



SAINT CHRETIENNE ANNALS

Volume 14 Number 1

Sisters of St. Chretienne Wrentham, MA

Winter 2007

THE LAND OF NINO

As a young woman in religious life, I was fascinated by the story of St. Chretienne, the patroness of our congregation. We knew her as Nina, "la Chretienne", but have since learned that her name in Georgia is Nino. In her youth, Nino had a dream in which she was given the mission by the Virgin Mary to carry the message of the Gospel to Iberia in Asia Minor. Nino traveled to Mtskheta, the ancient capital of this country where she lived as a hermit in a small hut, her days spent in prayer and solitude. Her reputation for holiness and healing spread rapidly throughout the land. This country in modern times is known as Georgia, which was one of the republics of the Soviet Union.

Little did I know when listening to this story in my youth, that I would one day have the privilege of visiting this land of Nino. The opportunity came in April 2006, when as a member of the General Council, I joined my three companions on a pilgrimage to the sacred sites where Nino lived and died. One of our goals was to work toward a rapprochement with the Orthodox Church with whom the Catholic Church has a strained relationship. We had been advised that Nino was the key that would open many doors for us in that regard. We were to discover within a few days the wisdom of this advice.



Srs. Helene Couture, Johanna, Mariette Desrochers, Marie-Noelle Lapointe and Agnes Therrien.

The first day of our pilgrimage took us to Mtskheta where we visited and prayed at Nino's hut that is on the grounds of a monastery of Orthodox nuns of St. Nino. We were received with much openness and grace by the young abbess,

Sister Johanna, who spoke fluent English. She shared at length about Nino's life and invited us to attend the Orthodox liturgy on Sunday in their chapel which we did with great interest and some curiosity.

We were able to visit two other monasteries of the nuns of St. Nino, one in Tblisi, the modern day capital of Georgia, and one in Bodbe where Nino is buried. In each place, once we were introduced as Sisters of St. Nino, the Christian, the initial austerity of the nuns melted into a softer, more open reception.

At Bodbe, the highlight was praying at Nino's tomb that has remained intact since the fourth century, in spite of wars and invasions that have repeatedly destroyed the church in which it is



Icon of Nino

found. The tomb was never desecrated and Georgian kings always rebuilt the church to protect the sanctity of this spot. It was very moving for us to pray at Nino's tomb and place our crosses of profession on it for a special blessing.

Another very important aspect of our pilgrimage were the encounters with the Roman Catholic Bishop, Msgr. Joseph Pasotto, attending liturgy at the Catholic Cathedral, visiting a number of Catholic ministries within the city, and meeting with the Catholic population in southwestern Georgia near the Armenian border. Catholics are in the minority in Georgia, but the good works they are involved in are impressive. The Bishop, who is very pastoral and kind, is well loved by the people. He would like the Sisters of St. Chretienne to start a foundation in southwest Georgia where Catholics are deprived of spiritual and religious formation because of too few priests and no religious in the region.

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From the Provincial's Desk

This edition of the *Annals* appears at the beginning of our Bicentennial Year. It is a time of rejoicing, of gratitude for God's many blessings upon the Sisters of St. Chretienne in these last two hundred years. On April 20, 1807, in the city of Metz, France, Anne Victoire de Mejanès and her companions pronounced their vows to God in the presence of their Bishop, Monseigneur Jauffret. "I consider myself privileged to embrace a state of life that commits my days to the free instruction of children and to works of mercy..." As she spoke these words, Anne Victoire could not have guessed what God would do through her. Her faith led her to search for the will of God and then *to act on it*. That has been passed down to each Sister of St. Chretienne.

In writing this, my first *Annals* letter, I thought I would share with you some moments in the living history of our Congregation. Our birth was in the darkest days of the French Revolution. Anne Victoire and Alexis de Mejanès with their small community kept the faith alive for the villagers in Argancy, caring for the poor and sick, teaching the children, preparing them for Sacraments and risking their lives with "non-registered" priests celebrating Mass in their home.

In the fall of 1813, the city of Metz found itself overrun by Napoleon's troops retreating from Russia. The famous *1812 Overture* of Tchaikovsky has immortalized that terrible defeat. More than 800 sick and starving soldiers arrived each day. Soon a typhoid epidemic broke out. At its peak, 6,000 people were hospitalized. Our Sisters were outstanding in their dedication, nursing soldiers and citizens with utmost care regardless of their own safety. Mère de Méjanès anxiously watched out for their welfare but 22 Sisters came down with typhus. Of these, 3 died. Our brave foremothers certainly lived our motto: *The love of Christ impels us!* In 1870 the region of Lorraine was annexed by Germany. The Sisters carried on their good works in difficult circumstances. During World War II, the Motherhouse was taken over as an office building by the German military. In Belgium and in the Ardennes region, the Sisters hid Jewish children among the students in their boarding schools. We still receive grateful letters from these former students.

