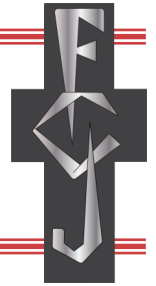


A Woman for our Time

Celebrating Marie Madeleine ... and Memories



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Gumley House Generalate, TW7 6DN, UK

"We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home."

Aboriginal proverb



1904 wooden camera

Whoever holds such a simple yet profound vision of life's purpose cannot fail to be an agent of positive and enduring change. Such a woman was **Marie Madeleine d'Houët, foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus** (FCJ sisters), born in France in 1781, just before the French Revolution. Our newsletter, celebrating her life and legacy, draws on testimonies to the kind of person she was, collected after her lifetime as part of the Church process leading to the official declaration of her holiness.

Marie Madeleine's personality combined a serious side – dutiful, conscientious - with a natural joyfulness and a delightful sense of fun. "She was lively and amusing, yet had remarkable firmness of character and fearless willpower. She was attractive because of her gifts of heart, her prudence, tact, courage and an unusual capacity for gratitude." (testimony of Sr. Maria Mollett fcJ) Her educational opportunities were limited by circumstance and sex – a letter from her mother, dated 1785, relates how another friend has just declared that little Gigi (Marie Madeleine's nickname) "has more wit than the rest of the family combined. I am not jealous; my only regret is that she is not a boy, for with us poor women folk intellect counts but little, and we have scant opportunities for its cultivation" - but Gigi made the most of the opportunities she had, and also learned practical skills of household and business management. She enjoyed social life, and excelled in the art of conversation: "magistrates, military, country people, she knew how to interest them all. The smallest incident recounted by her became amusing and interesting."

Marie Madeleine had no desire whatsoever to be a religious, or found a religious congregation. Another testimony tells us that "she loved the world, elegant clothes, amusements, and dances. She had what it takes to be successful in society, and had a taste for these things. Yet in the midst of it all, she preserved a certain innocence of heart and an admirable modesty. It was not without a struggle that she managed to overcome this fondness for the world; but in the face of the light, she did not step back. That is a striking characteristic of her life."

We have no photograph of Marie Madeleine's "sparkling eyes and radiant smile". But, in addition to the testimonies, we are fortunate to have many of her letters, and above all her precious handwritten memoirs in which she opens her heart about how God led her to found the FCJ Society: "from first to last it was God's work".

In our own day, photography, digital art, voice and video recordings and virtual reality can all be used to add vibrancy to the written word. FCJ sisters have enthusiastically embraced the new technologies and social media; and, remarkably, we had an FCJ photographer as early as 1906!

Read on

Venerable Marie Madeleine d'Houët
faithful companion of Jesus, religious sister and foundress, daughter, sister, friend, wife, widow and mother. In passing through death, we believe that life is changed, not ended; and as we believe that the risen Jesus is always with us, so too do we trust that where Jesus is, there, in him, must Marie Madeleine be too.



In the communion of saints, Marie Madeleine is a true 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.

Written by Rachel Duffy fcJ

Sister Julia Condon's story ...

Born in Limerick in 1850, Julia entered the FCJ Society at Bruff in 1867. After her novitiate in Paris she was eventually sent to Middlesbrough, where for over 41 years she taught in Saint Mary's elementary school, helped in the parish, and in the secondary school.

We are told her abilities were numerous. "Mother Julia would teach her less skilled sisters to mend cane chairs, mend umbrellas and boots, do carpentry and woodcarving, mend books, and make toffee. She was artistic and held diplomas for art but photography was her special bent and in her studio at the Newlands Convent in Middlesbrough after school hours, many of the Middlesbrough clergy not excluding the Bishop himself, sat before her camera."

"It is worth noting that Mother Julia quickly realising the importance of the vogue for organised games introduced netball, baseball, tennis, hockey, cricket and fencing to the Newlands girls. All who came into contact with her was struck by her cheerfulness, her sense of humour and her indomitable will. She retired at the age of 65 in 1914 and died two years later, to the profound sorrow of clergy and towns people. The Bishop ordered a public requiem in the cathedral which was attended by Clergy from all parts of the diocese, the mayor, representatives of the education department and many headteachers."

Page 40 'A Hundred Years 1872-1972 The History of the FCJs in Middlesbrough' K Blott

It is amazing that an FCJ had a camera in 1905 let alone photographed the bishop and clergy!

We each have our memories of **Covid** and its fall-out but for many FCJ Sisters and Companions in Mission **the FCJ Virtual Choir**, born of lockdown, will be long remembered.

The Manila FCJ community started the project. New technology was learnt and several songs were recorded, creating positive memories.

See the playlist of all the FCJ virtual choir songs at:

[FCJ Virtual Choir - YouTube](#)

Ctrl + click

Sister Rosemary Crowe's story ...

"When making the decision to follow the call to become a faithful companion of Jesus, some sacrifices and dreams were put on hold, not knowing what the future might bring. One dream was that of becoming a professional tennis player and the other one of note was to explore the possibility of becoming a creative photographer.

With some of the disciplines of religious life becoming a little easier after Vatican Two I was able to pick up a tennis racquet again and play socially with parish teams and with FCJ companions.

When asked to accompany a Sister to England I was left for some months without an assigned apostolate before returning to Australia. Sr. Patricia Grogan, an Australian, invited me to spend some time at Sedgley Park Teacher Training College where it was suggested that I audit a subject of choice. Of course I followed my dream and signed up for the photography Course under the guidance of Sr. Maureen Farrell and an elderly tutor whose name I have forgotten. Here I learnt the art and skills associated with black and white film developing and printing in ideal surroundings.

On leaving the UK some months later, Mother Catherine Windle presented me with camera that was no longer being used. She encouraged me with her blessing to pursue my new found skill.

When back in Australia I entered a State competition and won a SRL camera which greatly enhanced my capabilities. With the added gift of a basic enlarger I was able to record school and FCJ celebrations and activities and so make money to purchase the necessary items enlarger, photographic paper and chemicals needed and experiment with different possibilities. It was fortunate that I was living alone in a building beside the laundry which enabled me to set up a dark room.

I was called upon to record FCJ functions particularly Jubilees and always came with a camera in my hand. From time to time I put together some slide presentations for prayer services. Many of these photos are now in FCJ archives and some have found themselves in FCJ publications.

During the 90s when I was missioned to Broome in Western Australia I was in a photographic paradise in filming outback scenery, Aboriginal friends, their activities and artefacts. One memorable occasion was to have a friend to photograph me with a fully grown eagle with its wings spread sitting on my outstretched arm. This, perhaps, is my favourite photo."

Rosemary Crowe fcj

