Autumn 1999 Volume 4.3

In the FOOTSTEPS of St. Louis Marie de Montfort

RENEWING OUR LIFE

Earlier this year, in June, the General Chapter of the Company of Mary was held in Ariccia, near Rome. A General Chapter is a meeting, held every six years in our Congregation, of the General Council and representatives from every part of the Congregation. It is the highest authority in the Congregation, and its function is to elect the Superior General and his Council, and to make policy directives for the whole Congregation for the following six years. Accordingly, **Fr. William Considine, S.M.M.**, was re-elected as our Superior General for a further six years, along with three of the four members of his Council: **Fr. Jean-Louis Courchesne**, **Fr. Ivo Libralato**, and **Fr. Miguel Patiño**. The fourth member of the new Council is **Fr. Hubertus Louis**, a Dutch missionary from Malawi. To complete the team in the General House in Rome, a new General Bursar, **Fr. Gerard Smith**, from India, was appointed, but unfortunately he later became ill, and may have to be replaced (please keep him in your prayers). Our own **Fr. Paul Allerton** was appointed as General Secretary, and will be taking up residence in Rome at the beginning of October. We ask all our Associates to keep the new General Administration team in their prayers during the next six years.

The main topic of the General Chapter had been fixed as "our consecrated Montfortian life", and the members of the Chapter discussed the many aspects of this topic, in order to give a direction to the Congregation for the next six years. Because it is such a vast and fundamental topic, the members of the Chapter decided to issue a letter to all the members of the Congregation, and through this to initiate a program of reflection and renewal which will unfold during the next four or five years. This letter, ***"Open to Jesus Christ"***, has now been sent to all of us, and we share some parts of it with our Associates in this issue of "FOOTSTEPS". We hope it will inspire you, as well as the members of the Company of Mary, to try to deepen your Montfortian life in the next few years.

In this issue, also, Sr. Shirley continues her reflections on the four means given by St. Louis Marie to acquire and preserve Divine Wisdom: this time it is the turn of *"universal mortification"*, and since this is so closely connected with the presence of the Cross of Jesus Christ in our lives, we have also an article by Fr. Allerton on the great Calvary which St. Louis Marie tried to build at Pontchâteau. Neither *mortification* nor *the Cross* are popular ideas in today's world, but they are an essential part, not only of Montfort's spirituality, but of the message of the Gospel itself. As St Louis Marie says: *"Wisdom is the Cross, and the Cross is Wisdom."*

Due to the appointment of Fr. Allerton to Rome, we have once again had to make some changes in personnel, especially as regards the Associates.

Fr. Bob Ellwood **will again take on the responsibility for keeping in touch with our Associates, so all correspondence should henceforth be addressed to him at the address at the bottom of the last page of this issue of "FOOTSTEPS".**

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FROM THE PROVINCIAL'S DESK

My mother died this summer. Although we had just celebrated her 90th birthday, her death was rather sudden because she had had a fall. She became almost completely paralysed and could hardly speak. She spent the last few weeks in hospital.

This did not stop her joking and imitating us, as well as cooing at the great-grandchildren when they came to visit her. On the day before she died she said 'goodbye' to us all. She was very happy that day. She knew she was dying and had looked forward to that day ever since my father died. She was a very religious person.

She died as she lived. The parish priest saw her a few days before her death and said she had a real twinkle in her eye - as if we did not know! She was always a loving and good person. She was known as the 'good Auntie Maggy', ready to put her arm round and listen to those in need. When we were children she would often play with us, duster in hand. She also often played practical jokes on us. When my sister went to school she could not believe that other mothers did not do the same. She was a one-off. She taught us how to get up the drainpipe - to get into the top window (we had been locked out). We often saw her go head first through the kitchen window (again because we had been locked out). We never knew what she would be up to next. As she had played with and enthralled us, she did the same with her grandchildren and great-grandchildren and they loved her.

The grandchildren composed the Bidding Prayers for the Funeral Mass and I found them very apt -

"Lord, we thank you for giving us Grandma and for all the love and happiness she gave to us all for so many years. We pray that the family left behind remembers the good times we have all shared with her and that thinking of her will continue to bring a smile to our faces.

"Lord, we thank you that so many of us were able to come here today to remember and celebrate Grandma's life and the impact that she had on us all. Her caring nature and generosity made her a treasured relative and friend to so many of us. May we all continue to follow her example by loving and caring for each other.

