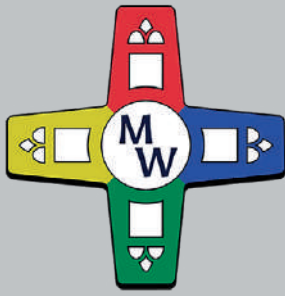


Conecta

THE IBVM AND CJ
SPANISH PROVINCE NEWSLETTER

NO 101





Conecta was the internal bulletin of the Spanish Province of the IBVM, but from its 100th issue, it adapts to the new times in which the IBVM and the CJ have decided to become ONE by Canonical Merger. It is now the Bulletin of the Spanish Province of the IBVM and CJ. The two branches founded by Mary Ward.

They are two religious communities inspired by Mary Ward, who want to live their spirituality and share it with the people they live and work with.


More information at
www.ibvm.es

Or on social media:



C/ Los Mesejo, 10-12.
Portal 1. 3° A.
28007 Madrid
Telephone +34 91 552 7544
Email: comunicacion@ibvm.es

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Cover Picture

The Spanish Province of the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary met for two days in San Sebastian. Another firm step towards the Unity that in Spain is already practically a fact.

Meeting of the CJ and IBVM Spanish Province



Group photo of San Sebastian attendees

The members of the IBVM (Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the CJ (Congregation of Jesus) met for the first time to work together on April 14 and 15 at the Provincial House of the CJ in San Sebastian. 36 religious of the Mary Ward family.

Why this meeting? After

the respective General Congregations in Nemi (Italy) and Manresa (Spain), both Congregations have started a process towards Union because we share Mary Ward as our founder and Ignatian spirituality.

Objectives:

- Meet and enjoy together.
- To present to the group the conclusions of both General

Congregations.

- To share our reality.
- To plan together how to move forward.

On the 13th we were scheduled to arrive before dinner. Introductions, hugs...some of us did not know each other and this first moment was exciting.

Each day began with a prayer based on the Gospel text

of the day. The silent reflection and sharing in groups has been enriching.

On the 14th we had the presentation of the two General Congregations and then we worked in groups. After lunch, we visited Mary Ward etxea, the residence of the elderly sisters, to chat with them and get to know the house. They were very grateful for the visit.

In the afternoon we had a lively and animated dynamic to get to know each other

(place of birth, how the vocation came about, the present mission...).

Wine and improvised songs after dinner made the rest of the day.

On the 15th, after morning prayer, we worked in groups on how to move forward together in Spain and a brief presentation of the different styles of leadership. We ended the morning with a Eucharist.

In the afternoon, those who wished enjoyed a tour of the

city and we ended our meeting with a barbecue.

We are aware that this was the beginning of a new stage between the 2 Congregations in Spain. In fact, the 2 Provincial Councils have planned the next meeting in October 2024 in Castilleja de la Cuesta.

“God has his time for everything” He accompanies us in this process.

PILAR URRETAVIZCAYA, CJ



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After the corresponding General Congregations in Nemi (Italy) and Manresa (Spain), both Congregations have initiated a process towards Union because we share Mary Ward as our foundress and Ignatian spirituality.



IBVM and CJ leadership meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia



From March 29-31, the European leadership meeting of the Congregation of Jesus took place, to which the leadership of the IBVM provinces of Europe were invited: Jen Bromhan from England, Barbara Murphy from Ireland and myself. On their side were Agnesa Jencíková from Slovakia (province that includes Czechia and Ukraine), Cosima Kiesner from Germany (Central European Province – MEP– which is made up of the communities of Germany, Austria and South Tyrol, which joined in 2005, and in 2017 Hungary joined), Pilar Urretavizcaya from Spain, Monica Cojan from Romania (which includes Italy – LEP) and Sarah Dodson, from England (from left to right in the photo).



It has been a time of sharing who we were, our experience of the Union process and our dreams for the future. We agreed that from now on we will meet periodically with the European leadership of the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute.

One afternoon Johanna Schulenburg, European director of novices of the Congregation of Jesus in Vienna, was with us and introduced us to the formation in the novitiate, where we have been for three and a half years and where there are currently two women.

On the way back to Vienna to return to Spain, we stopped at the provincial house in Bratislava. Clara, CJ, came for coffee and told us how she joined the Congregation of Jesus in times of communism in complete secrecy. It was



very shocking to hear about her experience, how she met the sisters, how they transcribed books provided by the Jesuits, how only her mother knew about her situation because it could endanger her family and friends. Today she is in her 70s and works as a historian at the university on Slovakia in the Middle Ages.

I am very grateful to have been able to have this experience

and I have come back with the feeling that we are really One. We are not so different from each other: we connect from very different realities, there is the same diversity in both groups, and there is a desire to broaden our vision of the Mary Ward Institute today.

