

INSTITUTE HISTORY WORKSHEET

TOPIC: Mère Monica de la Passion (1937-1950)

WWII: 1943 -1945

Places: The whole Notre Dame World

People & Relationships between them:

- Mère Monica de la Passion
- Sr. Claude du. S.C. (British Councilor); Assistant Mother General
- Sr. Julie de la Ste Famille (American Councilor)
- Sr. Maura Lynch (American, General Secretary)
- Sr. Thérèse Marguerite (Italy)
- OH: Sr. Teresa of the Passion
- MD: Sr. Rosalia B.S.
- American soldiers

Dates & Events:

- **End of 1943 where we left off:**
 - Japan: only our 3 Japanese Sisters and Sr. Mary Lucilla (Irish) are at Okayama, everyone else has been repatriated
 - China: only Sister Agnes Pauline Peng and Mary of St. Edward (Irish) are at Wuchang, everyone else has been repatriated
 - Rome: Sisters are primarily at via Urbana because Paciotti has taken so much damage; hiding Jews & Italians hunted by the Germans who have control of Italy
 - Britain: provincial dies in Dec. '43, Sr. Claude is doing her best to plug holes
 - Belgium: motherhouse in ruins, remnant of community at rue Pepin
 - Congo & Southern Africa: very little communication, thirsty for any news
 - U.S.A.: 4 provincials hold most of tension among themselves, good communication & collaboration

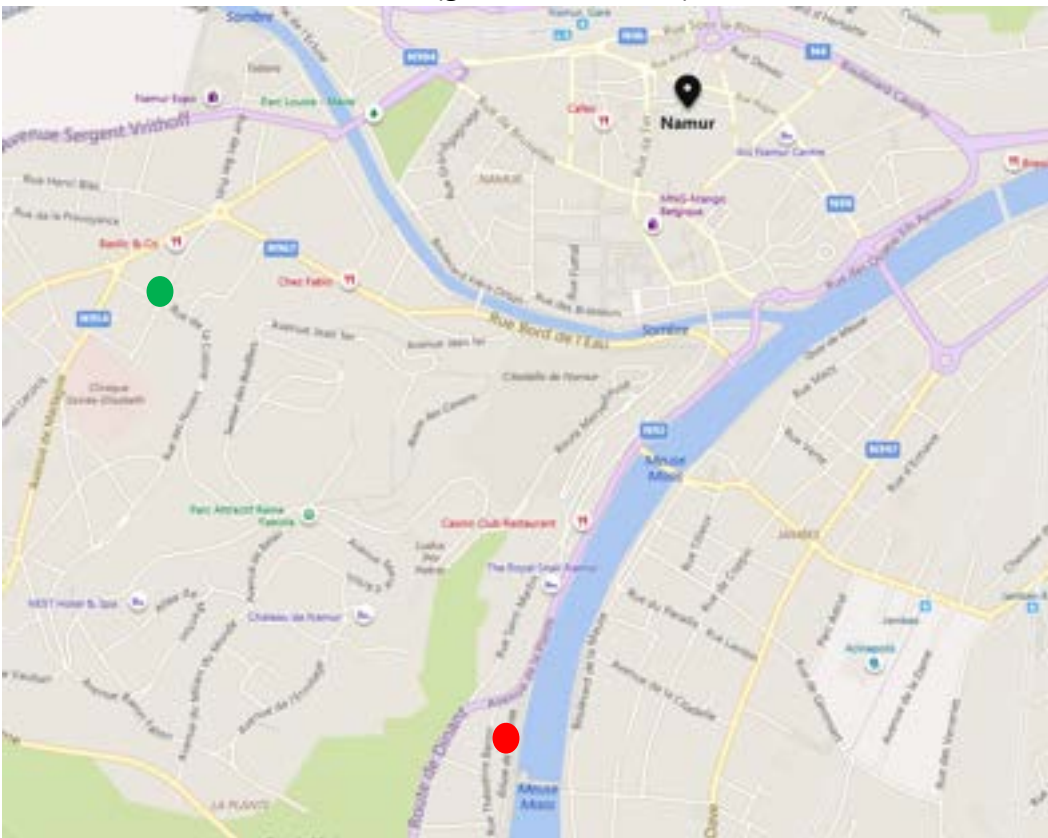
Sr. Claude writes in January, 1944:

We rejoice that our dear Sisters from Japan and China are home again, but what an awful predicament for the poor Sisters who were left behind on the score of their nationality.....

