

## Greetings from the Mason Mère in Paris, France!

It has been a while since I have taken the time to write about my adventures here at the Mason Mère (Mother House).

It was a genuine pleasure to have a little bit of time with Sr. Sharon Horace when she was here during and after the Vincentian Session. She and I took the time to visit Giverny – the home of Claude Monet. What an absolutely beautiful experience! We took the train to Vernon, the closest town where the train stops. We had a general idea of how to get to Giverny from Vernon, but just to be sure, I asked a lady behind the counter in the coffee shop at the train station for directions. She looked shocked and asked “À pied!?” – *On foot?* I smiled and said, yes. She told me it was a long way – Sharon and I knew it would be about 3 miles. The woman suggested taking the bus. I told her we wanted to walk, so she shook her head and gave me the simple directions. So, Sharon and I set out.

It was a chilly, foggy morning, but the walk warmed us up a bit. As we walked along, we noticed all sorts of things. One was the tower in Vernon which you can see in the photo below. We had all day, so we decided to check it out. It was at the end of a long narrow street. It used to be a dungeon and was part of the wall protecting the original city. Vernon is at least 500 years old. The photo next to the tower is of what I call a “guardian.” These kinds of things are all over the place above the entryways of buildings. I find them quite fascinating and am in the process of making a pictorial study/collection of them. This one clearly was carved out of wood and quite old. He looks a little grumpy, but I suppose that keeps the evil spirits away!



It was beautiful to see the fog lift and the colors emerge on the trees. It only took us about an hour to walk to Giverny. The town itself must only be about 2 miles long and half a mile wide. But, it is packed with wonderful things to see. The church was under repair and inaccessible, but it was pretty to see on the hillside. There is an American art museum and garden on the way to Monet’s house. More on that later.

As with many things in Europe, the exterior of a building doesn’t look like anything of much interest will be inside. But, when Sharon and I entered Monet’s house, it was like being in a different world. The colors of the flowers were exquisite and the garden was arranged in a wonderfully walkable path. One needs to take a tunnel to the other side of the road to see the pond that inspired his painting called “Water Lilies.” Below are two photos of the pond as it looked on that day. I love the way the colors and plants reflected on the water. Certainly, this trip is worth repeating in the spring and in the summer to see the beautiful flowers on the water.



We walked back through the town, stopping at the American museum's restaurant to have lunch. What a surprise it was to notice that the people next to us had their little Toto-like dog sitting on a chair with them in the restaurant! Yes, as my French teacher has stated several times in class, the French treat their dogs like kings.

The practice here in France is to post the menu for people to read **before** they enter the restaurant. Because this was the American restaurant, the menu was posted in both French and English. Sharon and I read the menu and noticed there was an item called, "Nuttypig Salad." This sounds simple enough, but the ingredients made us laugh – pig cheeks, fried onion, roasted hazelnuts, dried apricots, mixed greens, and cider vinegar. We weren't quite sure what a pig cheek was, so we got something else.

As we left the restaurant (and Toto), we walked through the American garden. I thought about the sisters who take lots of photos and create cards with them, Sharon Groetsch, Rosie DeDentro, etc., and thought they would have a field day in this garden. Below are two of the unusual flowers we found there. God must have had a good time making them!



At the end of October, the VIE group arrived at the same time we were having a Mission Exposition at the Mother House. Sharon helped with it since it took place just before she left to return to the States. It lasted two days and raised over 25,000 € for the missions! Super!

The VIE arrived the second day of the Expo. What a marvelous group of women! It was truly a time of grace to see both Pat Connolly and Consuelo Tovar from our province, but also to meet and acquaint myself with the great women from the other provinces who are participating in this international project. I had the incredible good fortune to participate in some of their talks and activities when time permitted. Indeed, it is a blessing to know that so many tremendous talented women are taking part in this venture that will help future generations of the Little Company as well as other Vincentian Family branches be in touch with our history and charism.

We celebrated Thanksgiving together. The VIE group brought many things with them that we have a hard time finding in France to help with the feast – cranberries, pecans, marshmallows, pumpkin. Everyone pitched in and we had all the things that make Thanksgiving truly American. And, we had delicious turkey thanks to the kindness of Sr.

Brenda, a British sister, who brought us a turkey across the Channel. I told her I thought it was good of her to do something nice for the sisters from the Colonies!

One of the many things I was able to do with the VIE was to head to Fain les Moutiers with them for a short pilgrimage. What a bonus it is to be able to visit places like this and be steeped in our Community history!

We arrived as Mass was going on in the chapel of the Sister's house, and joined right in. We even sang the closing song in English for them!

After eating a meal that was both delicious to eat **and** to look at, we toured the grounds and then walked to Moutiers St. Jean just as Catherine Labouré did. It was a snowy, cold day, but the walk was beautiful and peaceful. We visited the church where she worshiped and the home for the elderly there.

As we were preparing to leave, Sr. Francine Brown pointed out the crucifix below. It was on the side of a family home near the church in Moutiers St. Jean. If you look closely (you may need to enlarge the photo) you can see at the bottom that it dates from the 13<sup>th</sup> Century! I considered myself lucky to be there in the winter, because I am sure the crucifix and its inscription would be concealed in the summer months by the overgrowth of vegetation.



The VIE group left us the first week of Advent. It was hard to let them go, but that is the life of the Mother House – there are many comings and goings, just as Louise told us there would be!

The chapel here at the Mother House will be closed from January 5 through April 5 because there will be repairs done to the heating/cooling system as well as painting and other minor repairs. All the statues will be removed and the sarcophagi of Louise and Catherine will be covered to prevent any possible damage. It will be interesting to see how the pilgrims take it. Sr. Louise Sullivan was here recently, and said that she was here the last time it was closed and people lined up on the streets wishing to be allowed in. But, that was in the days before the Internet. Currently, the notification is on the website, so hopefully people are paying attention. They are being encouraged to go over to Rue de Sevres and pray in the Vincentian's chapel. If nothing else, it will make getting to and from my French class interesting!

During Advent I found it fascinating to sing familiar melodies with different words. Of particular note was, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The English refrain is so familiar to all of us, but the literal translation of one French version – "Chantez! Chantez! Il vient à notre appel; combler nos cœurs, Emmanuel" – is, "Sing! Sing! He comes to our call; fill our hearts, Emmanuel." That is my hope for all of you – that the presence of God will fill your hearts and lives completely. How great it is to know that God comes to our call!

I look forward to seeing Sisters Mary and Joanne in 2009 for the Assembly. Please bring some good old American yellow mustard and peanut butter!

Sr. Bernie Miller