

CONECTA



WE ENTER 2024
WITH NEW
PROJECTS AND
ENTHUSIASM



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 existing branches of the Institute 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



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Protection of children and vulnerable adults

The Spanish Conference of Religious has commissioned, presented and encouraged congregations to continue to address the long-silenced issue of Abuse in the Church. The Reports were presented by CONFER, the Spanish Episcopal Conference and the Ombudsman to a large attendance of Provincial Superiors from all over Spain.



On 22 of December, the Spanish Conference of Religious (CONFER) convoked the major/provincial superiors to a zoom meeting to inform us about the Report on abuses commissioned to the firm Cremades & Calvo-Sotelo, the Report "[Para dar Luz](#)" [To shed light], elaborated by the Spanish Episcopal Conference (CEE)

and the Report on sexual abuse complaints in the Catholic Church and the role of the public authorities, elaborated by the Ombudsman. There was a great response, 130 people attended.

The EEC introduced the report "Para dar luz", based on the work of the diocesan offices for the protection of minors, which includes information on cases of abuse co-

llected in ecclesiastical courts, in civil courts and in the media. This report also integrates contributions and recommendations from the Ombudsman's report, presented in October 2023, and the Report-Audit prepared by the firm of Cremades & Calvo Sotelo, delivered to the EEC in December 2023.

We had the presence of Ángel Gabilondo, Ombudsman,



The Ombudsman, Ángel Gabilondo, and the President of CONFER, Jesús Díaz Sariago during the online presentation

who shared his report with us, and at the same time thanked us for our collaboration in providing data from the different congregations. Through CONFER, we were invited all the congregations to answer a survey for the Ombudsman's office, whether or not we were aware of cases of abuse in our institution. Ángel Gabilondo, who is very close to religious life, told us that those congregations that had no cases, we should not believe that there had been no cases, but only that we had no knowledge of them. Personally I believe that this is so, and we have the responsibility and obligation to address the issue and try to know and alleviate the suffering that we may have generated from our institution.

Apart from the controversies we read about in the media, they all conveyed to us the importance of responding to a situation of suffering

and loneliness that for years has been kept, in one way or another, silent. The importance of approaching the issue of abuse from the point of view of the victims and their pain, of putting the victim at the centre and taking measures that help to remedy the damage done, to repair it. The essential point is to welcome the victims and to engage with them. The media generate controversy with data, but it is not the data that is essential, it is the person and their suffering that is essential.

I know more and more people who share with me that they have been victims of abuse in the Church, and let's not just talk about sexual abuse, we know what I am talking about, and the suffering they have experienced because of the silence of those who knew about it, or simply sensed it, and did nothing.

Let these lines serve to generate reflection on abuse

A personal process is needed to integrate it and not remain only in condemnation and disappointment

in the Church, of which we are part and which we love, which is working to repair the damage done and taking measures so that abuse, and more importantly, silence, does not happen again.

ELENA CERDEIRAS, IBVM

Brief testimony by Mercedes Ocharan



Mercedes Ocharan de la Cámara, born on 10 June 1941 in Madrid, entered the Institute on 19 March 1961. She spent the last 37 years in Peru, until, in the last four months of 2023, she returned to Madrid. She now lives in the community of El Soto. "I was very happy", she says with her characteristic humility.

In Peru she worked with prisoners, she doesn't remember very well whether it was 10 or 12 years. "I started with a men's

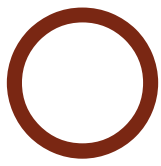
prison and then I went to a mixed prison where the women spoke English, but they didn't keep me there long, because they moved the women to another place".

She ended up working in two men's prisons. She clarifies that "working", "To do, to do, I did nothing. Not because they were clumsy or lazy, but because all they wanted was for you to spend some time with them. A time when they felt like human beings because they were treated very badly in general".

On other days I would go with a priest and celebrate mass for the prisoners who had AIDS.