ELENA CERDEIRAS, IBVM

Presentation of the book "Mujeres Ignacianas"



The day finally arrived for the official presentation of the book that we had been preparing for some years, including the pandemic... when everything came to a standstill. It took place on March 30, 2023, at the house of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate in Madrid. It was a moment of reunion for most of the authors, more than twenty of whom had participated in the composition of the essential texts of twenty foundresses of Ignatian spirituality, who were

living their mission in Spain. Other members of these religious institutes also attended and we were accompanied by a large group of young people living in this college.

The editorial team had prepared the presentation with great care and detail, involving the authors and others who had participated in the composition of the book: The presentation was followed by a 90-minute presentation of moments that favored the experience through prayer and interiorization and the symbo-

lic aspect of each foundress with the help of instrumental music; a brief presentation of the panorama of Ignatian religious life from its origins; introduction to the composition of the book by two of its authors; presentation of Ignatian religious life as a gift for the Church... The meeting ended with an aperitif served by the young residents, offered by the religious of the house and served by the resident students.

MARÍA LÓPEZ DE HARO, IBVM

The women next door



Ever since we received the invitation from the Institute to collaborate in proposing women to be honored during the month of March, I have been thinking about which woman I would humbly choose.

I borrow the expression *Gaudete ex exultate* and adapt it to what I feel now. They are important women in my life and without that public recognition they do not need. From my mother Mercedes, grandmothers and some other ancestors that, although I did not know them, what I know about them enriches me (like Aunt Paz, Provincial of the Jesuitinas or Aunt Maria, teacher in a village in the Pyrenees at the beginning of the 20th century). And now my sister, my daughters and my friends. Each and every one of them dawns every day with the determination to live a full life as authentic women. Beyond the family circle, I deal with brave and courageous women.

Women rich in experiences and a wisdom that I believe only Love can give, in my opinion. Women who believe and sometimes are not even aware of the enormous Faith that enlightens them. Women who, without believing, fight every day for justice and equality in their small spheres. Are all women like that? There are times when I think so! and then I give in to my dislike for generalizations.

There are also so many other women that I hardly know and I am surprised when I talk to them and perceive that fighting and overcoming spirit, that desire to improve what surrounds us.

I was at school, in Bami, when we were asked what we wanted to be when we grew up. They were all answering different professions and it occurred to me to answer that I wanted to be a “real woman”. The sister who had asked the question got my attention and took me to the blackboard to explain it. I don’t remember

what I said. I wasn’t old enough to know what that meant and what that commitment would mean for the rest of my life. May I always see the light of so many women with whom I share my path and may I know how to illuminate their shadows.

Dedicated to my sister Macarena, my daughters Ana, Mercedes and María, my friends “since I was a child” (Belén, Clara, Valle and María Luisa), friends from work (Ana and Mar), friends from the breakfast gathering (especially Ana and Marisa), religious friends from the Institute who have accompanied me at different times in my life (María and Isabel), friends from the Foco, the Antiguas and the Mary Ward Center project for the reception of migrant women with children, and so many others whom I also carry in my heart and whom life has given me the gift of knowing.

ANA SERRANO, SEVILLA

The CJ's Mary Ward Home for children in the Basque Country



The Mary Ward Shelter was created in 1982 by the Congregation of Jesus, to care for children who, due to their family problems, the competent authority decides to admit them to this service, considering that it is the best for the integral development of these minors.

The activity of the foster home is fundamentally educational, taking into account all

the reality that accompanies each minor. Hence, we tend to a very personalized work, with therapeutic characteristics, trying to cover all areas of relationships, bearing in mind the affective dimension, which, in many of the cases that arrive at the MW home, is very deteriorated.

The figure of the educator or tutor of each child, together with the whole educational team, is fundamental.

The Mary Ward Home meets the requirements of an adequate care of the children, according to the circumstances of their protection and the needs they present.

During vacation periods, the minors who stay in the residence have exceptional visits with different family members. Each minor has his or her own vacation plan. In general, the time they stay in the shelter apartment is occu-



This project of the Congregation of Jesus has been taking in children in vulnerable situations for more than 20 years.

plied with different activities of their liking.

At the moment, the director of the home is a CJ sister who is supported by a team of 13 educators and 7 integrators. Coordination and teamwork are very important.

ESTHER VILLAHOZ, CJ

At the Mary Ward Home, we take care of:

1 Family relationships.



2 Relationships in the school center.



3 Relationships in the residence of children and in the community.



4 Leisure and free time for children.



5 Además, es un centro de "Prácticas de alumnas/os de Educación e Integración Sociales.



A topic that wasn't talked about: Female Genital Mutilation

We met with the leaders of the organisation 'Save a Girl Save a Generation'.
This is the story they told us.



