



This prayer was created for
 CORPORATION FOR THE SPONSORED MINISTRIES OF
 THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH OF BOSTON
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Jeanne Fontbonne AND our sisters IN Lyon

READING: Much of the history of the first century of the Sisters of St. Joseph is hidden in the shadows of the major events that took place in the period before the French Revolution. After the Revolution, Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyon and Napoleon's uncle, heard of the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph and of Mother St. John Fontbonne who had been living in the seclusion of her family in Bas-en-Basset for 15 years. He called her to gather sisters and guide them in the spirituality of the congregation. And so on August 14, 1807, Mother St. John Fontbonne, then 48 years old, arrived in Saint-Étienne to re-establish the Congregation. Several years later it became necessary to move to Lyon, about 60 kilometers from Saint-Étienne. Instead of conceiving a plan and making it happen, she opened herself so that the plan of God could take flesh and become history in her and in the neighbor.

Excerpts from Mary McGlone, CSJ, Comunidad para el Mundo, Chapter 2, © Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, 2004 — see article on page 2



REFLECTION: READER: God of Inclusive Love, at the age of 18 Jeanne Fontbonne was seized by love—a love that impelled her to move beyond the familiarity of her small hometown in Bas-en-Basset, France, and adjust her dreams to respond to the needs of the church and society that beckoned her.

RESPONSE: We pray that we may model her humility, fidelity, and courage as we move beyond the familiar into the uncertainties of the future.

READER: Word of Outpouring Love, Jeanne Fontbonne and her sisters in Lyon were women grounded in the immediacy of your love—a love they poured out for others in the extraordinary way they lived their ordinary lives.

RESPONSE: We pray that we, too, may be and act as God's outpouring love in the ordinary moments of each day.

READER: Spirit of Animating Love, during and after the French Revolution, your steadfast presence enlivened the sisters in Lyon and surrounding areas with a love that was active and inclusive, forgiving and giving. Your love animated them to form bridges and make connections—enabling others to stir up love in a world in need of reconciliation and unity.

RESPONSE: We pray that we carry this fidelity of God's active love to the world by being the bearers of love to others.

READER: We continue our journey into the future—a journey which began centuries ago. In the time of the French Revolution, our sisters were terrified and scattered and had every reason to believe the Congregation had died—had simply ceased to exist. How thrilled these women must be to see us here, now in this 21st Century. Our presence here proves that Fear is useless; what is needed is trust. We live in exciting times, but not necessarily unique times.

FOR Reflection...

**How am I/are we open to the plan of God for this ministry?
 How are we enabling others to “stir up love”
 as we further the mission and spirit of the Sisters of Saint Joseph?**



PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM:
 Silk tapestry of Mother St. John for 200th anniversary of the Lyon refounding, Church where Jeanne Fontbonne refused to participate in Mass of apostate priest; site of Jeanne Fontbonne's imprisonment,
 AT RIGHT: Mary Southard, CSJ's, statue of Jeanne Fontbonne in Lyon Heritage Center.

Prayer FOR THE 140th Anniversary of the Sisters of Saint Joseph — 1873-1807-2013 AND BEYOND...

God of Great Love, you are with us, for us, in us. May we who share in the spirit of the Sisters of Saint Joseph see relationship with God and others at the heart of all we do.

In every relationship may we be and act in ever-widening circles of love poured out toward every kind of neighbor without distinction. May we live and work with the zeal of Christ Jesus, “that all may be one.” AMEN

Sisters of Saint Joseph of Boston – 1873...2013...and beyond

The Sisters of Saint Joseph arrived in Boston on October 2, 1873. This prayer is the second in a series of board prayers for 2013-2014 that reflect on the history that brought us to this moment as well as to a future without a prescribed set of blueprints — one open “to a God coming to us from the future” in ways we have yet to imagine.

