedience as seeking the will of God individually and collectively.

This mystery of the Servant is one that Jesus lived. It is seen in his obedience to his Father and in his love for humanity. It is also a fundamental aspect of the Little Sisters and one that Fr. Pernet ***insisted*** on. It was in the light of Jesus as Servant that he saw the mission and spirituality of the Little Sisters.

Prayer of the Little Sisters

"We, Little Sisters of the Assumption, are apostolic religious women, who live in communities that are often international, in harmony with the intuition of our Founders Etienne Pernet and Antoinette Fage. Inspired by the Gospel and motivated by the pressing need to proclaim the Good News and testify to the joy of believing, we work to help bring about the Reign of God and his Glory through the salvation of the poor and those considered to be "unimportant".



Working together for the common good

Chapter 4 – Apostolic Prayer – Spirituality

The Little Sisters have inherited a spiritual tradition an Augustinian contemplation. For St. Augustine the ideal was to “have time for God and to be busy for Him and others “

St. Augustine’s theology combines time for contemplating truth and for being involved in helping others. It is spirituality stamped by a unity for life. The Augustinian community is a community turned towards God, in search of God “Above all things may God be loved ...” This is the contemplative dimension Rule of Life No 1 “All humanity is called by God to live in a covenant of love with him”

All of life is touched by the divine. Contemplation needs silence, the stillness of silence. How do we develop a contemplative consciousness? It is action vitalized by an interior contemplative life, nourished by community and the sacraments. Contemplation also needs solitude and silence for Jesus is the harmony between Word and silence "Contemplate him and be radiant" (Ps 34:6) for we hand on what we contemplate. Contemplative living nourishes prayer and prayer unites us with the sacred at the core of our being.

Contemplation is the direct experience of our participation in the divine life: "You in me and I in you" (Jn 15: 4; 7; 17:23); It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me" (Gal 4:20). Contemplation can open the imagination to new possibilities. LSA in its ministries show us a joyful sense of the unity of all its energies and powers answering the gospel calling to breathe new energy, new power into the world so that they are centers of creative energy and power transforming lives, our world, and our cosmos.

In reference to fraternal community; this speaks of the Trinity. Rule of Life, no. 22 “Each sister is responsible for the silence and recollection which facilitates the search for God and communion. The communities themselves decide upon the necessary time of silence”.

Chapter 4 – Apostolic Prayer – Spirituality

Life and mission are one. Father Pernet continues” never separate the contemplation of the divine things from dedication to the neighbor” Among the different forms of prayer we give a special place to apostolic contemplation. We discern and contemplate the action of God in human history. “The first step in this contemplation is a cry that rises up from life. It is our cry and the cry of the poor. Our apostolic contemplation, our prayer are marked by the life of the church today and also by the setting in which we live. This setting is the community the congregation and also the world of the poor, the working world. The servant cannot be separated from the people; it is impossible that this people would **not** leave an imprint on our prayer” Marie Madeleine Termont .LSA)

We can begin by taking the person of Jesus as a sacramental reality in itself. He was a welcoming person; he made people feel strong. He nurtured, forgave, healed, and manifested leadership. What he did prompted change in others. People began to regard themselves differently. The community of disciples and the Church through the centuries have tried to imitate him.

According to Kathleen Coyle ssc, living incarnational theology means making the love and justice of God present in different times and cultures. This is precisely what LSA are doing today in their communities around the globe. Because times and cultures vary, what it means to follow Christ varies and can never be prearranged. Love demands action for justice and this is the key to the teaching of Jesus. LSA are asked to raise their voice for those who have **not been** allowed to be at the center of the community: the enslaved, exploited, the excluded, the deprived, those affected by racism, sexism, castism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Chapter 4 – Apostolic Prayer – Spirituality

The influence of a caring person in our life can set free the destructive energy within us so that we can allow this positive energy to transform itself into compassion for others. None of us can give the caring, the loving that our families and world need except we ourselves are in touch with God's mystery and are sustained by it. Such caring is precisely what is provided for us in the personal stories of the LSA around the world. These glimpses of divinity in the ordinary are a given grace when the glimmer of God lights up our life.

While the emerging spirituality of our age must be intensely personal, it must also be prophetic, incarnational, cosmic and communitarian. It must bring together science and spirituality, religion and social justice, and dialogue and mutual enrichment across religions. This is the mission of the LSA community throughout the world.

