



extend a hand  
we wish to extend a hand  
a spirit of commitment  
focused towards commitment  
Christian humanistic education  
offering a Christian humanistic education

# educational project

## Company of Mary Our Lady

Proyecto Educativo Orden de la Compañía de María Nuestra Señora

Projet Éducatif Ordre de la Compagnie de Marie Notre-Dame

Progetto Educativo Ordine della Compagnia di Maria Nostra Signora

Projeto Educativo Ordem da Companhia de Maria Nossa Senhora

教育プロジェクト 聖マリア修道女会

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## Presentation

### EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

1. An Educational Project which combines tradition and newness in order to continue “extending our hand”
2. A committed way of looking at reality re-creates and contextualises our response
3. Our own distinct educational proposal
  - 3.1. Components that make it valuable
    - A Christian humanist education
    - A quality education
    - An education for solidarity, social responsibility and development
    - An education that goes beyond the classroom and what is stipulated
    - An education carried out with others
    - An education offered as a service through men and women educators
  - 3.2. Philosophical-educational principles which mark our identity
    - “Not everyone wears the same size shoe”
    - “A relationship which accompanies, integrates and fosters growth”
    - “Formation of well-balanced minds not full heads”
    - “To educate in life and for life”
    - “To educate in community with a common Project”
    - “Women must save women”
    - “Do not let the flame be extinguished”
4. Traditions which mark our identity
  - Feast of the Presentation of the Child Mary
  - Feast of St. Jeanne de Lestonnac

# presentation

The formulation of a common Company of Mary Educational Project, with the participation of different groups from all the Provinces and Delegations, marks a step forward in our journey together as Universal Company in which, as religious and laity, we are determined: "to unite our strength for the magis of our mission".

To have this common framework, which puts the Educational Project of Jeanne de Lestonnac into the language of today and expresses the identity of the Company of Mary Educational Institutions, roots us and links us to a shared history. Thus it commits us to continue building the future together.

To educate in this increasingly plural world, demands that in our local context we live with openness to the universal. In this way the potential of each reality can radiate to others and enable us to respond to the needs of this ever more inter-connected and global world.

Educating today presents us with the challenge of interdependence. It requires that we shorten and bridge distances, interact, contribute our part and journey together, seeking common points of support.

This common Educational Project interlinks us and unites us to continue creatively offering an evangelising education according to the Charism of Jeanne de Lestonnac. To embody it and make it specific in each context is the responsibility of all of us. Mary Our Lady, synthesis of our identity, is our companion on the way.

*Beatriz Acosta Mesa odn  
and General Team*

*Rome, 2nd February de 2011*

# origin



odn Bordeaux

The first "Meeting for Directors and Management of Centres of Formal Education", Mexico 2007, highlighted the need to "formulate a common Educational Project, universal in character, containing the pedagogical lines of the Company and contextualized in the here and now".

Later on, the XVI General Chapter, Rome 2009, expressed the commitment to "structure a plan of formation and study in the identity, spirituality and educational project of the Company of Mary" for "religious and laity".

This Educational Project is a response to that need and commitment.

To elaborate it, a first draft Document was prepared, taking as a starting point the Educational Projects which had already been developed in different contexts, reflections we have carried out in recent years and the conclusions of the "II Meeting for Directors and Management of Centres of Formal Education", Medellin 2010. This Document was studied and worked on by different groups in each Province and Delegation.

With all the different suggestions and input, a second Document was prepared, which was presented at the "Meeting for Liaisons of the Bordeaux Project", Valle de Bravo, Mexico January 2011. At this meeting there was further reflection and work on the Document until the final redaction was produced.

The fruit of this joint effort was presented to the General Team so that, with some appropriate modifications, it could be approved.

The project aims to express the principles which articulate, define and mark what is specific to the Project of the Company of Mary. The concrete way of applying these principles will be provided by each reality.