"My experience in Peru was very rich, but I especially value the experience with the prisoners. I remember the first time I went there I was scared to death. I saw those big men, with the history they had behind them, in those rooms... everything was negative, but after 15 days I felt at home there. It's not much, but this has been very important in my life", she concludes.

The name of Jesus guides and gives meaning to Mary Ward's life



n the 3rd of January we celebrate the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus and therefore the feast of the Congregatio Jesu.

We may ask: what did the name of Jesus mean to Mary Ward? If her spiritual journey is reflected in Life in Paintings, it is worth considering the fact that the opening painting shows that the first word Mary Ward uttered was JESUS. Throughout all the paintings we see her human and spiritual growth in intimate dialogue with the Lord, both in her prolonged periods of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament and in any place and circumstance, whether in her struggle to respond to her vocation in the face of external pressures or in her own illness or that of others for whom she prayed, or in her journeys and dark nights when she did not know how to go on because all possibilities for the future were closed to her, or in the face of misunderstandings in which she had to learn to forgive... Every moment helped her to open her heart in intimate friendship with Jesus, to whom she confidently shared her fe-



elings, her deepest desires, her worries, the future of her Congregation...

Today, we are living this historic moment of **"To Walk Together"** to become one Body. And we know that it will be Jesus who will make it possible.

How many times before the witness of so many persecuted Christians today, capable of risking and giving their lives for Jesus, I ask myself: What about me? And what about us?

JESUS = GOD SAVES. We are called to be companions of Jesus in the here and now of history, in the midst of so many conflicts and ambiguities: what

is our relationship with **Jesus: "the God who saves"**, who wants to offer that salvation to every person we meet on our way?

New Year, New Life, we often say to ourselves. Let us take advantage of every moment to live from Jesus, with Jesus and for Jesus in greater service every day, with small gestures and words, to all those around us so that they can have a little happier life. We don't need great deeds, it is enough to put **"HEART"** in what we do, as JESUS did.

ESTHER VILLAHUZ, CJ

The friends of my friends are my friends

Although I have changed the title of the song* I think it is timely and appropriate. One of the great riches of living in an inter-congregational community is that the circle of sisters widens and increases considerably with sisters from other congregations.

This first day of the year Ana Cantalapiedra, Daughter of Jesus, and I were lucky enough to share a table and celebrate the new year with other sisters from both IBVM and Daughters of Jesus. As well as laughing, sharing anecdotes... it was also a time to share each other's different ministries. To discover that the mystery of God incarnated in these days, as well as the extension of the Kingdom in everyday life, in simplicity, in the fragility and vulnerability of our persons, does so in a modest way.

So my wish for this year is that we continue to expand the number of sisters in our lives. And as I heard someone say, with the wish also comes the commitment to make it happen.

BLANCA BERGARECHE, IBVM

* There is a famous song in Spain ironically entitled "The [male] friends of my [female] friends are my friends" by a group called Objetivo Birmania, whose singer is a girl.



From left to right in the photo above: M^a del Mar Domínguez, Blanca Bergareche, Teresa Ayi, Ana Cantalapiedra, Celia Da Silva, Louise Latin, behind: Rosario Hernández and Ana Jodar



Times of Hope

Pastoral Coordinator Pilar Fernández writes to us from the school in the north province of Barcelona, where the educational community, the students and the neighbourhood, especially the older ones, come together to bring out the best in everyone, regardless of age.

Times of hope is the title that best defines this school year. We need to sow and cultivate times of hope among our students, among our teaching staff, in our community. These longed-for times of hope move us to authentic social action, to work directly with the needs of our neighbourhood. How beautiful it is to feel the presence of Jesus when we spread smiles among our elders, among our families!

From our reality: our school, we sow times of hope with our great project, with our best talisman: the intergenerational project "We exchange smiles". Thanks to this project, our pupils have shared afternoons of games at the Domènech i Montaner nursing home and, in addition, and as a novelty, the primary school pupils have started to teach the grandpa-

rents how to approach new technologies, helping them with the use of mobile phones... A real two-way learning: our elders learn technology and our pupils are awakened to the value of help, patience,

understanding, tenderness...