From left to right: Asha Ismail, Cecilia O'Dwyer and Hayat Traspas

When Asha Ismail came to live in Spain in 2001, with her then husband, a Spaniard, they went to live in a village in Madrid. At first, her life was hard, she did not know Spanish, her husband worked and she had no social network with which to communicate easily. When she learned Spanish, she started working as a translator from Somali and Swahili to Spanish. "My Spanish wasn't perfect, but that's all there was," she worked with asylum seekers arriving from Somalia and East Africa. "A lot of families were arriving from Somalia and I started to realise that there were families arriving with daughters and no one was talking about one issue: female genital mutilation," she says. She underwent the practice as a child, like 98 per cent of Somali women.

At that time, Asha had an infection that forced her to visit the gynaecologist, she

recalls the woman's terrified face, who began to call other doctors "I had a terrible time, I left there very bad...". She thought she had to talk about it, reach more people, contact women who have been mutilated like her, women who may be thinking of mutilating their daughters one day, contact the various professionals in Europe who may be faced with FGM, doctors like her gynaecologist, social workers, police, educators... through an organisation she could better achieve this goal of breaking the silence and the taboo. And that is why she created the NGO Save a Girl Save a Generation, in 2007.

At first, her daughter Hayat was very young and was not connected to these issues. But when she herself became a mother of her first daughter, she decided to get fully involved in the fight against FGM because she understood what her mother had done, she understood that change is possible, her mother had made it happen. "Officially, Save a

Girl was born in 2007, but the reality is that Save a Girl was born when I was born," explains Hayat. When her mother was 15, they were going to mutilate her little sister and she rebelled, they had to lock her up because she wanted to avoid mutilating her sister at all costs. She swore to herself that she would never do that to her daughter. When Hayat was born, she cried inconsolably "What a world I have brought this child into...", but her determination overcame barriers and what she did not achieve with her sister, she achieved with her daughter, she saved her daughter.

Hayat explains, "that's why we are Save a Girl Save a Generation, I am that girl and my daughters are that generation. My mother, my aunt, my grandmother, my great-grandmother... all the women in my family were doomed to repeat this! Thanks to my mother's rebellion, life for the women in my family has changed, now my cousin has not been mutilated either. But then she brea-

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It's not that Somali mothers don't love their daughters, quite the contrary, but they don't relate it to harm, but to culture, it's a social norm, what has always been done.

thes a sigh of relief: "Thank God there are more boys than girls in my family...".

What started with a Facebook page on which Asha wrote more in English than in Spanish, making samosas (pasties), "they are the best in the world" says her daughter, making calendars and everything she could think of, to raise funds for the organisa-





Organization logo



One of the SaG SaG briefings in Kenya

tion, with which she paid for the studies of some girls in Somalia, Today it is a highly recognised and respected organisation for the immense awareness-raising work it has achieved, both in Spain and in Europe, as well as in Africa, because they have a centre in the Somali neighbourhood par excellence of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, where women from there, trained by SaG SaG, do impressive work among local women. Now the Facebook of the organisation has more than 10,000 followers, the Instagram has 15,000, it is a real display, as social networks are nowadays.

Somali women, the most affected

The Somali people are not only in Somalia, they explain, but in Kenya, in Ethiopia, in Somalia, in Eritrea and Djibouti, even in Sudan and South Sudan. They travel to the region often. Last year, they visited the village and the house where Asha was mutilated, because they are making a documentary about her life. "There was a lady there with three girls, 5, 7 and 9 years old. I am now 54 years old, I had FGM at the age of 5... almost half a century later, those

three girls had undergone female genital mutilation... in the same house", Asha laments, "I was devastated, it affected me a lot". That night she couldn't sleep and thought of organising a meal with the women of the village to give them information... "It's not that Somali mothers don't love their daughters, quite the contrary, but they don't relate it to the harm, but to the culture, it's a social norm, what has always been done", she clarifies. That's why, "when you reach them and talk to them from the heart, as they all want the best for their daughters, that's when

they think, 'Oh, maybe I won't. If I can avoid it, I'll avoid it. If I can avoid it, I will avoid it". Because just laws prohibiting it are not enough, without information, the custom will not change, in addition to laws, we need to inform people", insists Asha, who tells of that meal, a woman married at 12 or 13 years old, with 8 children, only her husband was working, she said: "What do I do? I can't do anything else, I don't know how to do anything else? If I want to rebel, where do I go? Who is going to take me and my children in? And she was right", says Asha, which is why the training centre and shelter they have opened in Nairobi is so important to them. Each

group of women who are trained inform others, spread the word, talk to others, the effect multiplies. One woman who attended a training, called "Kuelekea Mabadiliko" (which means "Walking towards change" in Swahili), hours later, sent an audio message to the social worker to tell her how happy she was that she had never had a chance to talk about these things, that she had returned home and was "still smiling".