Have you any news at all from Sister Maura or from Rome? I doubt if our dear Mère has received news of dear Sister Provincial's death. You seem as much cut off from communication with her as we are. How very anxious she must be! We can but pray that God's good mercy intervenes to bring peace.

- **1944:** Rome – children come daily for soup; Sisters helping refugees; impossible to keep school open
 - **February:** daily bombings near Paciotti, Sisters forced to live underground; rations running out; water becomes a problem; tremendous sickness among the Sisters
- **1944: April 9** – 1st allied bombing of Namur; Salzinnes property heavily hit
- **1944: June 3** – Germans take possession of Paciotti
- **1944: June 4** – Allies takes possession of Paciotti & Rome
 - Sisters open school immediately upon Allied occupation– built for 500, they take in 1600 and feed 700 daily;
 - American visitors find SNDdeN and packages start coming from the States

- **1944: July** - Sisters return to Paciotti after 11 months at Via Urbana
- **1944: July** Germans take men, boys & priests of St. Hubert; a novena to Blessed Julie started for their safe return – released on the last day of the novena
- **1944: August 18 bombing** - 6 Sisters killed at rue Pepin; 10+ bombs struck the SNDdeN Mother House property;
 - Garden chapel badly damaged, public chapel has to be demolished; 2 schools that had been repaired were uninhabitable once more; grotto and tennis court disappears entirely
 - Namur community split with Mother General and some Sisters taken in by Sisters of Ste Marie; Sister Superior and rest of Sisters taken in by Ursulines
 - Photo of motherhouse after 1940 bombing:
http://www.snddenheritagecentre.org/Virtual_Heritage_Centre/files/original/e8b920e8e8f4ab795b942a99e12d10c4.jpg
 - Photo of motherhouse after 1945 bombing:
http://www.snddenheritagecentre.org/Virtual_Heritage_Centre/files/original/e8b920e8e8f4ab795b942a99e12d10c4.jpg
- **1944: September 2** – Allied forces cross into Belgium
- **1944: September 5** – Germans blowing up bridges as they leave Namur, tremendous property damage
- **1944: September 6** – Namur liberated; rest of Belgium liberated by end of September
 - Jesuits offer Namur SNDdeN their country house (La Plante – red circle below), American soldiers will help Sisters move
 - Mother General and 5 Sisters are offered an apartment in the monastery of the Daughters of the Heart of Jesus (green circle below)



- **1944:** Constant American visitors; packages begin to flow into Namur & Italy from American SNDdeN

- **1944:** Namur – American soldiers take care of moving equipment for schools: 14 times!
- **1944: November 25** – V-1 bombing at St. Hubert injuries from flying glass but no deaths; statue of Blessed Julie stood unharmed in Oratory
- **1944: December** – American soldiers arrange Christmas celebrations for 2000 children in Rome

Soldiers write home:

Acting on the information you forwarded that “ma Mère was living in Salzinne” I started asking questions and found that Salzinnes was in our neighborhood. Today being foggy, I decided to pass up Louvain and induced my host and his young son to start out with me to see the city. The first place we went to was the Little Convent of Salzinne. We visited with the Superior there, found out that the reverend Mother was not there, but secured her real address. We had a nice visit at Salzinne, were treated to waffles and coffee, and received an invitation to return Saturday for some souvenirs.

We had to drive only a short distance to find the Reverend Mother who appeared with an American Sister from Cambridge – Sr. Julie of the Holy Family We had a pleasant visit and I am to return on Thursday. I am to take them in a jeep to visit their old site, practically destroyed.... Looks as if America will have to help them re-establish themselves. They will eventually rebuild the Mother House because the Foundress chose the spot.

It looks as if I shall have to deplete my soap supply in order to give them the comfort of some soap. The sister with whom I talked at the first convent had hands black and ingrained. Wish I was sure of staying around here I would let Notre Dame send as many packages as they wanted to me, and I would deliver them. I hope someone has already thought of doing it. The first sisters I visited were living in the cellar. Their convent is near a railroad and the windows in the chapel have been destroyed three times. I have an appointment to return to the convent on Saturday, an appointment with “Ma Mère” on Thursday, so am certainly booked up this week. I do not mind as we are not too busy and I have the time, and shall do what I can for them.