We continue our journey of sowing hope with the launch of the 1st Solidarity Day. I want to tell you that it has been a real challenge for the teaching staff, due to the complexity of the organisation... but it has been worth it. We are encouraged to organise this day to help the TV3 Marathon project, a foundation of our region that every year reinvents itself and unites the whole of society.

At the end of this intense first trimester, we are left with the satisfaction of a sowing well done and in our hearts lies the hope of seeing the growth of authentic agents of social change, of continuing with the task of evangelisation, of following in the footsteps of our source of inspiration: Mary Ward.

How beautiful it is to feel the presence of Jesus when we spread smiles among our elders, among our families!

PILAR FERNÁNDEZ,
PASTORALIST OF MARIA
WARD BADALONA



Prayer for the intercession of Mary Ward in Seville

The Pastoral Coordinator of the Aljarafe (Seville) School, Amalia González, has shared with us this beautiful initiative that they have taken in their school, to add their grain of sand to the Cause of beatification of Mary Ward and at the same time bring the students closer to God through our foundress.

My name is Amalia González and I am the pastoralist at Irlandesas Aljarafe School in Seville. I simply want to share with you an initiative that we started to carry out in the school last December and which aims to “add” a little to the cause of beatification of our dear and venerable Mary Ward.

Whilst it is true that this is our main objective, we cannot detract one iota of value from what this initiative does to help our pupils come a little closer to God through Mary Ward. Our aim is to make it easier for students to have an encounter with God in chapel whenever they want to. And recognising the difficulties they have in sharing their requests in front of others, we have provided a space for them to leave their innermost desires in a box



so that, through Mary Ward's intercession, they can come to God.

Although I am talking about the student body, any school staff can leave their requests in the box (neither God nor Mary makes distinctions based on age).

On the 23rd (or the day before if it falls on a weekend)

we want to join in with the various events around the world for the beatification of Mary Ward and we will burn the petitions that have been made.

We used incense and explained to our students that the smell of this plant is a sign of homage to God and is intimately linked to the Church. It represents the simple and



to God, and with this gesture we will symbolise, every month, that all our petitions are raised to Him, through the smoke that is released and through the intercession of our foundress.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we started this initiative last December and I share with you some of the images of that day. I also leave you the prayer that, humbly and drawing on other existing prayers, I have prepared to be prayed with our students each time we prepare to burn our petitions to raise them to God through the intercession of Mary Ward. We have no other purpose. Simply that you know about this humble initiative which aims to help, through prayer, the beatification of Mary Ward.

I myself believe I am fortunate to have Mary Ward as the "bridge" that brings me closer to God.

**AMALIA GONZÁLEZ,
PASTORALIST OF ALJARAFE**

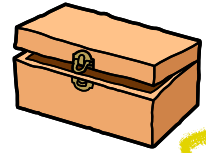
pure prayer of the believer. For thousands of years, Christians have believed that the pleasant smell of incense takes away the weariness and sorrows we have and that they reach heaven when burnt. It

is therefore a pleasing act for God, because with it we symbolise how much we need Him for us to live in peace.

We know the importance of symbolism and how much these gestures help us to get closer

PRAYER FOR THE INTERCESSION OF MARY WARD

Dear Venerable Mary Ward,
pray to God for us and for our needs.
That we may experience his help and that our prayer may be heard,
if what we ask, is for the glory of God,
You said: "When God grants me a place in heaven, I will do all I can to help you."
Therefore, today we ask that all our intentions be brought to Him,
so that we may be satisfied if it is His will.



Father, we thank you for the gift that you have given to the Church
and to all of us. Thank you for Mary Ward.
We have turned to her to bring our prayers to you,
our concerns and our needs.
We have asked her to pray for each one of us
and bring to you our sorrows and our weariness.
Listen to them with love and attend to them all if it is your Will.

