



**“Auteuil News” – En direct du chapitre – 27 juillet 2012**

## **An archivist's view of the chapter.**



Sister Therese Maylis shared with us today a few souvenirs of the congregations' life and different chapters throughout the ages.

Let us go back to the times of Mother Marie Eugenie and our first mothers. The notebooks containing the acts of the chapters from the origins of the congregation up to the 1950's indicate that these important moments in the congregation's history were brief.

They were always elective chapters, the general superior being elected for 12 years and the counsellors for 6.

The official acts were therefore very brief. The discussions and decisions concerning the orientations that were taken for the congregation took place at other moments, either before or after the chapter.

And the delegates? In the beginning, once a community was established (that is, with a certain number of sisters) the superior and a delegate participated in the general Chapter. The delegate was called the 'discrete' (from the latin discernere- to choose), the chosen one.

Once houses had been founded on other continents, only the superiors made the long trip, not the delegates. Each community had its delegate, chosen from among the sisters at the Mother House or another community in France. Sometimes the General Superior even suggested names...

From the time of Mother Marie Denyse (elected in 1953), the councillors were closer to the mother general, but didn't all live at Auteuil. For example, one was superior of a community in England and couldn't take part in all the council meetings.

The present structure –the council forming a community with the General Superior goes back to Sr Helene, elected in 1970. The counsellors represented different countries. The councils weren't all the same type. Sr Clare Teresa's first council was predominantly European, for reasons that the chapter had decided. But the second was intercontinental. With time, the capitulants have tried to choose a council that represented the congregation, whose members completed the General Superior according to the needs that she expressed and that the delegates discerned themselves.



*Prophetic image : Thérèse Maylis working at a computer!*

Choosing the best for the congregation may seem to cause loss for a province, but it is also source of life. When Mother Therese Emmanuel died, Mgr. Gay said “One doesn't lose what God gains, and Mother Therese Emmanuel is a gain for God”.

Where once one notebook served for several chapters, we now need crates for one chapter. Over and beyond the question of documents, this expresses the way that each sister is involved in the life of the congregation.

Our Rule of Life reminds us: « The sisters share in government by their prayer and collaboration, by reflection and discernment, by taking part in consultations and voting, by providing information and making suggestions, by implementing decisions and by being ready to accept positions of responsibility.” Thus all the sisters are involved.

This differs from the first chapters, though a certain nuance needs to be kept in mind. Mother Marie Eugenie's conferences on the spirit of the Assumption (1878) begin “It is difficult to define the spirit of the congregation as I understand it. I ask you therefore to pray and meditate

on it this week so that we can peak together about it. I would like those who have a clear idea to tell me. Then I could share mine better”.

## The act of obedience

In the early annals of the community, our Mother’s ‘throne’ was mentioned for feasts. In the chapel, there was the general Superior’s stall, in a public, visible place, as well as the Assistant’s. Up to Mother Marie Denyse’s day, the General superior sat in her stall as Mother Marie Eugenie had, and the sisters came forward to render obedience by kissing her profession ring.

When Sister Helene became superior (1970) in the Auteuil chapel that Mother Marie Denyse had had built, the superior’s stall was simpler and the ‘obedience’ less ceremonious. From one election to another, the sisters have expressed with increasing spontaneity. Now the same gesture has been lived out next to the stall moved to the choir. It is still the sign of authority and of mission, but in a climate that has become very cordial.

. On July 17 ,in the newly restored chapel the stall was replaced by a simple chair in light wood... A certain evolution between the gestures of deference and great respect and the warmer, simpler ones today, without changing or diminishing the recognition of authority and the spiritual mission.

In her letter of convocation to the chapter after Mother Marie Eugenie’s death, Mother Marie Celestine wrote « one doesn’t replace a Foundress, one succeeds to her. Such must have been the Apostles feelings when they had to name a successor to our Lord, in the person of Peter. Peter didn’t replace Jesus; he initiated that series of successors who rely on the unique rock.” So it is for us.

On the occasion of Richmond’s foundation in 1851, Mother Marie Eugenie wrote to Mother Therese Emmanuel “We are all foundation stones. When you and I are dead, the congregation will be done-for if the sisters who belong to it haven’t sufficient obedience, poverty, kindness and simplicity etc so that the congregation may live.”

The election of superiors and councillors are land marks in the life of the congregation and our own lives, this year’s being so in many ways. Passages, landmarks, in order that the congregation may live, they manifest that the congregation is alive and that each sister is a foundation

stone.

Above and beyond the exterior signs, the adaptations due to changing times, our history continues. Mother Marie Eugenie always wanted the congregation to live in sisterly communion and we hope that she is happy with us, in this chapter 2012.

## Our daily image



*The evolution of the religious habit through the ages*

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