*Co-ordinating Team of the Bordeaux Project*



Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady

# educational project

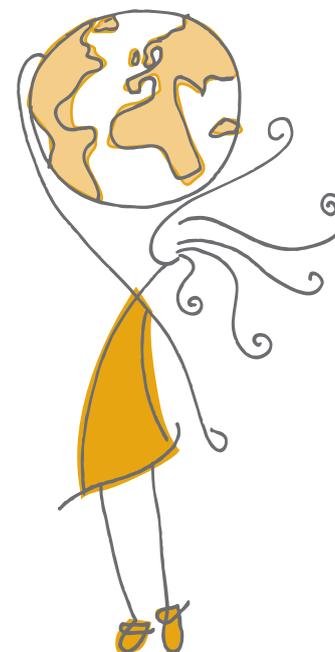
1. The Company of Mary, true to its origins, places at the service of society and the Church an educational legacy acquired over more than 400 years of existence. In dialogue with reality, it has been constantly developing and updating its educational and pedagogical work at each historical moment.

Today it is present in four continents: Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia. The Educational Institutions of the Company of Mary, inspired in the charism of St. Jeanne de Lestonnac, have as their MISSION:

*To offer a Christian humanist education which, from the perspective of the dialogue between faith-justice, faith-culture, faith-science and technology, has an impact on the integral formation of persons and on the transformation of society<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> "II Meeting for Directors and Management of Centres of Formal Education", Medellin (Colombia), July 2010.

“ Provide a  
Christian  
Humanistic  
Education



“ “ *An appropriate response for each time and place*

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## An Educational Project which combines tradition and newness in order to continue "extending our hand"<sup>2</sup>

2. The Company of Mary Our Lady was the first female apostolic religious Order dedicated to teaching. Ratified by the Church in 1607, it exists to educate girls and endow them with the moral and intellectual tools that will help them bear witness to their Catholic faith and their own value as women, thus having an impact on families and contributing to the transformation of society.

Jeanne de Lestonnac, the Foundress, from her own experience of salvation, was able to express in an *Educational Project* God's invitation to offer her hands to participate in his salvific mission. The authenticity of this Project is expressed in the harmonious articulation of her rich personal experiences with the diversity of elements contributed by the era: the humanism of Michel de Montaigne, her uncle, from whom she took philosophical and pedagogical principles, the boldness of the Calvinists in the education of women, the Ignatian tradition and some of the pedagogical methods of the Jesuits.

3. The educational intuition of Jeanne de Lestonnac has been developing throughout history in different forms. The integration of its fundamental elements with new knowledge and advances at each moment of history enables it to give an

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<sup>2</sup> History of the Order, "The Night in the Cistercians" narrates the founding experience of the Company of Mary:

*"... she saw a great number of young people about to fall into the abyss... and she understood that it was she who was to extend a hand to them."* Cf. HO., 1964, pp. 62-64.

adequate response to each “time and place”. This gives it an open and dynamic character.

Today, four centuries later, that initial Project is enriched by experience and by its inculturation in different countries and contexts. As Company of Mary, we continue to extend our hands to collaborate in the creative mission of God, offering a Christian humanist education in this pluralist world.



## A committed way of looking at reality re-creates and contextualizes our response

4. The education offered by the Company of Mary takes into account the specific characteristics of each moment of history.

Jeanne de Lestonnac entered her reality from the depth of her being, therefore she knew how to see and provide the necessary means to *act*<sup>3</sup>. Ignatius of Loyola, the great pedagogue of the experience of God and whom Jeanne de Lestonnac took as her point of reference, shows us the relation between seeing and acting: a profound way of looking at reality does not leave us indifferent in the face of the situations most in need of salvation, they touch our heart and commit us to seek ways of responding<sup>4</sup>.

5. To educate as Company of Mary demands that we understand and enter the reality of our world and its peoples in order to let ourselves be touched and affected by it. Only thus will we be able to situate ourselves with a realistic and hope-filled approach, trusting in the action of God in history and in each

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola presents to us “how the three Divine Persons look upon the round surface of the whole world” and he invites us to look around us. What we can see, if we look carefully, is a divided and contrasted reality, which speaks to us of a world of conflict and extremes. Something which does not leave the Trinity indifferent, but moves the Trinity so much that the Son is sent to enter this reality, to be incarnate, to be one among others and, from there, to transform reality. Cf. Sp. Exs. 101.