"Lord, we thank you for the fun-loving streak that Grandma had and managed to keep right up until the end. We pray that we will be able to reflect with happiness upon those times when her sense of humour and mischievousness shone through.

"Lord, Grandma was a great mother, grandmother and Hen Nain (great-grandmother) and so we ask your Mother to pray for her … Hail Mary,…"

My mother was born on a farm in North Wales, the ninth of 12 children. As she grew up, nearly every evening there was a bag of vegetables and things by the door to be taken to someone who was sick or poor in the village. When my grandmother heard that someone was sick, on went her shawl and off she went. Also, my mother often told the story of my grandmother taking the children down town one day. She had stopped to speak to everyone and ask how they were getting on, no matter who they were. One of the children got restless and said, 'Mam, what is wrong with you, stopping and talking to all those people?' The answer came back sharply, 'There is nothing wrong with me or them, my dear, but you!' End of discussion. My mother always remembered that lesson. When we went anywhere she always made sure we took something with us. An aunt said to my sister recently, after having received the usual box of biscuits, 'Your mother thinks that the war is still on.'

So, yes, we remember my mother with love but more particularly with joy. Again at the instigation of one of the grandchildren, the most apt memorial card we could find for her said, 'To live in the hearts we leave behind is not to die.' My mother was always conscious of how good her mother was and she remembered and tried to live by what she had done and said. We hope and pray that we will do the same.

When faced with such goodness I can understand St Louis Marie's ardent prayer to Our Lady in *The Secret of Mary:*

"May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind. May your deep humility take the place of my pride… May the burning love of your heart inflame the coldness of mine. May your virtues take the place of my sins. May your merits be my adornment and make up for my unworthiness before God. Finally, most dearly beloved Mother, grant, if it be possible, that I may have no other spirit but yours to know Jesus and his divine will. May I have no soul but yours to praise and glorify the Lord. May I have no heart but yours to love God purely and ardently as you love him."

But St Louis Marie is praying for something more - 'Jesus living in Mary, come and dwell in thy servants.' His Consecration, his renewal of his baptismal vows are all meant to make us more and more united with Jesus - the Eternal Incarnate Wisdom - to possess him. So, in a very special way, our prayer is that Jesus will live in us.

Fr. Bob Douglas (Provincial)

"OPEN TO JESUS CHRIST"

Extracts from the Letter of the General Chapter

The letter of the Chapter is some 23 pages long, and is primarily addressed to the members of the Company of Mary. What follows here gives simply a few extracts *which may inspire all of us, Associates as well as Religious.*

Listening…

Let us open our hearts to the calls coming from the world

We cannot pretend to undertake a sociological analysis of the needs of the world, but neither can we avoid pointing out certain phenomena which continually give rise to increasing poverty and injustice. Among the themes most often cited by members of the chapter, we especially note:

- the growing gap between the poor and the rich, unemployment, the waste of natural resources, uncontrolled development;
- violence, war, ethnic divisions, refugees;
- a search for meaning in life, a spiritual quest which very often gets mixed up in religious trends which are attractive because they seem to give an immediate response to the problems of people today.

This situation of the world in which we are immersed captures our attention and provokes us at the level of our reflection and our mission.

Let us open our hearts to the calls coming from the Church.

We are involved in a Church which is constantly on the road to conversion and which, in an ecumenical spirit, invites us to a "new evangelisation." The apostolic letter of John Paul II, *Tertio millenio adveniente*, focusing on the mystery of the Incarnation and the role which Mary played in it, leads us to reflect on our own spirituality. More precisely, in his *Message to the Montfortian Family* (21 June 1997), the Pope encourages us to share with the greatest possible number of people "the treasure" of "the precious heritage of Saint Louis-Marie."

"Open to Jesus Christ"

Such is Montfort's call… "Open to Jesus Christ"; open to him the door of your being and your times. It is in him alone that you will find your complete fulfilment, your truest joy, your deepest peace.

To open our life and our soul to Christ means to allow ourselves to be seduced by him and to desire to be in communion with his destiny. It involves following him in the total gift of himself to the Father…

Along with Montfort we ask:

> Great God, make yourself the Master
> of all my heart so that I may love,
> of my spirit so that I may know,
> of my tongue so that I may delight,
> of my senses and my abilities
> so that I may act or suffer,
> of my goods, of my sufferings
> and of everything, so that I may serve you

(*Hymn 141, v. 14*).