Thinking about the life of Jesus from his birth in Bethlehem to his death on the cross means thinking about a God who in Jesus Christ identifies himself with those who are “unimportant”. This experience of incarnation is part of LSA. It is the core of their spirituality. They prepare the way and make possible the meeting between God and his poor people.

The incarnation and mysticism are synonymous. In their deepest sense they refer to the union or fusion of the divine and the human. The mystic is one who opens up to God's presence and lets God fill his/her consciousness with God's personal presence. He or she has entered into the final stages of the harmonization between God and humans. In the biblical sense contemplation has to do with hearing, feeling, doing. It is never divorced from life or from the world. Today there is a renewed interest in contemplation and its relation to ministry.

Chapter 4 – Apostolic Prayer – Spirituality

But how do we develop a contemplative consciousness that leads to action? In the words of Leonardo Boff, we aim to combine passion for God with passion for the poor for the test of true mysticism is love of neighbor. The prophet Jeremiah emphasized that we come to know the Lord in doing justice for the poor (Jer 22:13-17). The gospels are about plantings and harvests, budding fig trees, fathers and sons, women baking bread, seeds growing into trees. Reflectively pondering on the wonder of these every-day events helps us to appreciate what it means for God to draw near.

In the past this was nursing but today LSA sisters are very involved in Family care, community development, childcare, counseling, care of the earth (ecology) and justice issues.



Pernet Lay Associates Networking Together (PLANT)



The Story of Pernet Limited

Pernet Lay Associates Networking Together (PLANT) comprises of a group of people drawn to live their lives at a deeper level. They are grateful for the gift of life; for the privilege of being part of the great beauty of nature; for the joy, hope, healing and energy that their Christian faith discovers and unearths in them like hidden treasure.

For over forty years friends of the LSA supported their mission and their work in Galway, Ireland. They hold in common their connection with the Little Sisters of the Assumption and recognise in them a kindred spirituality. They support their mission of service to the family and the wider community.

People offered their skills, their gifts and their time to support various projects. They willingly work with the Little Sisters in fulfilling their mission and to reach out in a variety of practical ways to those around us, both at home and abroad.

The Story of Pernet Limited (PLANT)

The time came to formalize this association into a structure which would have legal status. The purpose of this structure was **twofold**:

- To facilitate future involvement with the LSA
- To give protection to the members involved

In 2009 Martin Kennedy a freelance trainer and facilitator with a long time association with the LSA in **Training for Transformation (TFT)** met with twenty-four members of PLANT to agree on a mission statement.

- They believe in the **value and dignity of each individual**.
- They seek justice for all whose opportunity for a full life is denied.
- They seek their own personal growth, and the growth of others around them – families, communities and the wider society.

In establishing a structure for **PLANT (Pernet Lay Associate Networking Together)** it was decided that **ten groups** would be formed to represent different aspect of the charism of the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The groups were represented as seeds of the forest. Growing from these seeds, trees were associated with each group.



Plant

The goal of these ten groups within Plant is to support, network, encourage, develop, empower, unite and teach practical spirituality to all they reach out to in their various ministries. Following is a list of all the groups and their goals.



Family Group -The Pine Group the goal of which is to unite all families with their communities



The Joshua Tree - Youth Group the goals of which are:

- To help the youth find spirituality
- To create a safe space where “individual differences” are respected
- To create an environment that fosters talent



The Willow Tree – Education Group the goal of which is to give people hope and support through information and education – thereby encouraging empowerment.

Plant



The Redwood Tree – Spirituality Group the goal of which is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in guided meditation and discover Jesus' Spirituality. He sided with the marginalized people of his time. The call is for us to journey with Jesus in our lives.



The Birch Tree – Justice Group the goal of which is to seek justice for **all** whose opportunity for a full life is denied. We believe in the value and dignity of each individual.



The Ash Tree – Enterprise Group – the goal of which is to network, mentor and support training in Enterprise.

Plant



The Mahogany Tree – Finance Group whose goals are:

- To set up “trustees” for the financial management of Plant
- To fundraise for the PLANT projects which will help the LSA with their livelihood projects in the Philippines, Brazil, and Galway, Ireland



The Apple Tree – Hospitality Group whose goal is that the house (92 Currach Bui, Rahoon, Galway, Ireland) acts as a focal point for coordination of PLANT’S activities.



The Maple Tree – Celebration Group whose goal it is to have a gathering of families, friends, and associates of LSA once a year organized by PLANT to strengthen bonds and grow as a group in solidarity. It is open to all who wish to participate and share in the spirituality of the founders Etienne Pernet and Antoinette Fage.