We trust that, burning all our petitions, they will reach You
that You may hear them and fulfil them if it is Your Will,
and rejoice in the great trust we have in your great Love for us.
Today we also ask You to help us to follow the way of life of Your
Son Jesus
and his mother Mary, and may Mary Ward be for us a model of that way
of life.
Help your Church to recognise that her example of life is a light for all
of us
and may she enjoy with you the life of the Saints.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, now and forever,
for ever and ever,
Amen.



Mary Ward Week 2024



Christa Parra, IBVM from the United States, and Mariana Ojeda, CJ from Argentina, at a meeting

The booklet for reflection during this year's Mary Ward Week 2024 has been compiled by two young women religious from North and South America: Christa Parra, Mexican-American, IBVM from the United States, and Mariana Ojeda, CJ from Argentina.

This year, the common thread proposed by Christa and Mariana is a question: Who is Mary Ward for me, for us: "Who is this woman?" ... the people who have collaborated in this year's booklet add: where does she come from, where is she going, why did she come and go so far, she is a woman who takes us by the hand and guides us....

The work has been distributed worldwide in nine languages, which are spoken in

the different provinces of the IBVM and the Congregation of Jesus. In their introductory letter, the two General Leaders Carmel Swords of the IBVM and Veronica Fuhrmann of the CJ, ask us to be "challenged and encouraged to build just relationships with the earth and all creation." At the same time they thank the enormous work, not only of Christa and Mariana, but of general assistants Natalie Houlihan IBVM and Estela Grignola CJ, and the secretaries and

translators, without whose efficient work we could not pray with the attunement with which we do, from all corners of the world.

New this year is the recommendation to listen to an iconic song for the whole Mary Ward family, "Lead us on, Mary Ward" by Deirdre Browne IBVM from Australia.

This can be heard, with subtitled lyrics, in a video produced by Susan Daily Ibvm which is available on our YouTube channel.



20 years later. Everything is connected



Twenty years ago, when IBVM was opening its office at the United Nations, I was working as a teacher at El Soto school. I had just returned from a two-year volunteer experience in Paraguay, which had had a profound impact on me. Although I had always been interested in international cooperation and had already collaborated as a volunteer in Spain, living closely the reality

of one of the poorest countries in South America changed my perspective and confirmed my vocation to work for the dignity of all people. They were two years full of experiences, I worked with wonderful people, I got to know a different culture, I recognised myself as lucky, privileged, in a world where there are still many inequalities. Above all, I understood how everything is connected, how our decisions and our way of life influence the lives of other people on the

other side of the world.

Through my work as a teacher and through volunteering at school, I have tried to open the eyes of my students to this shared world. I don't know if I have been able as an educator to convey my deep conviction that all of humanity has a common destiny, beyond borders, countries, languages, cultures or beliefs. I like to think that education opens windows into our small local reality, that it provides maps to explore

that global reality of which we are all a part, and that it helps us to discover what we can contribute from our individuality to a common project. I would like to think that future generations will continue to build bridges of understanding over the rubble of today's conflicts. Underpinning peace and justice through dialogue and respect. Caring for our common home, where all humanity can live in dignity.

The presence of IBVM in all continents and its participation in the UN through ECOSOC are a visible sign of this way of building networks that unite very different realities, and that support the fragility and vulnerability of those most in need. In these few months that I have been responsible for JPIC and representative of the UN office in Spain, I have been able to learn more about the work of religious around the world and how they are interwoven with other congregations,

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I like to think that education opens windows into our small local reality, that it provides maps to explore that global reality of which we are all a part and helps us to discover what we can contribute

organisations and groups with which they share common objectives. I marvel at the cultural diversity and plurality that is evident in the online meetings and gatherings.

And, above all, I feel the common mission of each one, from their own place, with their personal contribution, in the construction of a more humane, just and sustainable world.

This year we look back over the road travelled in these 20 years. It is time to celebrate what has been achieved and to build momentum for new actions. I feel fortunate to be part of this project. I hope that in my new role I will be able to make visible the connection between what is growing at the local level, in the communities, in the educational and social projects of the IBVM and CJ in Spain and the great challenges at the global level: the achievement of the SDGs, climate change, the elimination of gender-based violence and human trafficking, the improvement of living conditions... Everything is connected.