Soldiers write home:

Some time ago I dropped in and had the good fortune to meet the Mother General. She was charming and in the best of health, and gave me a corker reception. She told me about her trip to America, and hopes someday to go back. Also saw Sr. Julie & Sr. Maura from Philadelphia, the only two Americans there. Both are doing very well after going through all kinds of trouble. I had a lot of fun trying to find them with my poor French, and as they were living with the Sisters of St. Marie, I managed to climb all the hills and visit most of the convents in the city, before I located them.

At the time I was well armed with chocolates, life-savers, peppermints, Gum, Soap, Tooth Paste, etc., which I had been saving for a few weeks in the event I should get near them. A couple of Catholic lads added their rations and it sure made a grand package, and they were like a couple of kids at Christmas. If you could only hear them laugh. I only hope they got as much pleasure out of the visit as I did. It was the best hour I’ve had since I’ve been overseas. Bishop Spellman had been to see them. In spite of all they have gone through, they were in great spirits. If I ever get back that way again, I’ll try to repeat the visit.

Sr. Julie wanted to be remembered to all, especially to you and to Clare Carroll. The Mother General sent her blessing to all. She mentioned Emmanuel often; she thought it was the best school she had ever seen.

It was a couple of Yanks in an Army Truck that moved the Sisters to their new location. The funniest thing I’ve seen here yet is a nun riding a bike on a windy day. Many of them travel in that manner all the time. The Sisters told me that the Belgians were amazed at the piety of the Americans, (everyone is amazed at the “happy-go-lucky Americans”), when we crowd their churches on Sunday. It seems that the men-folks here do not go to Church much after their First Communion. The weather, with the daily rain is not in our favor, but it

hasn't helped the Germans much either. The darkest days are ahead, but it should not take too long; as for the war, the Yanks continue to go "LIKE THE DEVIL", with the "SUPER DUPER" aid of the British!

Soldiers write home:

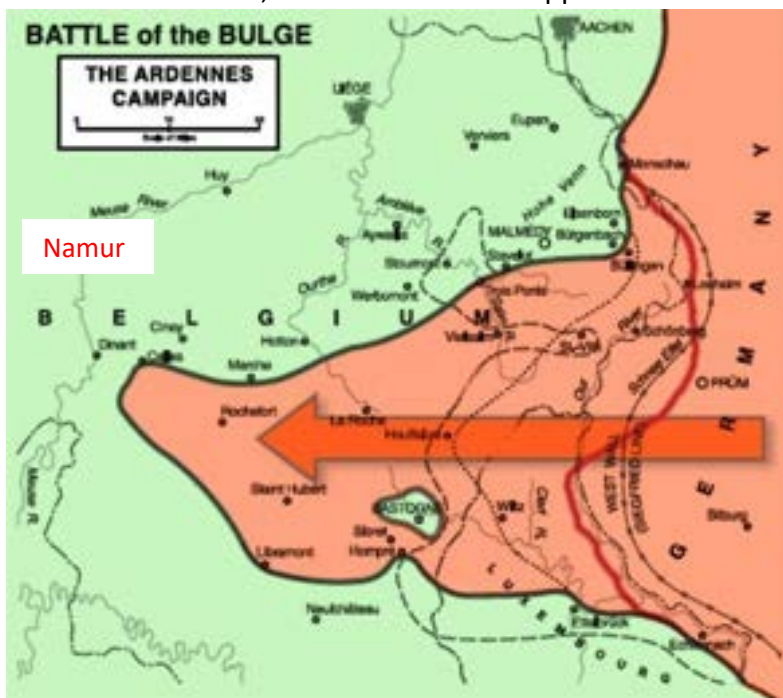
Dear Mother,

I sure would like to receive a letter from you but I am still changing post office addresses and if you wrote, chances are that I wouldn't receive the letter anyhow.... I drove over to Namur & went in to see the Sisters of Notre Dame again. ...I met a Sister from Philadelphia The last time I was in Namur, I was talking to all native-speaking nuns.This Sister had come from "Philly" & said that she had made a visit to the U.S. about 10 years ago. She had been in Springfield at that time & told me the name of the Superior there. She asked to have you say "hello" to the Sisters & tell them that they were quite well at present, thanks in a great deal to the Yanks. Fr. Joe O'Connell & Fr. Shea are the heroes there at present – they are both Chaplains & it seems that Fr. Joe got the bright idea of having folks at home send packages to him which he would in turn give to the nuns. Well, about two weeks ago, a G.I. truck drove up & dumped about 900 packages in their lap & they are really happy.