Following Montfort, we want to enter into the absolute faith of Mary, so that Christ might be perfectly welcomed in us as he was in her… Our entire … life is lived in the atmosphere of Mary, an environment most favourable for our transformation in Christ. That is why Montfort invites us to consecrate ourselves to Jesus through Mary… "The more [the Spirit] finds Mary, his dear and inseparable spouse, in a soul, the more powerful and effective he becomes in producing Jesus Christ in that soul and that soul in Jesus Christ" *(TD 20)*…

Calls issued

- Montfort invites us to live our baptism by consecrating ourselves to Jesus through Mary: How concretely can we live this spiritual path?

- To "become Jesus Christ", Montfort proposes the rosary to us as a simple and effective means of contemplating Christ in his mysteries. How do we make it a prayer that is effective and relevant?

Open to Jesus Christ, Sent to bring the Good News

"Wisdom is for humanity and humanity is for Wisdom" *(LEW 64)*.

Rather than isolating us and separating us from people, our consecration as Montfortians places us in the midst of those who long to hear the Good News. By giving ourselves to God we also give ourselves to those in need. We dedicate ourselves to "God Alone", knowing that this also means "God Alone" living in those around us, "God Alone" present in those to whom we go on mission. If "God alone is (our) tenderness" (*Hymn 52:11*), then we are called to be the tenderness of God for others. Montfort wants us to share in the "most tender inclinations of the heart of Jesus," who is our model (*cf. Manuscript Rule 7*). We are sent to live close to people in their everyday joys and struggles. We see in their lives the Word made flesh today. Our solidarity with them enables us to read the living gospel which they embody. As we are witnesses to them, they are also witnesses to us of the Wisdom of God incarnate in them.

Open to Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Little Ones and the Poor

The organization, or rather the disorder of our societies causes more and more poverty, as the reports of the entities have underlined several times.

We allow ourselves to be inspired and guided by Saint Louis Marie in his concern for the poor. Let us remember him in the hospital at Poitiers. Remember him during his missions: a part of the common fund was destined for the poor, meals were prepared for them, and a poor person was always invited to share the missionaries' table. His cry "Open to Jesus Christ," while carrying a poor man on his back at Dinan, invites us to enter into the mystery of Jesus-Wisdom incarnating himself in the poor (*cf. Mt 25:31 ff.*).

Let us also remember the call of John Paul II in his letter to the three institutes to "renew (our) presence close to the poor" (*Message of John Paul II to the Montfortian Family, 6*)…

We believe that our God is one who is incarnate and present in all suffering. It is his voice which we hear in all these calls. We also believe that we can only respond to them by allowing ourselves to be drawn into the same movement of the incarnation lived in Jesus and Mary. Our religious life is above all a total "assumption" of our humanity in Christ-Wisdom, in order "to announce the good news to the poor, light to the blind, freedom to captives" (*Lk 4:18*).

What might be our response to these calls? … Even before we can go to bring the Gospel to others, must we not ourselves be re-converted to the Gospel, and allow ourselves to be transformed by Christ-Wisdom at the deepest level of our Montfortian consecrated life?

Open to Jesus Christ, giving himself completely on the Cross

"Wisdom is the Cross and the Cross is Wisdom." *(LEW 180)*.

"In order to draw closer to humanity and give them a more convincing proof of love, Eternal Wisdom went so far as to become human, even to become a child, … even to die for them on the cross" *(LEW70)*.

The extent to which Wisdom became one of us can be seen in that he even accepted the experience of human weakness and mortality. … Jesus' death on the cross became the moment of his total self-giving to the Father. Even as Jesus experienced the pain and darkness of death, he gave his life into his Father's hands, trusting that he would not be abandoned in death (*Lk 23:46*)…

Our consecration … reminds us that our own experiences of doubt and pain can bring us more deeply into the very mystery of God. These experiences of limits and weakness provide further opportunities to give ourselves anew to God, and they prepare us for the day when we will hand over our very lives to the God who raised Jesus from the dead.

God Alone

Reflections on Montfort's fourth means to obtain Wisdom: *Mortification*

Sr. Shirley, D.W.