**MARTA SANTOS,
RESPONSIBLE FOR JPIC IBVM**



Golden and Silver Jubilee of Religious Life in San Sebastián

On 11 November 2023, we celebrated with great joy the Golden Jubilee of María Paz Sanz, Ubaldina Moure and Pilar Urretavizcaya and the Silver Jubilee of Cecilia Lee, in San Sebastián (Basque Country), in the north of Spain.

It was an enjoyable meeting where we felt united in giving thanks to God for the call of these sisters to serve Him with joy as Mary Ward did.

After the Eucharist we had a fraternal meal, where in addition to all the sisters of the Spanish CJ Province, family, friends and staff from the schools of the Basque Country and Catalonia were present.



From left to right: María Paz Sanz, Pilar Urretavizcaya, Ubaldina Moure and Cecilia Lee, from the Congregation of Jesus

ESTHER VILLAHOZ, CJ



Prayer to Our Lady of Loreto

Francisco de Paula Suárez Balbuena, school principal of Irlandesas Loreto, Seville, writes to tell us that they have also written their own prayer for the image of the Virgin of Loreto that they have in the school.

Mary Ward had a special devotion to Our Lady of Loreto. According to tradition, the house of the Virgin Mary was moved by angels to a place in Italy, where there were two huge laurels - lauretum - and the image there, Our Lady of Loreto. Going from Saint Omer to Rome to speak to the Pope, the story goes:

"In all they walked 2000 kilometres on foot, crossing the Alps - what are the Alps but mountains, she said before crossing them over the St Gotthard Pass - in a period of war in Europe. They took only three days' rest: one to write to their companions, one to venerate Charles Borromeo, and finally Loreto, because of Mary's special devotion to the Mother of God. The visit to Loreto was an additional 250 miles of travel".

This story shows Mary Ward's devotion to the Virgin, and especially to the Virgin of Loreto. In our school we have an image of the Lady of Loreto, an image made by the Sevilian artist Miguel Bejarano when he was a student at our school. Miguel is also very close to everything related to our foundress, being the author of a bust of Mary Ward that was given to Pope John Paul II and he is the author of the image of Mary Ward that was inaugurated last year in the school of Leioa.

In our school we have a special devotion to the precious image of Our Lady of Loreto and this year we have made a prayer to her, which has been shared with everyone on Wednesday 17th January, during daily prayer.

From here we want to offer this prayer to Our Lady of Loreto and that we feel it as something of our own, of all of

us who feel part of the Mary Ward family.

The author of the prayer is Marcos Aguilar Liso.

FRANCISCO DE PAULA
SUÁREZ, DIRECTOR OF
IRLANDESAS LORETO



In our school we have a special devotion to the precious image of Our Lady of Loreto and this year a prayer has been made to her.

MW

Irlandesas Loreto

PRAYER TO OUR LADY OF LORETO

Mother of Loreto, protector of our schools and homes,
pour out your Holy Blessing upon all.

Like our Venerable Mary Ward,
may we always seek your home,
which is hope, embrace, refuge
and the drive to go out and work for a better world

May we know how to listen to the Word that the Lord
has for each person.

Help us to respond with your courage to say "yes",
being committed to the needs of the world.

Teach us, Mother of Loreto, to look at life
with Faith, Hope and Love.

Move us, with the Joy of the Risen One,
to allow ourselves to be impelled by His Spirit,
and to live with Justice, Truth and Freedom.

Mother of Loreto, Mother of God,
may we never leave your side.

Amen

Haz el
bien
y hazlo
bien
María Loreto



An unexpected visit

Last November we had an unexpected visit. A group of past pupils from Ireland came to visit the "Irlandesas" sisters at El Soto School. We were surprised to discover that among them was a relative of M. Stainslaus Murphy, a great-niece! All of them were full of energy and vitality to know something more about our common history, our origins and something more about our present reality. They knew about our arrival in Spain from Ireland and, above all, they were delighted to know that many of them are former students of our schools here in Spain. We had a good time sharing what they had seen on their whirlwind tour of Madrid and also Avila. They were amazed not to find it as cold as they had expected and above all at the warm welcome that some of us had given them. Here in the photo you can see the large group we had gathered and of course, next to the statue of Mary Ward who was the one who united us all.