Plant



The Mustard Tree – LSA Mission Group whose goal it is to support their mission of service to the family and the wider community.

The values which are expressed and held in these groups comes from the charism of the Little Sisters. As such the work which will be achieved will further the kingdom of God and the message of hope. By walking in the footsteps of Jesus in guided meditation we discover Jesus' spirituality. He sided with the marginalized people of his time.



Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism - Mission

My initial attraction to the Congregation was back in the early 1960s when I got to know two LSAs who were working among the poor on the north-side of Cork city, Ireland. What struck me in particular was their very simple way of being present among the people especially among the women. I remember the fun in the cookery and sewing classes, Christmas concert with the children performing drama and music. All of this made a deep impression on me as a young adult, as the only Sisters I knew of at that time were either in schools or hospitals. I had never heard of Sisters in the local community and something about those early first contacts resonated deeply within me. I didn't know then that it was the charism of the Congregation already alive in me by the work of God's Spirit, which was stirring....

At our International gathering in 1976 there were quite revolutionary changes in our perception of ourselves and who we were called to be in the world. These changes came to us largely through the influence of our Sisters in Latin America, who were steeped in **Liberation Theology**. A new emphasis was being placed on '**proximity**' and '**insertion**', that is, on us as women living in solidarity with the poor, sharing to some measure in their conditions of life and working to promote social justice by committing ourselves to their empowerment. Again this stirred something very deep in my heart, and I felt a tremendous joy in what I was hearing, a sort of confirmation of something I had been trying to live.

At the time I was working in the large urban housing estates around Limerick, where there was a lot of poverty and hardship. Along with a team of other people similarly engaged, we began to pay more attention to **community development** and to working on the causes of the situations which were causing people to suffer.

A memory was a trip to Dublin to meet TD's (public representatives) which resulted in the provision of a new pre-school. I was amazed at what we were able to do once we were **organized together and persistent in our quest!** This reinforced the notion that truly 'the power is with the people', and that they can contribute significantly to changing their own situation if they become aware of the causes of their social situation, and have the skills and organization to act together.

Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism - Mission

A favourite part of Scripture for me has always been Exodus 3, of the Old Testament, which truly came alive in those days. It describes how Moses was called by God to lead the people of Israel out of their conditions of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. I found an inner certainty growing in me that what we were experiencing in Southill, Limerick, Ireland was truly the same God, faithful as ever to the poor, who was creating a community of people and leading them from their conditions of slavery, oppression and injustice, into a better living situation for everyone. I saw at first hand that the Biblical experience of liberation from slavery was alive in the people's history just as truly as it had been in the history of the people of the Old Testament! This is what we call ***Apostolic Contemplation***, recognizing the work of God in the peoples' lives and in the calls to justice in their social reality.

In later years, I felt the call to go to Brazil where I had the joy of participating in the same Salvation History, this time being lived out in a totally different context to Ireland. I lived in the semi-desert region of Brazil for 17 years, first with the Medical Missionaries of Mary Community and later with a mixed community of religious and lay, male and female, married and single, both Brazilian and Irish, all with the common mission of working to bring about the Kingdom of God among the poorest people of Brazil through our various engagements for social transformation.

Initially, we lived in a small terraced house and when our numbers grew, we built a six-bed roomed house, all for the grand sum of 3,000 euros (three thousand)! It was built in just three weeks and every week-end around 20 men and some women worked voluntarily on the construction, to get it finished. For another 5,000 euros (five thousand) we were able to build a fine hall and meeting rooms for the newly emerging Citizens' Forum, again with lots of people giving their time voluntarily at week-ends. There was lots of positive energy around.

Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism - Mission

In response to the children who were rummaging for food in the dumps at the backs of the shops, two Childrens' Centers were set up in the town and in a very poor rural village. Two volunteer lay missionaries from Ireland who were Montessori teachers trained a group of 15 local women. Eight years later most of these local women are still running the preschools!



Missionary development work implies that the missionaries are *not there forever*, but rather to help something to take root and blossom, and then move on, letting the people cultivate the harvest. In 2011, after 11 years we felt it was time to hand over the project to the local people. The Little Sisters still support it, but now from a distance by fund-raising since the people cannot raise all the needed funds themselves to keep everything going.

Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Justice

The Citizens' Forum began running courses on the rights and duties of citizens, drawing speakers from other parts of the region, thus networking began. This enabled the people to campaign against the privatization of the public water system in the town, and after 5 years, the campaign was finally successful in shutting down the private water company, and the state company took over. This experience awakened in many people a new sense of their own **empowerment**.



Ted De Barbieri (right) of the Urban Justice Center, speaking at a rally in support of small businesses.

This led on to the development of a **communal farm** where landless families can grow their own vegetables on irrigated land in the semi-desert. We have also helped a similar project to develop in the south of Brazil, through helping them to get a grant to buy a tractor which has transformed the lives of many families there.



Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Justice

In all of this development work, how little did we realize we were beginning to upset 'the balance of power' in the town! Our social justice work brought us into direct conflict with **both** the Church and the Local Government authorities and for many years we were rejected by both. Our work was seen as upsetting the 'status quo' because people were beginning to question many things. That should not have surprised us as being a Christian inevitably leads one on the same journey which Jesus made.

Working for justice with the poor did give us the joy of seeing small seeds taking root and growing slowly.....and so the **Congregation's motto of 'Thy Kingdom Come'** is made real and present by the power of God. We drew heavily on the gospel texts on the struggle Jesus had in dealing with the authorities and those who were threatened by His message and this was the source of our strength.



Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Spirituality

“The Heart of a Missionary and the Soul of a Carmelite”

This was the **wish** of Etienne Pernet for his Sisters

What attracted me to the Little Sister of the Assumption was their work with the Family. Before I entered I was well used to giving a helping hand to my mother minding my younger brothers.

After I joined I listen to the missionary stories of the sisters who worked in Africa and Italy. They gave breath to the mission and a sense of belonging to an International Congregation. For me, the mission is where I work **as poverty is everywhere**.

My missionary drive **is the empowerment of those I serve**. Any step taken to improve the life situation of the individual, family or community was and is a shared joy for me.

I describe our Spirituality as Contemplative. St Paul put it this way in Phil 2:5 “Let This mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’. My daily meditation is to let Jesus’ life soak into my personality so I can have the same attitudes and values that Jesus of Nazareth had while He live on earth.

Sister Imelda O’ Sullivan –Galway, Ireland



Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Family

I have been a Little Sister of Assumption for the past 40 years. For the last 10 years I have worked with Sophia providing homes and support for families and single people who are out of home and are in need of support in order to maintain their home.



One family I worked with came from Emergency Accommodation having lost their Local Authority flat due to the parent's addiction. The family of six moved from hostel to hostel as their addiction got worse, they begged on the streets in order to get funding to feed their addiction habits soon the children were taken into care as a result the parents addiction spiralled out of control they ended sleeping on the streets. The father got ill and after some months died from drug related illness.

This was a wake up call for the mother who then linked into a Drug Treatment Centre and while it was very hard worked on her addiction issues, got a place in a hostel and with support moved to Short term accommodation and worked hard to get her family back some of whom were young adults at the time.

Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Family

The family were offered a house with Sophia and with support from myself she continued to work on regaining her ability to maintain her home, paying the bills, providing for her family and keeping her addiction at bay. As the months moved on her confidence grew and her ability to maintain her home grew as well. After two years I withdrew back and monitored the situation from afar. The family continued to improve they still have difficulties to overcome but have come a fair distance from their time on the streets.

As I moved into the background I will always remember the words that the mother said. *“Thank you and Sophia for giving me the chance to create a home for my family.”*

Ann Thomas

Chapter 5 – Lived Expression of the Charism – Family

Project Hope is a pioneer in the movement to prevent homelessness from occurring. Its goal is to partner with families as they move up and out of poverty. Sister Margaret Ann Leonard is the Executive Director who has designed the strategies to make that happen.

Since her appointment in 1985, Project Hope has grown from being an Emergency Shelter serving 8 homeless families, to a multi-service center with a selection of educational and economic programs serving families in the North Dorchester/Roxbury, area of England. In 2006 a four story “green” building was constructed on Dudley Street in Roxbury to house those programs, while the original site, a Victorian home in North Dorchester, continues to house a family shelter and children’s center.