“ A holistic education that strives for a balanced development in all potential areas



person. It is an approach that seeks to transform difficulties into opportunities and places us in the multiple scenario of our times as a place for commitment.

## 3 Our own distinct educational proposal

### 3.1. The components that make it valuable<sup>5</sup>

6. The Company of Mary, at the service of society and the Church, offers a *Gospel-focused education* based on the person and message of Jesus of Nazareth. Mary Our Lady, his first disciple, gives the Company of Mary Project its own name and identity. In her person she is a fount of inspiration.

From the Christian cosmivision of the person, life and the world, which is the foundation of the education we offer, our distinct educational style emphasises the following:

- 7. A *Christian humanist education*, which embraces the ideal of becoming “new men and women in order to build a new world<sup>6</sup>, as the goal of the educational task.

The Company of Mary:

Considers that the person is the centre of educational

<sup>5</sup>The headings correspond to the “elements that give value” on the Strategic Map of the Educational Centres of the Company of Mary, which were formulated at the II Meeting for Directors and Management of Centres of Formal Education, Medellín (Colombia), July 2010. They were approved at the Meeting of the Teams of Government in Orvieto, December 2010.

<sup>6</sup>Revelations, chapter 21.

action. Hence, it offers an integral education which contributes to the harmonious development of the whole potential of a person.

Offers the means of formation for dialogue with each culture, to discover the seeds of life within it and to journey with others who seek the common good.

Accompanies growth in the faith of the members of the educational community, respecting personal freedom and other beliefs and religions. At the same time it asks for respect for its own educational offer.

- 8. *A quality education*, which seeks to be efficient in every aspect of the educational process.

Improvement is on-going. “That ...it always be done better and better”<sup>7</sup>, is what inspires our praxis and introduces the necessary dynamism and flexibility to continue fitting the response to the needs and demands of each moment in history.

Company of Mary Centres, seeking “greater service”<sup>8</sup>, are in a constant process of openness and renewal. Reflection on our practice, a process of constant evaluation and the introduction of plans for improvement are the tools that we use to make this possible.

The Company of Mary is an organization which is continually learning. On-going training of educators guarantees the quality of education.

- 9. *An education for solidarity, social responsibility and development*, which contributes to the transformation and improvement of each context.

<sup>7</sup> Foundational Documents 1605-1638, ODN 1. Rome, 1976, page 142, chpt. III, nº 1 Formula for the Classes.

<sup>8</sup> The comparative in “greater service” is a reference to the “magis” in Ignatian tradition. “Greater” in the quality of education is closely linked to a “better service”.

“ *Educators who give witness to the principles and standards they wish to instill through education*

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The education offered by the Company of Mary seeks to contribute to “public welfare”<sup>9</sup>, to collaborate in the process that should lead every society to attain a dignified life for all.

In the Company of Mary Centres we seek to articulate personal development with socialization, freedom with responsibility, personal autonomy with collaboration, personal creativity with the creation of community ties which enable people to work together on shared commitments.

We want those whom we educate to become persons who are committed to changing situations which generate poverty, injustice, the destruction of life and the planet, etc. and who are capable of getting involved in improving the world, both in realities close to home and those that are far away, by taking advantage of the resources and all that the universality of the Company of Mary makes possible<sup>10</sup>.

In order to foster education for solidarity and to support development projects, the Company of Mary has FISC, the Company of Mary International Foundation for Solidarity, as a channel to unite our efforts and as an expression of the collective commitment that we seek.

- 10. *An education that goes beyond the classroom and what is stipulated, seeking other educative opportunities which can foster an integral education and the experience of interculturality.*

The Company of Mary Centres offer a series of extracurricular activities which promote diverse practices: faith sharing, cultivation of artistic sense, capacity to

create and research, enjoyment and care of nature, sport, and contact with other realities...