Someone once said "If your dreams don't scare you, they're not big enough", the dreams that this mother and daughter talk about have no ceiling and, from what they say, all the women who join them

here and there have the same enthusiasm. "Because we have little money, and we have to stretch it as far as possible, otherwise.... Every time we get together with the women here or in Kenya we solve the world, then we have to go down to earth and select priorities, look for strategies that multiply the effects, etc.", they say.

Their achievements are impressive and will become more and more so, because their passion is both admirable and contagious. Of course, the mother has already infected her daughter and the chain continues. Hayat, about her role as Fundraiser in the NGO, says "If I had to sell cars, I wouldn't do it, but for this, I give my best!



The management team visits the schools

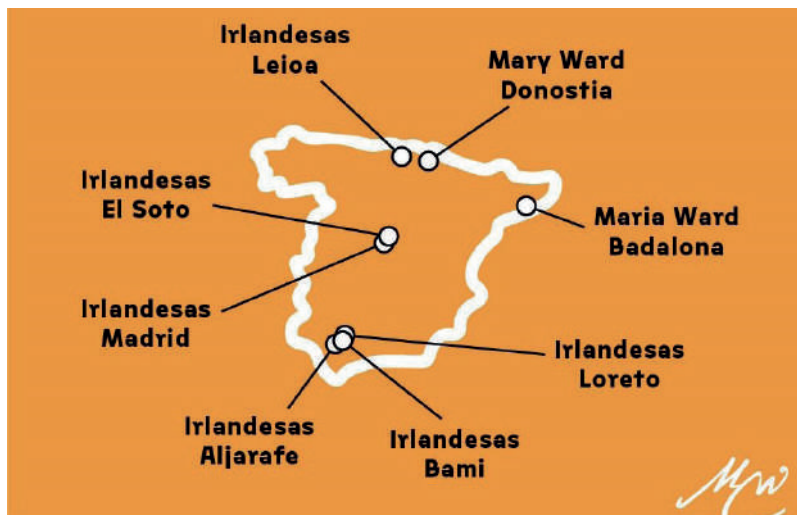


With the joy of inaugurating the new Mary Ward Educational Foundation, the Management Team made its first institutional visits to its eight schools during the second quarter of the school year. The objectives were clear: to get to know the teachers, to talk with the teams and to start building a new common project.

This Management Team is formed by:

- Teresa Clemente (General Management)
- Jorge Largo (Pedagogical and People Area)
- Josep Cerrada (Pedagogical and Personnel Area)
- Clara García (Pastoral and Charism Area)
- Luis Miguel Cuñado (Strategic Management, Marketing and Communication Area)
- Juan Carlos González (Economic - Labor Law Area)

On the website of the Mary Ward Educational Foundation, all the information about its organization and structure is available.



The eight schools that make up the Mary Ward Educational Foundation

These visits were planned with different objectives in mind. On the one hand, to meet the teachers and share with them moments of dialogue and listening. On the other hand, to encourage, accompany and follow the reality of the centres so that they respond to the aims of the Mary Ward Educational Foundation and the objectives of its Strategic Plan.

In all the schools, the reception was extraordinary and allowed the Management Team to share with the staff different experiences and concerns in formal and informal meetings. There have also been different meetings with teams and individuals that have been very enriching: General Management, Management Teams, pedagogical and project managers, communication and management managers, etc.

These face-to-face meetings and the tour of the facilities are fundamental for getting to know the daily reality of each centre and working together on the new path from the reality of each of the schools with a common horizon.

In the words of the members of the Management Team, "we must accompany the members of the educational community in the educational task assigned; and for this it is necessary to listen to the schools and thus be able, among all, to carry out our educational mission following the Charism of our Foundress Mary Ward".

ALEJANDRO DELGADO, COORDINADOR DE COMUNICACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL FEMW



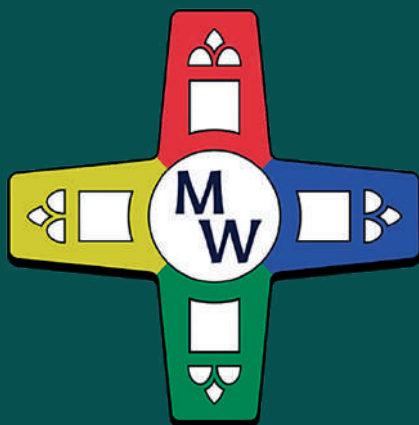
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Email: comunicacion@ibvm.es 

Phones: 915 512 999 / 915 012 189 

Mobile: 659 220 956 



Provincial Office of IBVM
C/ Los Mesejo, 10-12.
Portal 1. 3ª A.
28007 Madrid
Phone: 91 552 7544