

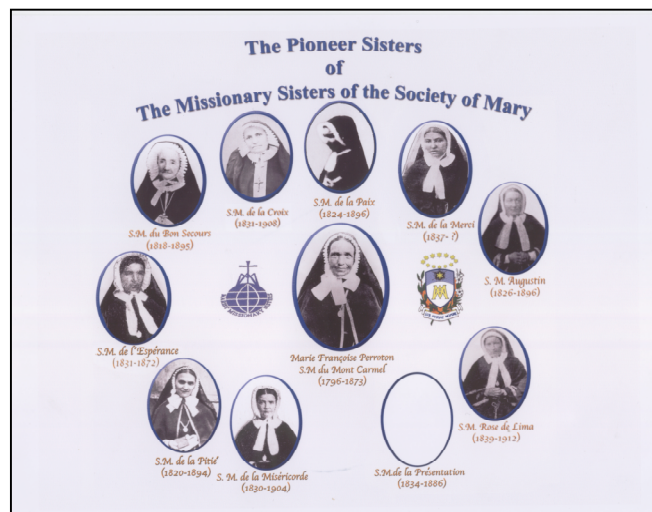
SMSM Beginnings

Unlike most religious congregations, Marist Missionary Sisters do not claim any founder or foundress except, perhaps, that of Our Lady herself. Rather, we claim eleven Pioneers, exceptional women who went out on mission in a way that was unheard of for women of their times. Our Pioneers began their missionary efforts in affiliation with the Society of Mary. This Society can trace its beginnings to an inspiration of several seminarians in France in 1816. They felt called to work towards the establishment of a religious group whose gift to the Church would be to bring the presence of Mary into contemporary society. Twenty years later the Church officially recognized the Society of Mary as a religious group of priests and Brothers. The desire of the early Marists was that the Society would include sisters and a lay branch.



At the time of its recognition as a congregation in 1836, the Society of Mary was given the responsibility to evangelize the islands of Oceania and four Marist priests set out for the Pacific. A few years after the martyrdom of St. Peter Chanel (Marist) in 1841, the people on the island of Futuna became Catholic. It was a letter from two women of the Island of Wallis asking for someone to come and help them and their children to develop as good Christians that inspired our first Pioneer, Marie-Françoise Perroton, to leave

France and travel to the Pacific. As Marie-Françoise Perroton stepped aboard a trading vessel headed for the Pacific in 1845 at the age of 49, she took the first step towards the establishment of the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (smsm). Her great desire was to be missionary, happy to be associated with the Society of Mary and perhaps eventually she would become a religious. Marie-



Françoise arrived in the Island of Wallis in 1846 and served the people there for some years before going to a nearby island to continue her ministry. After twelve years in Oceania, she rejoiced in the day when other women from France joined her. Between 1857 and 1860, ten other women joined Marie-Françoise as missionaries in Wallis, Futuna, New Caledonia and Samoa. It is these eleven women, our Pioneer sisters, who were there at our origins. Although our Pioneers were lay women, their desire to be missionary, Marist and religious was evident. They were genuine missionaries who lived and worked very closely with the people, giving of themselves constantly. At the outset of their journeys, these women were inducted into the *Third Order of Mary for the Missions of Oceania* and considered themselves to be truly Marist. They considered their vow of obedience to the bishop of the vicariate in which they lived and the religious rule that they followed (which included all the spiritual exercises for religious) to be the seed of their religious consecration. Women from the islands of the Pacific joined our Pioneers in the early years of their missionary activity. And, over time, women from many other countries followed in their footsteps. After years of development and being held together as a loose affiliation of missionary women, our congregation finally received official Church recognition in 1931 and became known as the *Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary*. It was then that the movement launched by Marie Françoise-Perroton came into its own.



Today, the Marist Family consists of various Marist lay groups around the world and four religious congregations: *The Society of Mary (the Marist Fathers and Brothers)*, *The Congregation of Mary (the Marist Sisters)*, *The Marist Brothers of the Schools (the Marist Teaching Brothers)*, *The Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (Marist Missionary Sisters)*.