

My relationship with the Dames de Marie

My journey with the Dames de Marie began in September 1960, when, returning from the Congo after the events surrounding independence, I needed to find a school that resumed the regime of the teacher training college that I had started there. A somewhat difficult adaptation at the beginning would quickly turn into true happiness and I have wonderful memories of my years of teacher training.

I did not know it yet, but the last two years would, little by little, give me the direction for my future life.

Our French teacher, Mother Marie Berchmanns, whose name would change later, left in the middle of the school year to make a scouting trip to Latin America to study on the spot the possibilities of a collaboration of the congregation with the local church. Due to the time needed to organize everything, she would leave a few months later for the Brazilian "Nordeste", with three other Dames de Marie, not to found a Belgian house, but to serve the bishop and the church communities.



In the last year, studying rhetoric, we studied the great discourses of the time. Two moved me greatly: a speech by King Baudouin and another by Raoul Follereau addressed to the happy youth of the world. All this touched me, as did all that the school offered in the way of spirituality.

This is how, when the Dames de Marie, decided to associate lay people with the experience of community life, I was ready to answer their call.

As for life in Brazil I will not describe it here because it would duplicate the testimony of Marie Jeanne Mevisse who described our life in the Rio Grande do Norte

The experience on the spot was extraordinary: nuns, laywomen, postulants, Brazilians, Africans, Europeans and Americans living fully in community, sharing concerns, tasks and money, and adopting Portuguese as official language, it was already a great change inspired by the Council, and very avant-garde for the Brazilian communities.



But the adventure with the Dames de Marie did not end after our return, for back in our own country, Marie Jeanne resumed her post at Uccle and I, for my part, having taught two years joined Rue Vergote where I had studied, not as a pupil, but like Marie Jeanne, in the post of bursar.

I thank the Dames de Marie for the great trust they placed in us in accepting us to share their life in Latin America, and later, in our role as bursars where we were a little pioneers to occupy this position in Catholic education that we only left at the age of retirement.

This is a very brief overview of my journey with the Ladies of Mary

