



# SAINT CHRETIENNE ANNALS

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Sisters of St. Chretienne Wrentham, MA

Summer 2015

## History Revisited: Light Shines in the Darkness

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Sisters of St. Chretienne lost a good friend in the person of Mr. Paul Piterman, a German Jew and survivor of the Holocaust. At ten years old, he, his two sisters and twenty-two other children were helped to escape the Nazi reign of terror through the courage of some persons working in the Belgian underground.

It was Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1942, when, under the cover of darkness, young Paul and his companions



were shuffled off hastily and clandestinely to a Catholic convent school in Chimay, Belgium. Their first impressions: strange women dressed in black, a cross around their necks, a rosary hanging from the waist and speaking a foreign language. In

this sea of darkness, Paul asked himself, "What kind of a place is this?" Thus began his lifelong journey of association with the Sisters of St. Chretienne, who became his mothers, his friends, his teachers, and his protectors. In his own words he speaks affectionately to these Sisters. "You were a safe harbor, a gentle shore of dedication without measure, of feminine tenderness. You saved us from hunger, you played with us, you made us laugh. You helped make this time of terror bearable. You kept us standing upright at a great risk to your lives."

At the age of 83, Mr. Piterman had already devoted the last years of his retirement to research and documentation of the events between December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1942 and September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1944. Paul, himself remained in Chimay until 1947. Having maintained an affectionate relationship with the Sisters of St. Chretienne all his life, his dream was to obtain from Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, the Medal of the Righteous and the Certificate of Honor for the Sisters of St. Chretienne for their bravery in sheltering Jews during World War II. After a long investigation, Mr. Piterman and our Superior General received a letter from Yad Vashem in January, 2015

stating that the award would be given posthumously to Sister Marie Mechtilde, superior in Chimay at the time, in the name of the Sisters of St. Chretienne. Ordinarily, this award would be presented in an official public ceremony under the auspices of the Israeli Diplomatic Mission. With the sudden death of Mr. Piterman, this ceremony has yet to be organized. At any rate, Sister Marie Mechtilde's name will be inscribed on the wall of honor in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

We Sisters of St. Chretienne remain very grateful to Mr. Piterman for his ongoing affection and devotion in pursuing this project until his death. This story has all the drama and intrigue of a good book and a fabulous movie, which were the next projects on Paul's to do list. We are blessed that our Sisters remained strong in their faith and committed to our mission during this troubling time in history and became models of hope and beacons of light in the darkness.

Personally, I had the privilege of getting to know Paul Piterman up close through correspondence on the internet, phone conversations and a one on



one visit in Metz, France in June, 2014. I will cherish these memories forever. Paul struck me as a man who was not em-

bittered by his past, but as someone who had made peace with it, a man with great moral integrity, a joyful spirit, affectionate and loyal. As a final note I would like to mention that Paul's parents were exterminated in Auschwitz. May God have mercy on man's inhumanity to man, then and now.

*Sr. Agnes Therrien, SSCh.*

## **WAKE THE WORLD! YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE**

In proclaiming 2015 the Year of Consecrated Life, Pope Francis has invited all members of Religious Orders and Congregations to wake the world with joy! As we take time to reflect on the beauty of our way of life, we look to the **PAST** with **GRATITUDE**, live the **PRESENT** with **PASSION**, and embrace the **FUTURE** with **HOPE**.

As Sisters of St. Chretienne, we want to take this opportunity to thank all of you with whom we have ties: family members, friends, associates, benefactors, for all the love and support you have given us throughout the years as we have tried to live our call faithfully and joyfully. Our lives are richer because you have been a part of them.

As we journey through this year, we have participated in some of the many activities and celebrations prepared by the dioceses in which we live. Some of us have had the opportunity to share the beauty of our vocation with others, both lay and religious. Here are a few examples of what we have done.

*Sr. Agnes Therrien, SSCh.*

### **Rumford, Maine**

On Monday, May 18<sup>th</sup>, I offered a PowerPoint presentation on the Year of Consecrated Life in the church hall at St. Athanasius/St. John's in Rumford, Maine.

This presentation was based on excerpts of Pope Francis's letter to religious, illustrated with slides appropriate to depict the passage being quoted.

This presentation was dedicated to all the men and women from the three parishes of St. Athanasius, St. John the Baptist, and St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and profiled the names and pictures of 52 vocations coming from these three parishes.

In his letter, Pope Francis urges religious to 'tell their stories'. The only story I could tell was my own and I did this, beginning with "the call" to religious life, the answer, and the ministry I was involved in for fifty years in Alberta, Canada, serving the native peoples of the Cree nation. Those who figured in the story: Fathers Jean Paul Vantroys and Father Rogier Vandersteene, both Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Sisters Jeanette Berger, Cecile Larue, Gertrude Girardin, Pearl Gallant and of course Gloria Bernard, Sisters of Saint Chretienne, all mentioned as models of consecrated life.

