



Introduction to St. Julie Billiart

Foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

Saint Julie Billiart's influence is as alive today as it was nearly 200 years ago when she founded the Sisters of Notre Dame. Born and raised in the darkness of the French Revolution, hunted by those who would have her reject allegiance to the Catholic Church and afflicted with 23 years of paralysis, St. Julie overcame these obstacles because of her deep faith. Her life was a balance of contemplation and action.

Marie Rose Julie Billiart was born on July 12, 1751, in the French village of Cuvilly. Even as a young child, Julie's love for the good God was apparent to all who knew her. She loved to tell Bible stories and teach others about "le bon Dieu" —the good God.

As a young woman, the effects of poverty, violence and illness reduced her to a state of near helplessness, unable to speak or walk. Despite these afflictions, she was determined to serve God. From her bed, she prepared children for their First Communion. Adults also began to seek out Julie for her spiritual guidance. After experiencing a vision of a group of sisters surrounding the cross, Julie began to contemplate the establishment of a religious congregation for women. A wealthy aristocrat, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, and several other young women sought Julie's guidance and religious instruction. On February 2, 1804, they consecrated themselves to God, becoming the first Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. The fledgling community committed itself to the education of the poor, the illiterate and the spiritually deprived.

In 1804, at the age of 53 and after 23 years of paralysis, Julie was miraculously cured. After so many years of pain and isolation, Julie was able to personally respond to the needs of her sisters and those they served. In the last decade of her life, she undertook more than 120 journeys to establish new schools and convents.

At her death on April 8, 1816, there were more than 58 Sisters of Notre Dame and 25 novices, each committed to Julie's mission to "Go out to all the world."

In 1840, the Sisters of Notre Dame came to North America. In the ensuing decades, they also established missions in Africa, Asia and South America.

On June 22, 1969, St. Julie Billiart was canonized by Pope Paul VI. Her feast day is celebrated each year on May 13.

Since 1804, more than 10,000 women have dedicated their lives as Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Today, more than 2000 sisters and 400 associates continue to live out the spiritual vision of St. Julie Billiart, educating children and adults and working with the poor on five continents.



For more information, contact: Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, National Vocation Team
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