Exchanges between different Company of Mary Centres to get to know different realities, to do voluntary work, to learn and perfect other languages..., as well as sharing knowledge and experience, making the best use of resources, articulating actions and projects using technological means, all help to make us feel part of a community which goes beyond its own borders<sup>11</sup>.

■ 11. *An education carried out with others*, working together and complementing each other.

The educational action of the Company of Mary is an open and plural process, nourished by a web of interpersonal relationships, structured around a common project.

Making the Educational Project a common project involves building an *educative community*, based on “union and mutual conformity... so that they may better, more efficaciously... apply themselves to the service”<sup>12</sup> commended to them. Openness, dialogue, participation, working as a group, cooperation and co-responsibility are the elements fundamental to making this possible.

Awareness of the importance of the role of the *family* in education and society makes our Centres look for ways to provide channels for participation and to maintain frequent communication with parents. They also offer opportunities of formation in accordance with our Educational Project, in order to help parents fulfil their role as the principal educators of their children and so that, with these same values, they may contribute in other personal and professional areas of their life.



<sup>9</sup> In the Formula for the Classes, Jeanne de Lestonnac refers to it as one of the aims of education. Cf. Foundational Documents, page 142, chpt. III. The good of the people, or “public welfare”, is an expression taken from the protestant schools. A text by G. Compayré, in his History of Pedagogy, developed the concept which links education to public good: “the salvation and strength of a city rest, above all, on a good education given to the citizens who are instructed, reasonable, honourable, and well educated”. Compayré, G. Histoire de la pédagogie. Paris, 1980, page. 93 and Soury Laverne, Françoise: A Pathway in Education – Jeanne de Lestonnac, 1556-1640. Rome, 1984, page 66.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. XVI General Chapter 2009. ODN, n° 17, page 29.

<sup>11</sup> XVI General Chapter, op. cit. page. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Foundational Documents: Rules of 1638, Rule 40, op. cit. page 55.

““ *An educational community of students, staff and parents where everyone has a place*

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Former students, in whatever context they may find themselves, are called to demonstrate by their lives the fundamental values they learned through the Educational Project. They are encouraged to contribute to the growth and updating of the Centres.

As Company of Mary, we collaborate with the local Church and different entities, institutions and groups which work for the common good.

- 12. *An education offered as a service through men and women educators who bear witness, by their word and life, to the values and principles we wish to inculcate*<sup>13</sup>.

A Company of Mary educator lives his/her professionalism and vocation to service in an integrated way. The mission he/she carries out gives meaning and purpose to his/her own life, hence he/she is able to be a guide and companion for the journey.

To be a Company of Mary educator is something which goes beyond a function or a task. It is, in reality, a way of embracing and transmitting life<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.2. Philosophical-educational principles characteristic of our identity

13. Throughout history, the Company of Mary has been adopting phrases which reflect the philosophy underlying Jeanne de Lestonnac's Project and which reveal its own manner of carrying out the task of education. Its durability in time shows

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<sup>13</sup> XIV General Chapter, Rome 1997: Chapter Document, nº 13, page 148.

<sup>14</sup> La Compañía de María, un proyecto de educación, 1998, page 33, nº 61.

the validity of what these expressions affirm. They evidence a legacy which has been received that it may continue to be projected in the future. These are the most significant of those expressions:

■ 14. *“Not everyone wears the same size shoe”*<sup>15</sup>

The Company of Mary seeks to provide an education fitted to the needs of each person and which nurtures the development of all of his/her potential.

Diversity is considered a value. This is expressed in our Centres which are inclusive and endeavour to offer equal opportunities, and where we affirm that being different, heterogeneous and diverse, in itself enriches us.

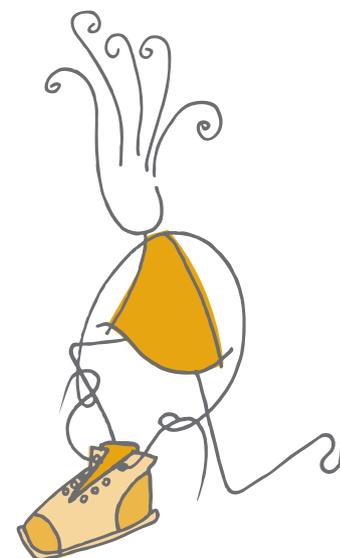
The person is the main protagonist of his/her learning process. Promotion of the development of personal criteria, cultivation of the ability to dialogue and communicate, encouragement to think differently, use of different resources to access information and knowledge - these are some elements of our personalised education.