OUR PRAYERS WILL FOCUS ON THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

1. beginnings in Le Puy, France, during the turbulent times of the mid-seventeenth century
2. renewal in Lyon, France, after the French Revolution
3. coming to the United States during the great expansion to the New World
4. arrival in Boston in response to the needs of a growing immigrant population
5. Sisters of Saint Joseph mission and spirit now and into the future.



Beyond our beginnings in LePuy

TO THE French Revolution, Jeanne Fontbonne, AND THE SISTERS IN Lyon, France

Jeanne Fontbonne was born on March 31, 1759. Jeanne showed the qualities of leadership from an early age. Moreover, according to accounts from her childhood, she gave early evidence of having a strong will and personal judgment.

Much of the history of the first century of the Sisters of St. Joseph is hidden in the shadows of the major events that took place in the period before the French Revolution. The story of unpretentious women who served the neighbor in simplicity did not appear important enough to enter into the historical annals of the nation or the Church. Since the time of the original foundation at Le Puy, each community of Saint Joseph was independent, with a local superior and the bishop or his delegate as an ecclesiastical superior. The Sisters of St. Joseph did not define themselves in terms of a special apostolate or a particular style of life, but rather, they were organized to be able to respond to any need in any place. Although there are no precise records, it is clear that from 1650 to 1789, the Congregation continued to grow and adapt to the needs of the people and places where it was established.

This is the Congregation into which Jeanne Fontbonne entered in July of 1778. She was among the hundreds of French women who, captivated by Médaille's dream for the Little Design, had dedicated themselves to serving the neighbor in that part of France for more than 110 years. The sisters of the community elected Sister St. John superior of the Monistrol community when she was 26 years of age. That was the beginning of what would be a very long experience of leadership. While the seeds of the Revolution were germinating, the Sisters of St. Joseph continued with their mission.

The French Revolution affected the sisters in the places where they lived, prayed, and worked. It attacked their moral sensibilities before it began to threaten their physical well-being. The French Revolution violently disrupted the lives of the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Congregation was outlawed, the right to teach was withdrawn and the sisters were denounced as unpatriotic, fanatics and enemies of the people and the Revolution. The sisters were brought before kangaroo courts, imprisoned on trumped up charges without trial and some were guillotined. Those who escaped the wrath of the Revolution returned to their families, went into hiding, or simply disappeared into French society.

After the Revolution, Cardinal Fesch, Archbishop of Lyon and Napoleon's uncle, heard of the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph and suggested that they might be able to help with the formation of a group called “the Black Daughters.” He had heard of the work of Mother St. John Fontbonne who had been living in the seclusion of her family in Bas-en-Basset for 15 years and called her to gather sisters and guide them in the spirituality of the congregation. And so on August 14, 1807, Mother St. John Fontbonne, then 48 years old, arrived in Saint-Étienne to re-establish the Congregation. Several years later it became necessary to move to Lyon, about 60 kilometers from Saint-Étienne.

On July 14, 1808, the 12 postulants put on a widow's habit, that the Sisters of St. Joseph wore prior to the Revolution. In Lyon and St. Étienne, the community found new life. Before she died, Mother St. John had founded or reorganized more than 240 houses of the Congregation, not to mention those that came to life in foreign lands. Some of the communities, who joined with her, like the Black Daughters, came from traditions that had little in common with the Little Design. As Superior General, she led her sisters in such a way that they allowed themselves to be in a continual process of reform in order to respond to the needs of the times.

The figure of *Mother St. John Fontbonne* whom we meet in the traditions is a holy and wise woman. Instead of conceiving a plan and making it happen, she opened herself so that the plan of God could take flesh and become history in her and in the neighbor.

Acknowledgements:

Mary McGlone, CSJ, *Comunidad para el Mundo*, Chapter 2, © Sisters of Saint Joseph of Carondelet, 2004; Joanne Gallagher, CSJ, Boston, *Reflection on Life of Jeanne Fontbonne for Graduation Invocation at Fontbonne Academy, Milton, MA*, 2005; Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another*, ©2002; Photo above: Hand outstretched from statue of Mother St. John in Heritage Center, Lyon, France