

URSULINE SISTERS OF TILDONK

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History

The Ursulines of Tildonk were founded in the context of historical events occurring at the end of the 18th century. The French Revolution, which began in France in 1789, had serious consequences for religious communities and for the Church in Belgium and in the Netherlands. Many churches were closed, most convents were

plundered and destroyed, and religious and priests were persecuted. The congregation's founder, John Lambertz, was born during this period.

John Cornelius Lambertz was born in Hoogstraten in 1785. He was the eighth of nine children. During his childhood, he experienced the effects of the French Revolution, such as people attending Mass secretly.

Immediately after his ordination in 1812, the young priest was assigned to the parish in Tildonk, a small village northeast of Brussels.

In the beginning of the 19th century, several religious congregations tried to reopen their schools, but these were mostly in the cities, and only for boys and for the rich. Pastor Lambertz saw the need for educating girls who had no means of education, literacy, or catechesis during that period. He deeply longed to do something for them. He talked about this with other priests, prayed much and offered penance for this intention. And God answered him.

One day, a young lady, Anna-Marie Van Groederbeek, then 26 years of age, was sent by her confessor to Father Lambertz. She spoke to him about her wish to enter a convent, but since she did not speak French, she could not be accepted in any convent. She proposed to help the pastor begin a school.

The pastor's servant, Maria Van Ackerbrouck, 27 years old, had often spoken about her desire to become a nun. She could help with household chores. And the two women could live a sort of religious life together. When another young lady who lived in Tildonk, Catharina Van den Schriek, 26 years of age, heard of this initiative, she asked to join the other two.

On April 30, 1818, the feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, the three young women were accompanied by their mothers to the parish. They began a ten-day retreat under the guidance of Pastor Lambertz, and on Pentecost Sunday they offered themselves to the Lord.

They lived in the parish house as religious, and their pastor named them "Daughters of Saint Ursula".



This is how the Ursulines of Tildonk began.

However, King William of Holland intervened when the young community undertook to build a school and a chapel. The king ordered the then-curé (parish priest), Pastor John Lambertz, to stop the building process and disperse the sisters to their family homes. On March 20, 1823, the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, the pastor received permission from King William to continue building the school and the chapel. He further gave permission to reassemble the sisters as a lay association.

On March 4, 1825, twelve sisters pronounced their first vows. On March 13 the first superior was elected, Sister Félicité Toubeau.

On May 1, 1832, the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Ursuline Sisters of Bordeaux, modified and adapted according to the times and local needs by Archbishop Engelbert Sterckx and the pastor, were accepted by the sisters. On the same day, eighteen of them pronounced their final vows in Tildonk.

Now that the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk had been approved, the pastor could send the sisters to other parishes where priests desired to open schools for the education of girls.

Since the beginning of his priesthood, Pastor Lambertz had cared for the Christian formation of youth. He was eager to advocate for the education of girls, fostering the knowledge and love of God among girls and children. Did not St. Angela do the same?

From 1832 on, after the Independence of Belgium, Pastor Lambertz founded many convents, not only in Belgium, but also in the Netherlands and in Germany. From these countries Ursulines went to South Africa and to Indonesia. In 35 years, 42 convents were founded.

Several foundations made by Pastor Lambertz of Tildonk later chose to join the Ursulines of the Roman Union as the Provinces of the Netherlands, England, Indonesia, South Africa and Belgium.

Ten communities were founded in the Netherlands : Venray, Sittard, Uden, Posterholt, Grubbenvorst, Breust-Eisden, Roermond, Kerkrade, Maastricht and Echt. They can be considered the basis of the Roman Union Province of the Netherlands.

The sisters who were sent from Tildonk to London in 1851, and who, after many difficulties, purchased a house in Upton, built the foundation of the Roman Union Province of England.

In 1855, Pastor Lambertz sent five sisters from Sittard and Maaseik to the area around Batavia, a town in Indonesia. (One of them died just after her arrival). Two years later, a group of nine sisters was added; they came from six different convents in Belgium and the Netherlands. The first house was outside Batavia in Noordwyck, the second house in Weltevreden and the third house in Sourabaya. This was the beginning of the Roman Union Province of Indonesia. Pastor Lambertz died in 1869.

In 1895 five sisters from Sittard and one from Upton began a mission in Transvaal in South Africa. Therefore, two houses founded by the pastor gave life to the Roman Union Province of South Africa. In 1905 the house of Zaventem joined the Roman Union Province of Belgium.

The Ursulines of Tildonk have, therefore, contributed to forming a big family of Ursulines.

The sisters of the Ursuline Convent in Tildonk also showed their love and openness by heartily welcoming different groups of French refugees. In 1901, 112 years after the French Revolution, the French Parliament voted a 'Law of Association' which gave the



signal for persecuting religious and priests. The French sisters were expelled from their houses, their institutions were closed, and their properties were confiscated. The first four Ursuline refugees who arrived in Tildonk from France in August 1901 came from Nuits St. George. In October and November, three more arrived from the same convent belonging to the Ursulines of the Congregation of Paris.

In 1904 new groups of Ursuline sisters came as refugees

On July 25	nine Ursulines from Caen
On August 6	seven Ursulines from Quintin
On August 24	seven Ursulines from Tulle
On December 24	an Ursuline from Havre
Several years later	an Ursuline from Auch

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the Ursulines of Tildonk have also sent their members to far-off countries.

In 1903 four left Tildonk for Ranchi, India, at that time, Bengal State. Now there are more than 805 Ursulines of Tildonk in 90 convents in India.

In 1914 they sailed for Canada, and in 1924 they went to the United States. Now there are seven sisters in Canada and forty-nine in the United States.

In 1955 the first Ursulines from Tildonk arrived in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. This was five years before the colony became independent of Belgium. There are fifty-two sisters in DR Congo at present.

In 2006 the Ursulines of Tildonk began a mission in Guyana, South America; four sisters presently minister there.

Today

Since 1978 the Congregation of Tildonk has had an International Congregational Government, composed of members from the various Provinces. With a view to fostering the internationality of the congregation, the 1978 General Chapter mandated the General Government to apply for Pontifical Status, which was granted on October 18, 1982. The General Constitutions and Directives, Fullness in the Life of Christ, were approved on September 15, 1983, the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Inspired by the life and charism of Angela Merici, foundress of the Ursuline tradition, and of our founder, John Lambertz, we are committed to the mission of the universal Church. Our specific mission is to make God known and loved by responding to the needs of the local Church wherever we are. In responding to these needs, our congregation accepts a diversity of ministries while it gives priority to education in its broadest sense.

The 1996 General Chapter mandated that the Indian Province be divided because of the large number of sisters and great distances between houses. Thus, three provinces and a district were created in 1997.

Vocations are flourishing in India and gradually increasing in the Vice-Province of DR Congo.

Countries where the congregation is present

BELGIUM - 64



CANADA	-	7
D R CONGO	-	52
INDIA	-	805
UNITED STATES	-	49
GUYANA	-	4
GENERALATE	-	5

Links

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