In 1914, on June 24th in Salem, Massachusetts, the Sisters' convent had just been finished and painted. However, the very next day, the great Salem fire caused the Sisters to lose everything. They were among the 10,000 displaced persons. In August, they purchased the property known as *Loring Villa*. Two years and many sacrifices later, the Sisters opened a girls' school. With the influenza epidemic of 1918, the school had to be closed and the classrooms were turned into hospital wards. In gratitude, the city never sent us a water bill during all the years we had the Villa.

The seed of faith-filled service, planted in the heart of Anne Victoire, continues to bear fruit in the Congregation today. As we gather in Metz in April with our Sisters, Associates, relatives and friends from many places and nations, our prayer is that we be open to the new things God wants to do for His people. We will pray for all of you who are connected to us through these *Annals*, for God's blessings upon you. We pray that Christ may reach out through you to comfort, to build up, to support, and to defend His people who look to you for help.

Sr. Lisette Michaud, SSCh.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

2006-2011



Sisters Julie Tremblay, Lisette Michaud, (Provincial)
Jeanne Allard, Jeanne Fortin

NINO

(continued from page 1)

We left Georgia with lasting impressions of all that we had seen, heard, and experienced. This is a country of great natural beauty and rich in natural and spiritual resources. Because of its resources and its strategic place in the world at the crossroads of the East and the West, it is an easy target for powerful nations trying to control its destiny. As Sisters of St. Chretienne, we hold this land of Nino in our hearts and prayer, asking Nino for protection and guidance as we continue to discern our role in supporting Catholics of Georgia in their faith. During this Bicentennial Year of our Congregation, our hope is that we might mark this event in a special way by establishing a new foundation in Georgia in the fall of 2007. Please pray with us for this intention.



Sr. Agnes Therrien, SSCh.

Thank You Soooooo Much...

You may recall the article *My African Experience* from the last issue of the Annals. Sister Alice Fontaine shared with us her experiences with the street children of Tanzania. Because of your great generosity and the number of projects undertaken, we were able to take in about \$17,000 for the projected new center for these children. I share with you portions of a letter written by our "Sister Apostles" there.



Street children preparing a meal

'I was naked, homeless, hungry, and you helped me.' ...

"Chantal and I have been deeply moved by the way you all rallied to help us with the street children... 'I was naked, homeless, hungry, and you helped me'... With Chantal, in our name and that of the 'Disciples' with whom we are joined, we thank you... May the Spirit guide us as we plan this Center for the children... Thank you for your

great support, both spiritual and material. With our friendship, Yvette and Chantal."

As we print these Annals, Sisters Yvette and Chantal are already giving some shelter and nourishment to 50 or 60 children on a daily basis. They have named their facility Nazareth Center and hope to provide sleeping quarters in the near future.

Sr. Jeanne Fortin, SSCh.

I am interested in contributing toward the needs and ministries of the Srs. of St. Chretienne

\$100 _____ \$75 _____ \$50 _____ \$25 _____ Other _____

Your concern and interest are vital to us and any contribution will be greatly appreciated.

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

Please make checks to THE SISTERS OF ST. CHRETIENNE and mail to: 297 Arnold Street, Wrentham, MA 02093-1798

SIGNATURE PRESENCE

As many of you, our readers, know, our big Bicentennial celebration will take place in France from April 27 to May 1, 2007. Since the summer of 2006, we have embarked on a spiritual journey in order to prepare our hearts and souls for this yearlong celebration and especially this important week in the history of our Congregation.



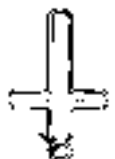
As part of our preparations of the year, we have been circulating parchment paper to the areas where our Sisters live and minister. We have asked those who attended our special gatherings to take the time to sign these papers. Some have added a little word with their signature and some have simply signed it. Whichever way they chose was just right. Though this may seem like an insignificant little happening, it is high on our list of important events.

We are well aware that we can never get all the signatures we would like to have. Some of you are no longer in areas where we live. Maybe some of you may no longer be able to write. What is important to remember is that **whoever you are, wherever you are**, you will be represented on these parchment scrolls. We will take **you** to France with us. And as we bring these scrolls up to the altar at the Offertory Procession, you who have been part of our life, love and ministry will be offered to God in thanksgiving for all that you have been for us and to us over these many years.

Sr. Julie Tremblay, SSCh.



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