As part of our journey towards the year 2000 when we celebrate the birth of Christ, we have, in the previous two issues of **"FOOTSTEPS",** been reflecting on the ways or means suggested by Louis Marie de Montfort to help us to draw closer to God and to each other. We first of all reflected on the need to **Desire** Jesus Wisdom with **all** our heart, and then we saw how the desire for Wisdom leads to **Continual Prayer** in our everyday lives. Montfort, in Chapter 16 of **Love of Eternal Wisdom** challenges us now to reflect on the Cross and mortification in our lives as part of our journey as a disciple. He reminds us that it is all about love and focusing our lives on **God Alone.**

> **' The Cross is the evidence God gave of his love for us; and it is also the evidence that God asks as proof of our love for Him.' LEW 176**

As disciples we are asked daily, wherever we are to walk in the footsteps of Christ, knowing that the journey will lead to hardship, suffering - and resurrection ! Montfort was also a realist and he recognised that often we do not have to look for penances, for they are present in the everyday,

> **' …..in sickness, various bodily ailments, the discomforts of the weather, and even the sufferings that others impose on us……' LEW 201**

But he also suggests voluntary penances such as fasting, vigils and pilgrimages as a way of helping us to turn our gaze to God Alone and to enable us to love others better. It is about seeking with all our hearts for what is **truly** important in life, and freeing us to love more, whatever the cost.

Let's pause for a few moments now to reflect on what is important in my life, in all our lives.

What is the real treasure in my life ?
Who or what do I value most in life ?
What am I prepared to sacrifice in my life NOW to gain this treasure ?
To help in this reflection read again Matthew 13: 45-46

> **'The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, <u>he went and sold all that he had</u> and bought it.'**

'He went and sold <u>all</u> that he had'……..for that one pearl of great value!

In a society that values lotteries, windfalls, fat cats, millionaires, and the cut and thrust of the economic marketplace, it **is** hard to be different. **But** that is precisely what we are called to do - to put God first in our lives, in our thoughts and affections and to put aside **ALL** that does not lead to Him.

> **If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross everyday and come follow me.' Luke 9:23**

The call to be a disciple is universal because it is required of <u>all</u> of us who are followers of Jesus, and it takes courage and perseverance. But it is in the **certain** hope of the resurrection.

In one of his letters to Mother Marie Louise, co-founder of the Daughters of Wisdom, Montfort wrote,

' I know that you will have many difficulties to overcome, but an enterprise

which is going to do so much for the glory of God and the salvation of souls will have its way strewn with thorns and crosses. <u>If you do not take risks for God you will never do anything worthwhile</u>……'

What risks am **I** prepared to take for God today?

Clearly, for Montfort and Marie Louise there was a social dimension to being a disciple of Jesus. They challenge us to change our attitudes, our ways of thinking , our patterns of behaviour and, above all, how we relate to others in our families and with our friends **and** those we do not get on with ! So, let's ask ourselves some hard questions!

- What do I need to change in my life so that Jesus can live and act through me ?
- How can I relate better to those in my family, my community, my place of work ?
- What in my life is not focused on God alone and how does this stop me from receiving and giving love ?
- As we approach the 3rd Millennium can I, as a disciple of Jesus, make a difference ?

Following in the footsteps of Jesus Wisdom, Montfort and Marie Louise lived lives of utter simplicity and dependence on God's Providence, and asked the same of those who joined them, whatever the circumstances of their lives. As they were prophets in their time, so can we be in our time if our lives are centred on God Alone.

- **We can** live our lives trusting in God's Providence and listening attentively to His Word in prayer.
- **We can** stand up to a torrent of clever and skilful advertising that urges us to spend more, become more beautiful, slim and fashionable, have the latest car or household appliance.
- **We can** live simply in a spirit of detachment and give of our time, energies and financial support to developing countries struggling to survive and shackled by unpayable debts.
- **We can**, even in small ways, be prophets standing against the dominant culture of the 20th Century marketplace; real voices that quietly challenge the structures that make the rich richer and the poor poorer.
- **We can**, with God's help, let our whole lives be given over to discipleship **wherever we are,** at home, sick in hospital or disabled, at work, retired, unemployed, in the pub, on holiday, at the hairdressers etc.

Can you take risks for God ?

Mary was the first disciple of Jesus, for she walked the road of suffering not knowing where it would lead her, only that His Word **would** be fulfilled in her and would lead to life. Let us ask her to walk with us NOW and at the hour of our death.

