

VOCATION AWARENESS LESSON

GRADE SEVEN

MOTHER SAINT JOHN FONTBONNE

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY: SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

Objective: Through the life of Mother Saint John Fontbonne, students will gain an understanding of vocation to the consecrated life.

Materials: Story of Mother Saint John Fontbonne; history, coat of arms and insignia of Sisters of Saint Joseph(provided); art supplies.

Instructional Focus:

- I. Students will listen to age appropriate adaptations of the following vocabulary/definitions which are taken from the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.
  - Vocation- the call each person receives from God; everyone has been called to holiness and eternal life, especially in Baptism. Each person can also be called more specifically to the priesthood or religious life; to the married life; and to the single life.
  - Priest- a baptized man ordained through Holy Orders who with the bishop exercise the pastoral mission of the Church. They serve God's people in the work of sanctification by their preaching, teaching and offering the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and the forgiving of sins. (A priest may be ordained as a diocesan priest or as a member of a religious community.)
  - Holy Orders- The sacrament in which a bishop ordains a man to be conformed to Jesus Christ by grace, to service and leadership in the Church. A man can be ordained as a deacon, priest or bishop.

- Religious or Consecrated Life- A permanent state in life into which certain men or women freely commit themselves to a life of special service to Christ, marked by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Students will read the biography of Mother Saint John Fontbonne and the history of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

In groups of three, students will discuss:

- Mother Saint John's call from God to become a consecrated religious
- the events of the French revolution and Mother's refusal to sign the Oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy
- the persecution of the Sisters of Saint Joseph
- Mother Saint John's role in the reorganization of the Sisters of Saint Joseph after the French Revolution.

Students will create a timeline on the important events of Sisters of Saint Joseph under Mother Saint John Fontbonne's leadership.

II. Students will present their timelines to the class.

With the same small group, students will answer the following questions:

- how does Mother Saint John Fontbonne show faithfulness to God's call
- why is her example of faithfulness and courage still important today
- how can I be faithful and courageous to my call from God?

Students will create individual prayers to Mother Saint John Fontbonne for their vocation.

III. Students will read about the insignia and coat of arms of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill and then discuss the relationship of the symbols to their mission. Students will brainstorm other Church symbols. Students will design an insignia or a coat of arms which reflects their commitment to the Catholic Church.

Optional Activity: Students will write letters or create cards for the retired and infirmed Sisters of Saint Joseph which may include:

- their study of Mother Saint John Fontbonne
- their personal vocation prayer
- thanksgiving for the sister's vocation

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Resources for this lesson and story of Mother Saint John Fontbonne provided by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Chestnut Hill, PA.

## MOTHER SAINT JOHN FONTBONNE

Mother Saint John was a foundress and superior-general of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Lyons . She was born March 3, 1759 at Bassen-Basset, Valey, France.

In 1778 she entered a house of the Sisters of Saint Joseph which had just been established at Monistrol (Haute-Loire) by Bishop de Gallard of Le Puy. The following year she received the habit and soon gave evidence of unusual administrative powers, particularly through her work in the schools. On her election, six years later, as superior of the community, Mother Saint John, as she was now called, co-operated with the saintly founder in all his pious undertakings, aided in the establishment of a hospital, and accomplished much good among the young girls of the town. At the outbreak of the Revolution she and her community followed Bishop de Gallard in refusing to sign the Oath of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, notwithstanding the example of the Curé of Monistrol, who went so far as to abet the government officials in their persecution of the sisters. Forced to disperse her community, the superior remained at her post till she was dragged forth by the mob and the convent taken possession of in the name of the Commune, after which she returned to her father's home. Not long afterwards she was torn from this refuge, to be thrown into the prison of Saint-Didier, and only the fall of Robespierre on the day before that appointed for the execution saved her from the guillotine.

Unable to regain possession of her convent at Monistrol, she and her sister, who had been her companion in prison, returned to their father's house. Twelve years later (1807), Mother Saint John was called to Saint-Etienne as head of a small community of young girls and members of dispersed congregations, who at the suggestion of Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyons, were now established as a house of the Sisters of Saint Joseph. She restored the asylum at Monistrol, repurchased and reopened the former convent, and on 10 April, 1812, the congregation received Government authorization. In 1816, Mother Saint John was appointed superior general of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and summoned to Lyons to found a general mother-house and novitiate, which she accomplished after many difficult years of labour. During the remainder of her life she was busied in perfecting the affiliation of the scattered houses of the congregation, which had been formally decreed in 1828. She also established over two hundred new communities. An object of her special solicitude was the little band which she sent to the United States in 1836 and with which she kept in constant correspondence, making every sacrifice to provide them with the necessities of life. Towards this end of her life, Mother Saint John was relieved of the arduous duties of superior, and spent the last few years in preparation for the end. She died in Lyons in 1843.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was founded at Le Puy, France, October 15, 1650. In the beginning of the 17th Century, St. Francis de Sales, concerned with the needs of society in his time, attempted an innovation in the life-style of women religious. He founded the Congregation of the Visitation whose members would combine works of mercy with a life of prayer. Since all women religious up to that time had been cloistered (or a life of prayer in a convent or monastery), his innovation met with surprisingly hostile opposition, especially from the hierarchy of the Church who maintained that the cloister was necessary to ensure the stability of women religious. After five years of meeting unrelenting opposition, St. Francis de Sales abandoned his plan and the Visitandines were cloistered. Bishop Henri de Maupas, an admirer of St. Francis de Sales, and to Father Jean-Pierre Médaille, a Jesuit missionary, continued to promote his idea by forming the Sisters of St. Joseph. In his ministry, Jean-Pierre Médaille had been directing a number of young women who wished to be not only women of prayer, but who also were concerned for the needs of society, particularly for those of the poor, the sick, the aged and the orphans. In the Chapel of a house in Le Puy, Bishop de Maupas received these young women who wished to live an apostolic (or active) religious life in Community. He gave them their Rule and confided to them charge of the "House of Charity for Orphan Girls of Le Puy", and the care of sick in hospital and the sick poor in Le Puy. Official approval of the Church was given by an Episcopal Ordinance in 1651. Bishop de Bethune, Bishop de Maupas' successor, confirmed the approval in 1663 by which time the Institute had spread to several dioceses. Royal Approval came in "Letters Patent" in the reign of Louis XIV.