One outfit had taken over & moved into one of their convents & it developed that the Mess Sgt. for the outfit was from Worcester. He had also gone to the ND Sisters in grammar school & he did all right by them from what they told me. I guess every Yank Soldier who had ever gone to school to them that gets near Namur drops in to say "hello" & I actually think the nuns are pretty proud of the fact that they do. Pat Deery... is the C.O. of a General Hospital not far from them so I got him interested & they won't go short in our line either from now on. Cost me some money again but I was glad that I had some to give them. (& speaking of money, I am enclosing a Money-order for you---get yourself something you want Mom.) All in all, I really enjoyed the visit & I am sure Pat will be able to do them a lot of good and they sure can use it.

Well, Mom, I will write you again Say "hello" to all at home for me & I will be hoping to see you all soon. For now I will say, "God bless you all" & I'll send you all my love. Eddie

- **1944: December 16 – January 25, 1945:** Battle of the Bulge & worry over Sisters at Bastogne, St. Hubert and Marche; German advance stopped 26 miles south of Namur outside of Dinant



- **1944: December 16** – Germans advance on Bastogne; the school cellars assured safety of 100 students, 600-700 civilians & more than 50 Sisters.
- **1944: December 19** – boarders sent home from St. Hubert, Madame Stoz begins novena to Blessed Julie, Oratory filled to overflowing
- **1944: December 20** – St. Hubert offers food to refugees & shelter to 100 Canadian soldiers
- **1944: December 20** – Sister Emmanuel Didier killed at Bastogne
 - Heritage Centre page on Battle of the Bulge:
<http://www.snddenheritagecentre.org/Museum/index.php/foundation-of-the-institute/evolution-at-namur/bombardment/bastogne-bombardment>
 - Video of Sisters' experience at Bastogne during Battle of the Bulge:
<https://vimeo.com/61890715>
- **1944: December 21** – Americans leave St. Hubert
- **1944: December 22** – Germans take St. Hubert; raid houses
- **1944: December 23** – Germans occupy St. Hubert's free school, park tanks at convent, uproot fruit trees; all food, horses, cattle become "property" of Germans
- **1944: December 24 & 25** – St. Hubert Sisters go in groups to different Masses in spite of machine gun fire
- **1944: December 26** – St. Hubert Sisters hide wheat in attic; bombing with lots of damage; no water or light from that time; Sisters & those who shelter with them relegated to cellar
- **1944: December 27** – end of St. Hubert novena; German advance is slowing down – withdrawal eastward begun
- **1945: January 1** – full battle in St. Hubert
- **1945: January 2-11** – St. Hubert: much pillaging by German Soldiers; French & Americans arrive on January 11
- **1945: January 13** – St. Hubert community able to leave cellar
- **1945: January** – flooding of river in Namur
- **1945: Sr. Julie de la Ste Famille** hitches a ride to St. Hubert to check on community & gets stuck there
- **1945: May 8** – war ends in Europe
- **1945: August** – SNDdeN able to return to motherhouse property in Namur
- **1945: August 6 & 9** – dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- **1945: August 8** – Russia declares war on Japan
- **1945: August 14** – Japan surrenders
- **1945: September 2** – Japan formally signs surrender documents
- **1945: November 26 – December 11** – Sr. Claude flies to Brussels and spends time in Namur, Bastogne, St. Hubert and other communities
- **1946: End of May/June** – Sr. Claude visits Rome

Impact of War/Political Unrest:

- SNDdeN had 36 houses in Belgium at beginning of the War – only 6 escape damage
- Rationing of food everywhere (continues for a decade after the war in Britain)
- Rebuilding during the war: opened extern and primary classes, and undertook rebuilding of motherhouse – symbolic as well as practical

- England :Sisters evacuated from London with students slowly return and schools reopen; many schools damaged or destroyed by bombardment (Southwark & Battersea in London area in particular)
- Not a lot of vocations - especially in England

Relationship with Hierarchy & Clergy:

- Amazing working together in Italy & Belgium to save Jewish people
- With a common enemy - better everywhere