Mary, Woman of faith and openness,

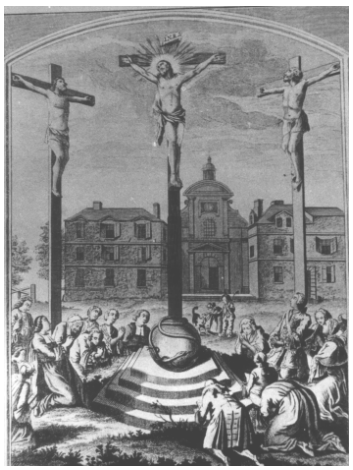
who pondered on all these things in her heart,

be our guide on the journey of life.

THE CALVARY OF PONTCHÂTEAU

Fr. Paul Allerton *describes the magnificent plan, and disastrous failure, of the Calvary proposed by St. Louis Marie at Pontchâteau in Brittany - a potent symbol of the Cross of Christ in Montfort's own life, and in ours.*

In 1704, St. Louis Marie spent some time, at the request of the diocesan authorities in Paris, living with a group of hermits on Mont Valérien, to the West of Paris. His task (in which he was successful) was to restore peace to this group which had been divided for a long time. While he was there, he seems to have been very impressed with the three crosses of a Calvary which stood on the hill at that time (today, the figures from this Calvary can be seen in the garden of the church of St Peter, next door to the Sacred Heart Basilica, on the hill at Montmartre). He was to cherish the idea of building a similar Calvary in his native Province of Brittany for many years.



The Calvary at Mont Valérien

Three years later, while preaching a mission in his home town of Montfort, St. Louis Marie thought his chance had arrived: he proposed building a great Calvary on the Butte de la Motte, the highest point in the town. He even bought the statues which would be mounted on the Calvary from a sculptor in St Brieuc. But it was not to be: the local authorities would not agree, so he had to wait another three years before bringing his plan to fruition.

His opportunity finally came when he went to Pontchâteau, 60 km or so from Nantes, to preach a mission there. Just outside the town was a kind of heath, known as the *Lande de la Madeleine*, rising to a height which commanded wide views over the surrounding countryside. This would be an ideal spot, he thought, to erect a great Calvary, one which could be seen for miles around, serving to remind all the faithful people of the area, of the great sacrifice of love offered by their Saviour, Jesus Christ. Perhaps there was a further reason for choosing this particular spot: not far away, there is still to this day a "standing stone", the *Menhir de la Madeleine*, which was known to have been the site of pagan rites in bygone days. Also, whenever a place bears the name of the *Madeleine* (Magdalene) in France, it is often associated with a degree of immoral behaviour which seems to be customary in such a place. Perhaps it was in St. Louis Marie's mind to "christianise" and hallow this place?

Whatever may have been his reasons for choosing this place (and there is also a legend of doves flying to the spot to indicate it…), it was here on Magdalene Heath that he rallied thousands of helpers to build the Calvary. His magnetism was such that members of the nobility, the bourgeoisie and the peasantry all worked together, in harmony, and even in a religious silence, even when the saint himself could not be there to oversee the work.

His plan was to bless the Calvary and its accompanying Way of the Cross, on the feast of the Triumph of the Cross, September 14, 1710. All was ready when, at the last moment, a cruel blow fell: the Bishop of Nantes forbade the blessing. It transpired afterwards that an order had already gone out from the Palace of Versailles itself that the Calvary was to be pulled down again. Some enemies of Montfort had managed to persuade the Government that this was not a Calvary at all, but a redoubt planned to give succour to an invading English force!

St. Louis Marie was obviously bitterly disappointed, but saw in this setback a manifestation of the Cross of his Master in his own life, and, true to his habit, gave thanks to God for being allowed to share in this Cross. He did not, however, give up hope that the Calvary would one day be rebuilt: in a letter he sent to a Father de la Carrière (to whom he had entrusted his statues for safe-keeping), he wrote: "Letters have been sent to Paris about their return (i.e. the return of the statues to the Calvary), and I am more hopeful than ever." However, it was not to be for almost another hundred years that his Calvary would be properly rebuilt and completed. Today, it stands as he would have wished to see it.

The Calvary at Pontchâteau today

NEWS FROM HERE AND THERE

Expressions such as, "God's ways are not our ways" or "God can be difficult to understand sometimes" have been quite relevant recently to the Montfort Missionaries. For example, at the General Chapter in May/June of this year, our Superior General, Fr. Bill Considine, having been re-elected, appointed after due consultation, a new Bursar General. Sadly the new Bursar General became ill shortly afterwards, and Fr. Fred Scragg, the out-going Bursar General, has graciously taken over the reins again till Christmas after twelve years on the job.