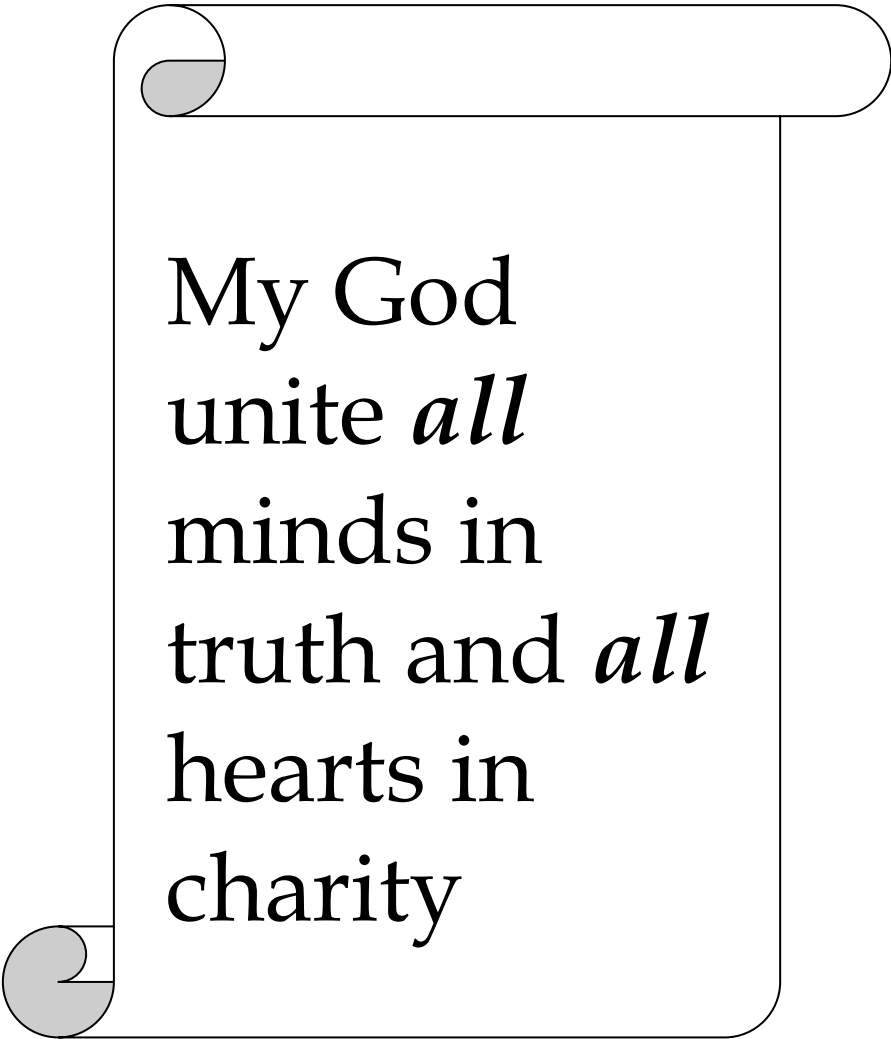
Sister Margaret has been a catalyst in forging strategic alliances, partnerships and collaborations at local, city and state levels that create a continuum of care and support for low income families in the movement from crisis to stability. She has been honored for her achievements throughout her career.



Global Outreach



- Ireland
- England
- Wales
- France
- Belgium
- Italy
- Spain
- Portugal
- Peru
- Brazil
- Tunisia
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Madagascar
- Canada
- United States of America
- Columbia
- Uruguay
- Argentina
- Vietnam



My God
unite *all*
minds in
truth and *all*
hearts in
charity

Bibliography

Documents and Works Consulted

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PUBLISHED, DATE & PLACE
	In the footsteps of Etienne Pernet		Dossier no.1,2013
Sr. Imelda O' Sullivan	Looking at Self, the World & God		Ireland
Marie-Noelle de la Bassetiere, LSA	The Dawn of A New Day		Paris, April 2007
Raymond Courcy	Passion for the reign of God		Mother House, Paris, 1997
Charo Martin	Discovering the Spirituality of the Little Sisters of the Assumption	Mother House	Paris, July 2010
Jim Marion	Putting on the Mind of Christ		
LSA	LSA 100 years in Ireland 1891 - 1991	Little Sisters of the Assumption - Ireland	Provincial House Terenure, Dublin 6 1991
Marie-Noelle de la Bassetiere, LSA	Following a Dream	LSA	57 rue Violet – 75015 Paris
Pernet Lay Associates Networking Together	PLANT report 2011-2012	Westside Resource Center	Galway, October 3 rd , 2011

Bibliography

Documents and Works Consulted

Websites

[www.littlessistersof](http://www.littlessistersoftheassumption.org) the assumption.org

Photos:

Little Sisters of the Assumption website