■ 15. *“A relationship which accompanies, integrates and fosters growth”*<sup>16</sup>

To walk alongside, in a spirit of relationship and affection, pointing to the horizon and allowing the person to follow

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Foundational Documents, op. cit. page 73. Jeanne de Lestonnac takes up Michel de Montaigne’s principle: “To take into account individual differences in educative procedures”. Complete Essays, 2nd edition, March 2005, Book I chapter XXVI page 185

<sup>16</sup> The statue of St. Jeanne with the child in the Church of St. Eulalie in Bordeaux, as well as different versions of the same, which have been created over time and in different contexts, expresses this kind of educative relationship. Cf. La Compañía de María, un proyecto de educación, 1998, pages 24-25.



“ Form “heads that are well-made rather than well-filled”

his/her own path, is the approach of the Company of Mary. The educator, mediator in the learning process, accompanies the process of development and growth of each person. He/she is a close witness of this process, someone who is capable of listening and guiding. In this relationship, he/she knows how to blend “kindness with severity, sweetness with efficacy, and charity with justice, according to circumstances”<sup>17</sup>.

*Conversation*, freedom in dialogue, is a concrete means to make possible a meeting of ways and to resolve difficulties<sup>18</sup>.

#### ■ 16. “Formation of well-balanced minds not full heads”<sup>19</sup>

Education plays an important role in forming a person’s self identity. For that reason, the Company of Mary has a pedagogy which helps people to structure their ways of thinking, encourages discovery and forms them to be critical and creative.

Over and above the acquisition of content knowledge, importance is placed on the development of interior qualities (being), ability (knowing), capabilities (knowing how to do things), and motivations (wanting to do...).

<sup>17</sup> Foundational Documents, op. cit. Pages 70, 5 and 138, 6. Some of these statements are based on things said by Montaigne: “Education must be carried out with severe sweetness...” Cf. Essays, book I chapter XXVI, op. cit. page 198.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. History of the Order, 1964, page 117. Jeanne de Lestonnac takes the ideas of Michel de Montaigne concerning the importance of freedom for dialogue and correcting others without being hurtful: “I converse with great liberty and ease... No idea astonishes me; no belief hurts me, however different it may be from my own”. “We refuse to let ourselves be criticised, when we should seek it and also do it, particularly in conversation, not teaching.” Cf. Essays, book III chapter VIII, op. cit. page 892.

<sup>19</sup> Jeanne de Lestonnac took up the idea contained in these words of Michel de Montaigne. Cf. Essays, book I chapter XVI, op. cit. page 185.

Formation of reflective and open thought is encouraged, and a mentality of solidarity is fostered.

The integral development of a person requires that we link humanist wisdom with scientific and technological knowledge, the content of diverse areas of knowledge with the discovery of the ethical dimension and the person's own culture with the richness encompassed in different cultures.

■ 17. *"To educate in life and for life"*<sup>20</sup>

Company of Mary Centres employ a methodology which combines knowledge, capabilities and attitudes, so that each person may integrate them, relate them to and apply them in different situations and contexts in daily life.

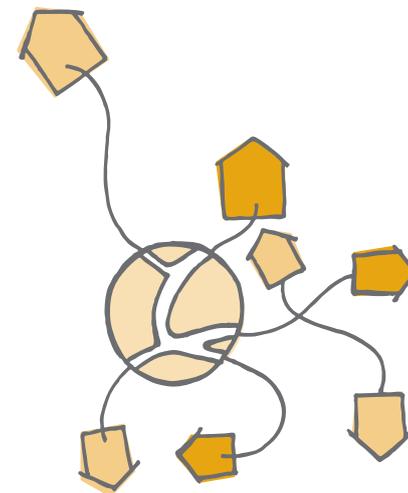
It prepares people to face the newsituations and challenges which arise with ethical principles and Gospel values. This involves living in a dynamic of constant learning.