Macarena on her way to Zambia

In response to a request from Carmel Swords, leader of the Institute, Macarena Fernández de Bobadilla is to spend six months in the IBVM mission in Zambia, until mid-July.

As Carmel said in her letter to the Spanish province, "Your generous response means that Elizabeth and Pat will be able to have three months off each. There are only two there and the work is demanding". They are grateful to the Spanish province for making this much needed rest possible.

IBVM's presence in Zambia began in March 2006, when two sisters from South Africa, Elizabeth Donnan and Pat Hanvey, started a new foundation in the Diocese of Mongu. They established their home on the banks of the mighty Zambezi River in Lukulu, the country's capital. From there, they work in grassroots development, primary health care support programmes, community schools, education and catechesis. In 2020, we were invited to reopen a Nursing Hospital for the needs of the local population in Lukulu, a collaborative project between IBVM, the Diocese of Mongu and the Zambian government.



IBVM and CJ Spain online meeting

On the 19th of November, the IBVM and Congregation of Jesus communities of Spain gathered online to share and seek inspiration for the spiritual connection between body, mind and responsibility towards our earth.

Through this message, we want to foster individual and collective awareness, promoting the importance of self-care, self-love and action for the common good. Together we strive to spark meaningful conversations and concrete actions that reflect the call for global harmony, thus contributing to the flourishing of humanity and the healing of our shared planet earth.



Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the MW E.F.

On 25 November 2023 the board of trustees of the **Mary Ward Educational Foundation** and the director of the Foundation, Teresa Clemente, met at Irlandesas Madrid. The meetings are usually by videoconference but we feel it is important to get to know all the schools and we will meet once a year in person, each year in a different school.

We were warmly welcomed by the IBVM community and by the school principal, Beatriz López Quesada.

We continue to strengthen our journey together, very grateful for the availability and dedication of each of the members of the board of trustees.



Christpoly, a game to discover the real Christmas, has arrived in the schools of the Mary Ward Educational Foundation.



A very special Advent

Last Christmas, or rather Advent, came to our schools in a very special way called Christpoly.

The operation and design of the game is based on the popular game "Monopoly", but with some very significant differences that allow us to load it with meaning.

The background of the game is to achieve the values of Advent and Christmas through the characters that accompany the birth of Jesus: the shepherds, the portal of Bethlehem, the star, the Magi, the Holy Family... Our pupils were winning hearts (love) with which they were able to achieve values such as humility, joy, hope and courage. And so, little by little, they prepared

their hearts for the birth of Jesus.

In addition, there were some special squares, such as the questions (with which we discover some curiosities of Advent), Herod's Castle (which makes us lose our turn) or the Star Electric Company (with which we help an opponent to advance 2 squares).

Some schools have even turned their corridors and doors into a part of this game!

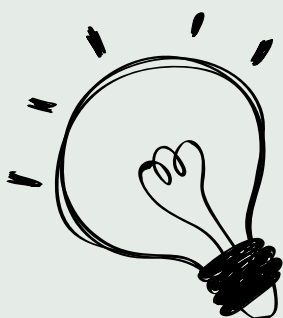
We were very happy to celebrate this Advent in a different way, with the joy of receiving Jesus and the hopeful expectation that, for another year, the Child Jesus was born surrounded by all our love.

ALEJANDRO DELGADO, COORDINADOR DE COMUNICACIÓN INSTITUCIONAL FEMW




GET CONNECTED TO CONECTA

If you would like to collaborate with the Conecta newsletter by writing, sending some photographs, suggesting a topic, or telling us something interesting to share, please contact us!

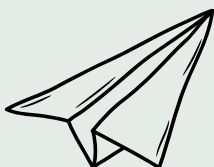


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