### Revolution

The "Little Design" as Father Médaille called it, flourished until the French Revolution suppressed all religious institutions. Five of the Sisters were guillotined while others, among whom was Mother St. John Fontbonne, escaped death when Robespierre fell from power the night before they were to be executed. They returned to their families.

### Rebirth of the Sisters

After the Revolution, some of the former Sisters banded together to form an Association which was re-organized as the Sisters of St. Joseph by Cardinal Fesch and Father Charles Cholleton to take over the works of the Foundation of the pre- Revolution years. Cardinal Fesch recalled Mother St. John Fontbonne from her home and appointed her Superior of the little Community at St. Etienne. There was a particular need at that time for good Christian training, so the Sisters, while retaining their original purpose, added education to their charitable works. In spite of the ignorance of and consequent hostility to all things religious that characterized post-Revolution France, the efficiency of the Sisters was quickly recognized and they were given charge of the principal education facilities of Lyons including the training school for teachers.

### Crossing the Atlantic

The Congregation continued to grow, spreading through much of Europe and was destined to cross the Atlantic. Countess Rochejaquelin, acquainted with the work of the Sisters and hearing of the need for Sisters to work among the Indians in America, contacted Bishop Rosati of St. Louis, Missouri, who had appealed to Bishop Cholleton of Lyons for aid. In 1834, Bishop Rosati visited Mother St. John Fontbonne to ask for Sisters to work in America. Mother St. John's two nieces, Sister Febronie Fontbonne and Sister Delphine Fontbonne were the first to volunteer. Their two companions, Sister Celestine Pommerel and a postulant, Julie Fournier, remained in France to study sign language and later joined the others in America, where they were to minister to the deaf. The Sisters arrived in St. Louis in 1836 and made a permanent foundation in Carondelet, near the city. Ten years later, in response to the invitation of Bishop Kendrick, a band of Sisters went from Carondelet to Philadelphia to serve in the schools and in the care of those in need.

## Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia Coat of Arms



The coat of arms of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia is based on the ancient family arms of Bishop Henri de Maupas, Bishop of Le Puy and Count of Velay, France. Bishop de Maupas welcomed the Sisters of Saint Joseph to Le Puy, France on October 15, 1650. The Maupas shield consisted of a gold griffin on a scarlet field.

The Congregation added to the Maupas family shield:

- \* a silver carpenter's square (emblem of Saint Joseph)
- \* a heraldic tri-mount (bottom) which symbolizes the their consecration to the Most Holy Trinity and the name of the motherhouse (Mount Saint Joseph).

In the blue chief or upper portion are the lilies of Saint Joseph and Our Lady as well as a book which symbolizes an emblem of learning. Written on the pages of the book is the community motto: ITE AD JOSEPH.

The griffin is a fabulous heraldic animal. It is a combination of the body of a lion and the head and claws of an eagle. The eagle is the noblest heraldic bird in Church history and is the of Saint John the Evangelist. The the lion is the noblest heraldic beast and the symbol of Saint Mark the Evangelist.

The colors are also symbolic:

- \*GOLD is for wisdom, majesty, faith in adversity
- \*RED is for love, patriotism, courage, martyrdom
- \*BLUE is for charity, truth, constancy
- \* WHITE is for purity and perfection.

## Sisters of Saint Joseph, Philadelphia Insignia



The insignia worn by the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Philadelphia derives its design from their mission, which is based on the mission of Jesus:

“We live and work so that all people may be united with God and with one another.”

The globe represents global awareness of everyone as our “dear neighbor.” The Sisters of Saint Joseph strive to live the Gospel call to “love God and neighbor without distinction.” No one is left out. All are welcomed.

The cross, which is placed on the globe, signifies their desire to bring the love of Jesus to all whom they meet. As followers of Jesus, the Sisters of Saint Joseph, “recognize the miseries of people throughout the world and try to change those conditions which cause poverty, suffering, and oppression.”