Again, Fr. Ellwood, having relinquished the correspondent's responsibilities eighteen months ago, is taking up the job again, as Fr. Paul Allerton has been appointed to Rome as Secretary General.

Our Missionaries

Two of our Missionaries have been home for the last couple of months. Fr. Frank Loughran, our oldest member - a sprightly eighty-four year old!! - returned to Malawi in Central East Africa on 13th of September. He enjoyed his holiday very much and he thanks the Associates for their prayers. Father has been in Africa for over fifty years and loves ever minute of his calling to the people of Malawi.

Fr. Danny Keenan, at the moment of going to press, is on holiday in his native Belfast. He is due to return to Uganda on the 20th October, where he is working with Fr. Charlie Beirne. He also thanks the Associates for their invaluable prayers.

All Missionaries realise that prayer is the driving force, the fuel of the Church and their work in the Third World will not be as successful without your prayers. So, they all ask you to continue to pray for the spread of the gospel in the regions where they are working.

A New Venture

We are sure the Associates will be delighted to know that we have opened up our former Noviciate house in Hampshire, St. Joseph's, Ashurst, to various refugees including one of two from Kosovo. There are two priests, two La Sagesse Sisters and three Brothers involved in the running of this new venture. The local Bishop, Crispian Holliss, and the local social services have welcomed the project. Again, we ask for your prayers for the success of this venture, which is very much in keeping with St. Louis Marie de Montfort's ideal of looking after and caring for the poor and disadvantaged.

Our Dead

On 2nd August we lost another one of our Missionaries, Fr. Joseph Wareing. He now makes the twelfth Montfort Missionary to depart this life for his eternal reward in three years. There have been no replacements during the same period! Again, let us realise the importance of praying to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest, for the labourers are becoming fewer and fewer.

Fr. Wareing was born in Bootle, near Liverpool on 10 November 1921. He attended St. Francis Xavier's College in Liverpool before going to Montfort College, our then junior seminary in Romsey, Hampshire, to complete his secondary education. He studied philosophy at Leagram Hall, Chipping, near Preston. Having made his vows in the noviciate in Hampshire on 8 September 1943, he returned to Chipping. He was ordained priest in St. Edmund's, Waterloo, Liverpool on 19 March 1947.

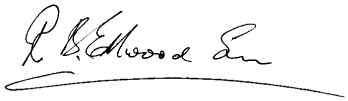
His priesthood led him first to teaching at the junior seminary, which led to him being made superior after just three years. Then to teaching moral theology at the scholasticate, which once more led to him being made superior. He remained in those capacities when the student house moved to Heythrop College in Oxfordshire and then on London in 1970.

After having spent some time back at the junior seminary, he finally came to his beloved Liverpool where he very successfully ran "Sandymount" Retreat House in collaboration with the Montfort Sisters (La Sagesse) from 1977 to 1993. The Sisters' presence proved an invaluable asset to the success of the venture.

The next six years were spent in the Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption in Liverpool, where he was much loved by the people there. However, due to poor health, he became chaplain to the Montfort Sisters in St. Annes on Sea, from where he was taken ill and died in Blackpool Victoria Hospital on 2nd August 1999. Again, "God's ways are not our ways". Father had only been there for a couple of months, and the Sisters were beginning to enjoy his company as Chaplain, but God had other plans - He brought him "Home". May he rest in peace.

Prayers requested, please. For…

Fr. Joseph Wareing, R.I.P. 2 August; Mrs. Margaret Douglas, R.I.P. 25 July (Our Provincial's mother); Sister Marguerite Marie; Greta Stone (Fr. Doyle's sister); Margaret Keogh; Mrs Adams (Sister Eileen's mother); Agnes Allerton (Fr. Allerton's Aunt); Sister Ignatius; Kathleen Mayers and Edel Callan McNally. May they all rest in peace.

Finally, let us all pray for one another. We all need the help and assistance of the good Lord and His Blessed Mother, who both had to suffer during the course of Their lives on earth. Let us learn to accept, like them, whatever comes from the loving hands of the Father, whose year we are celebrating. May His will be done now and in the next millennium.

God bless and reward you all.