

# A Woman for our Time

*Celebrating Marie Madeleine ... and Business Enterprise*

July 2022

A newsletter issued by the Faithful Companions of Jesus  
Gumley House Generalate, TW7 6DN, UK

**Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët is a woman for our time;** a French woman of inspiration and courage. She was ... daughter, sister, friend, wife, widow, mother, and ultimately a religious sister and foundress. Her husband, Joseph died before their child Eugène was born and Marie Madeleine faced the future on her own. She did so with courage and not only did she bring up their child, Eugene, she founded a group of Catholic sisters known as the Faithful Companions of Jesus. **Her story is remarkable!**

At her marriage in 1804, Marie Madeleine was given a vineyard which she managed till the end of her days. It gave her an income - indeed, it was a bumper vintage that enabled her buy the Amiens property which became home for the first FCJ sisters.

As a young woman, Marie Madaleine learnt well the art of household management and the experience of managing her vineyard shaped her business skills. She gave superb advice to the sisters sent to set up new communities and schools.

**Wise insight and insistence on good practice shine through her letters.**

## **Watch your income, learn from others ...**

'As for that piece of land, I think we should leave it to these men to sell part of it so that we know better what it is worth. I don't think we have ever heard about selling outside of the town for such a high price. In any case I wouldn't want to acquire a piece of land in a back-handed way. However, as I have told you I think you can arrange your pond and also the laundry, because even if we do buy it we will need to wait till the pupils in the boarding school are more numerous and there is more income.'

**1841 letter: A2607/196**

## **You will need to transfer money ...**

... you have to pay the 13000 francs to the receiver in Nantes and he will give you a receipt in my name, with the promise to guarantee it in the countries where we need it. Send 1000 francs from this directly to Amiens so there are 12000 left for the receiver. I keep forgetting to ask you to send me a receipt. **1840 Letter A 2607/155**

## **Be prudent ...**

If the other house was bought, we could rent another while waiting, but don't sign ... **1837 Letter: A2606/67**

## **Take legal advice ...**

Mr. Delaporte has informed you, with great detail, that he and Mr. Paul have leased out Marcelcave's property for eighteen years, 4,543F per year, the taxes being paid by the leasor. He must send you the draft of a letter of attorney so that you can send it to him. The wording of a lease follows ... If there any other terms to add, the solicitor in Nantes will tell him. If he has sent you a draft of the letter of attorney which should be almost as that above, write the letter as he asks. He should send you another letter of attorney for a partition of assets, you must send me that one beforehand. **1838 Letter: A2607/117**

## **Keep accurate accounts ...**

You have made a mistake with the account. I am sending you a copy of the accounts of one of our other houses. Apparently, I had not explained it well to you. Please send me once again the account that you made for me and tell me where that money is coming from. I have mislaid it. **1842 Letter: A2607/196**



*Marie Madeleine is a 'friend' who is looking out for us, praying with us and ready to assist us. If you need help with something ask her to pray with you*



**Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët**

**Ask her to pray with you, especially for the sick**

## **Learn from problems ...**

*... business in London is giving me trouble. We have bought a house quite cheaply but in a superb location. The Queen (Victoria) gave me approbation. But it has cost a lot more than I thought and so I have to beg from our houses. ... I'd be really grateful if you could send me 4000 francs or more. However, I don't want to leave you without any money. ... I do not want to buy anything else in England. The least service costs 100 to 200 pounds.*

**– it's a nonsense!**

**1841 Letter: A2607 /171**

## ... good business practice lives on in the co-operatives in Naga

**Many years after Marie Madeleine shared advice on good business practice**, her FCJ Sisters ministered in Naga, Ipil, Mindanao. Philippines. Across the years Sisters Elizabeth Poilievre, Judith Routier, Margaret Sheehan, and Veronika Schreiner worked there.

Whilst the FCJ sisters were in Naga, 6 co-operatives were established and it was recognised that a regular income and good management were basic to their sustainability. **Clearly, the good practice of Marie Madeleine lived on!**

Veronika Schreiner fcj was a key player in starting the co-operatives, and recently, thanks to modern technology, had a video call with members of a co-op in KM2 - a small village, which is part of the Parish of Naga and of the Prelature of Ipil. Veronika had not seen the people for over 20 years. **See the photos taken during the video call.**

Veronika learnt that four of the six cooperatives have survived, namely, the two in **KM2, Guintuluan** and **Tipan**, where they run grocery stores. At KM2 they ran a second Co-operative to buy and sell Copra, the flesh of the Coconuts. At Tipan there is a Co-op to deal with reforestation, but this is now under the responsibility of the Diocese.

Fred, Dilida, the co-op leader, and a guitarist, had only 3 years primary schooling, but was clever. He quickly learned how to do the accounts, establish the balance, calculate the benefits, and share the gain correctly. He learned how to track down mistakes and even spot dishonesty. **A Co-op that lasts so long must be run well. Sustainability!**

The meeting in which Veronika participated was held in the chapel built and financed by the local people. It was indeed a tremendous gift to see the people so alive, responsible and holding together as a community.

Whilst ministering in the Philippines, the FCJ sisters had one objective: **to walk with the people in their hard life and open to them possibilities to live a better life.** Three ways to achieve this were seen: cooperatives, youth ministry including scholarships for College/University studies and care of the Environment. Marie Madeleine would have recognized her desire "to follow Christ to the way of the Cross and BEYOND." One might ask why the sisters were not involved in preaching the Gospel, in Spirituality, running prayer meetings. The Basic Christian Communities were well established in the Prelature. To the Naga Parish belonged 30 chapels, spread over 30 sq km, from the sea to the Subanon, a Tribal Group in the mountains. One young priest was in charge. But the 30 chapels had their own local leaders, who held Sunday Services, distributing Holy Communion. Small groups met once a week for Gospel sharing. This functioned well before we arrived. It would have been a tragedy, if we had interfered. What you can do by yourself, do it. When you can take responsibility yourself, take it! When you need help in a new idea, accept it!

All our Philipino sisters have come through the contacts in those years in Naga. **We are grateful for that gift.**

*Photographs taken during the video call : Sr Veronika on screen in Naga but at home in Munich, talking to Fred Dalida by video. Workers and students follow the video call intently; workers sing along as Fred plays the guitar.*