About twenty-five people from the parish were in attendance for the presentation, and all seemed to have enjoyed it.

The evening culminated with a drum song to Mary and a Cree blessing.

*Sr. Bernadette Gautreau, SSCh.*

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**Woonsocket, RI**

The Parish of St. Charles Borromeo in Woonsocket, R.I. is really taking the Year of Consecrated Life to heart. Of course the fact that the pastor and the priest who lives with him are Jesuits helps. Beyond the usual announcements and prayers for Consecrated Persons, Father decided to invite two Sisters and two Brothers to give a talk on their individual vocations on two Sundays in March. I was invited to give one of the talks on March 8<sup>th</sup>. The attendance was modest but the interest was real. Conversations continued after the formal talks and a group of women asked if I would go to breakfast with them some day to share more. Also, perhaps as a result of these days the parishioners have decided to honor the Religious living in the parish, two Jesuits, six Brothers of the Sacred Heart and me, at a reception and dinner after the 4 o'clock Mass on Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup>. We all had a good time with these wonderful people.

*Sr. Jacqueline Dickey, SSCh.*

**REGIONAL ASSEMBLY: LABOR AND LOVE**

The US Region of the Srs. of St. Chretienne held its 2015 Assembly May 8-11 at Campion Renewal Center in Weston, MA. Nineteen of us gathered to prepare for the General Chapter of 2016 in France, where our Congregation has its roots. The days were facilitated by Sister Yvette Bellerose, a Sister of St. Anne and Sister Nancy Sheridan, a Sister of the Assumption. Their combined experience and personal gifts and talents served us well throughout these days. The purpose of the Assembly was threefold. We discussed some issues particular to our Region. We prepared some proposals for the upcoming General Chapter which reviews the life and governmental structures of the Congregation. We elected



*Srs. Jacqueline Dickey, Julie Tremblay, Ida M. Devoe, Suzanne Beaudoin and Lisette Michaud*

three delegates and two alternates from our group to participate in the congregational event in the summer of 2016.

It was certainly a time to get together for these assigned tasks. But we also prayed and reflected together, enjoyed one another's company and had some good conversations and a few laughs. The weather was

warm and the venue was picturesque with newly budded tress, lovely flowers and the sight and sound of many birds.

We felt the breath of the Holy Spirit in our deliberations and felt peace in our hearts. We congratulate those elected to represent our US Region in France next year. Our delegates are: Srs. Ida Devoe, Julie Tremblay and Suzanne Beaudoin. Should one of these Sisters not be able to participate in 2016, one of the two alternates, Sr. Lisette Michaud or Sr. Jacqueline Dickey would be her replacement. We are grateful to God for these four days of prayerful discernment. We also continue to hold all of our friends, relatives, associates and benefactors in our prayer.

*Sr. Suzanne Beaudoin, SSCh.*

**IN MEMORY**



**Sr. Pearl Gallant  
(Sr. Jean Marie Vianney)  
1925-2015**

Born in Rumford, ME on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925, Sister Pearl became a Sister of St. Chretienne in August, 1945. The year 2015 marks her 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in Religious Life. Most of Sister's active ministry was as an elementary teacher in schools staffed by the Sisters. Creative and dynamic, she was beloved by her students. Everyone delighted in her winning smile and joyful disposition. Sister Pearl spent ten years teaching the Cree children in a two-room log cabin school in Fox Lake, Alberta. During the last seven years, Sister was a resident at the Bethany Health Care Center in Framingham, MA, where she endeared herself to the staff and visitors. She now rests in God's loving embrace.

**Wrentham, MA**

If you drive down Arnold Street in Wrentham, you may be surprised to find two Sisters' residences just across from each other: 297 - our address and 300 - Mount St. Mary's Abbey where a group of 40+ nuns live a cloistered life of prayer and make delicious chocolate confections to support themselves. (www.trappistinecandy.com) For many years we have attended Mass in their chapel, and an occasional Jubilee or a Sister's funeral.



*Sr. Lisette Michaud, SSCh., Sr. Julie Tremblay, SSCh.,  
Mother Maureen McCabe, OCSO, Sr. Ida M. Devoe, SSCh.*

During Easter week we, Sisters Ida M. Devoe, Julie Tremblay and Lisette Michaud, received a very special invitation on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life. The Nuns wanted to hear about our vocation journeys and something of our life of ministry as Sisters of St. Chretienne. We joined the Sisters for Evening Prayer, and then we were ushered into the Chapter Room amid joy and laughter as we greeted and embraced each other. After a 'picnic' supper of pizza and Klondike bars, the Sisters listened in rapt attention as we shared our personal story of God's call, and the directions in which the Spirit has led each of us. Whether in monastic or apostolic life, we all "are called to bring to everyone the embrace of God" (Pope Francis). The time we spent together really confirmed that!

*Sr. Lisette Michaud, SSCh.*



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