Primitive Spirit:

- Devotion to Julie
- Letter writing
- Unity – sharing of resources everywhere – holding all things in common
- Humor in the midst of horror
- Seeing God's goodness in others

Letter from Sr. Julie de la Ste Famille May 30, 1945:

You have, I hope, already received the cable set you yesterday by our dear Mother telling you of the arrival of packages and cases that we are not yet finished counting. The only thing needed to make the arrival perfect was that you would have had a television connection to see the little brown parlor try to make itself big enough to hold them all....A message came from the door to say that there were 3 American soldiers in the parlor and asked for the American Sisters....3 fine looking young Americans introduced themselves and said that they had some packages for us. We were not surprised because 19 of the boxes you had announced had not arrived. But when we mentioned "19" the 3 of them laughed as if they had some grand joke. They said they had enough to fill the whole room, and that they would like to begin to bring them in....

Then they came in, 4 of them now, with huge mail-bags that it took 2 to carry. They turned the bag upside down & let the packages slide out as best they could. And as fast as 1 bag was emptied, they brought in another....They said they had a truck and a trailer full....& the bags kept coming....

Each one of the soldiers received a rosary, a relic of Mère Julie, etc. & each was very grateful, as all 4 were CatholicsSister Portress appeared with a tray & coffee....As 1 was setting down his cup, he said, "Sister, I'm mighty glad to have that rosary." They were all fine boys, all of them; & we pray that they will all reach home safe when their turn comes to go....

We have all worked every minute that we had free; but there are still more than a 100 packages that have not been opened....

When the large cases from Newton Street were opened, our dear Mother kept exclaiming, "What treasures! What treasures!"....She had hard work to keep back her tears...."Now, we can clothe our poor novices!"

And yet, useful as the gifts are, it is not the gifts themselves that touch my heart and fill me with pride in my American Sisters. It is the pent-up love & sympathy that has found expression in these gifts, that is what counts.

Letter from Sr. Thérèse Marguerite to Sister Teresa of the Passion dated October 23, 1945:

I have just received your kind letter of September 1. Up to August 24 we received 118 packages and one case from the Cincinnati Province. Cincinnati 16; Reading 14; Dayton, Holy Family 13; Villa Julienne 15; Bainbridge Street 7; St. Agnes 17; Monmouth Street 15; Columbus 13; Chicago, Moody Street 6; Hamilton case

and 2 packages. In September Dayton, Immaculate Conception 5 packages. Most of the packages contained clothing for the Sisters, beautifully prepared, beautifully packed. Indeed my dear Sister Superior we have an immense debt of gratitude to pay. But we confined it to the Divine Treasurer and know it will all be repaid with blessings and graces in abundance. I would love to write to each House, but I cannot arrive at doing so. The school with 1600 children and the trips to Rome keep me very busy. Would you please tell them of my sincerest, deepest gratitude?

Spirituality underpinning everything:

- Trust in God
- Prayer, prayer, prayer!
- Battle of the Bulge in St. Hubert: Superior starts to pray the Rosary aloud – 15 decades; set up altar in cellar & have tabernacle there (elsewhere too) “We held together – prayed decade after decade, litanies of Our Lady and the Holy Name of Jesus, the Office of the Angels, the Memorare... It is an awful experience...our very roof seems to tremble....”

What touched your heart?

- Devotion of family members, former students, etc. and their generosity
- American soldiers’ response to the Sisters, how they help them everywhere – marvelous example of broader Church and collaboration with ‘friends in mission’
- Sr. Claude’s challenges in England
- Wear & tear on our Sisters everywhere from danger, deprivation, anxiety, fear
- Uptick in illness among the Sisters – because of stress of War, malnutrition, inadequate health care during War, living situations during War
- Tremendous need in Belgium – how the Sisters there were able to pick up and get back to work during the war, afterwards, even in the middle of construction zones
- The sense of “home” – SNDdeN went back to our property as soon as part of it is habitable

New insights?



- We tend to focus on one part of the story - when there are so many facets to it. Breaking it into pieces helps us deal with the horror, but it makes it harder to see the abundant goodness of God that is present in the totality including:
 - Only 9 Sisters were killed
 - The mission continued in horrible circumstances
 - Unity was strong
 - Collaboration w/external audiences was strong
 - Charism shared with so many