Education in "solid virtues"<sup>21</sup>, in values that are incarnated and which become the back-bone of a person, enables him/her to go out of him/herself and undertake vital commitments to build a more human world.

Training in discernment is the pedagogical and spiritual pathway to acquire sound judgement and the ability to make decisions with interior freedom. It is a sign of an integral and integrating education.

■ 18. *"To educate in community with a common Project"*<sup>22</sup>

The Educational Project of the Company of Mary requires a community of educators, where each of the members has a role to play and a specific contribution to make.

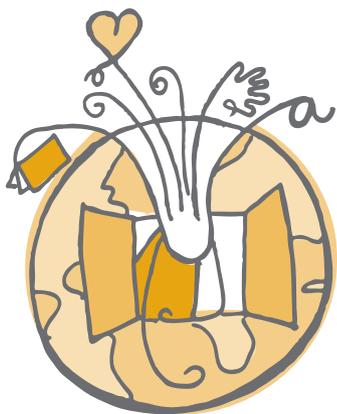


<sup>20</sup> Jeanne de Lestonnac took up this expression of Michel de Montaigne.

<sup>21</sup> Jeanne de Lestonnac used this expression frequently. Again we see the influence of Montaigne: "There is nothing more beautiful and legitimate than to act well and correctly in the manner of human beings. This is virtue." Essays, book III chapter XIII, op. cit. page 1052.

<sup>22</sup> From the beginning Jeanne de Lestonnac had other companions with her to carry out the Project: "Let us make haste to unite our strengths..." H.O. op. cit. pages 71-72.

“ Take care of  
the flame and  
extend its light



Coherence between the action of the Educational Community and the principles and values of the Project should be a sign of a way and style of life that springs from the Gospel and vouches for the authenticity of the faith which is proffered.

Team work, helpful relationships and responsible involvement on the part of everyone who carries out the task of education, shows that education is the work of all. One person alone does not educate, but rather an environment<sup>23</sup>.

■ 19. *“Women must save women”*<sup>24</sup>

In the education which it offers, the Company of Mary takes the perspective of gender into account. From a clear option for women, it seeks to accompany women in the affirmation of their identity and development of their potential, which enables them to fulfil the role that corresponds to them in the transformation of society.

In Company of Mary Centres, the equality and complementarity of the sexes is fostered and educated, as a way of re-focusing the mechanisms that transmit traditional models which subordinate the woman to the man.

To opt for women commits us to defend the dignity and rights of women<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. La Compañía de María, un proyecto de educación, op. cit. pages 49-50, nº 102-103.

<sup>24</sup> H.O. op. cit. page 77.

<sup>25</sup> XVI General Chapter, op.cit. page 29, nº3.

■ 20. *“Do not allow the flame to be extinguished”*<sup>26</sup>

The Centres of the Company of Mary offer the necessary means so that the encounter between each person and God who dwells in him/her may take place.

Listening and openness to others, experience of solitude and silence, the practice of admiration and contemplation, the possibility of thinking and questioning, the encounter with the vulnerability, limitations and needs of those around us – these are some of the experiences which foster openness to transcendence and nurture the religious dimension. *“Art, Humanism and Spirituality”* (AHS) is a Company of Mary programme which cultivates interiority, promotes commitment and encourages artistic expression as a universal means of expression.

To seek and find God in life, in the world, in each day, in living the present moment to the full, harmoniously combining contemplation and action, is what defines the spirituality of the Company of Mary<sup>27</sup>.

Conscious that faith is a gift, to educate for transcendence is a call to be witnesses and signs, both personally and collectively, of the God of Jesus<sup>28</sup>. It commits us to “take care of the flame” and to share and spread this light.

<sup>26</sup> This is the invitation God made to Jeanne de Lestonnac in her youth: “Be careful, my child, that the fire, which I have enkindled in your heart be not extinguished so that it may move you to serve me ardently.” H.O. op. cit. page 47.

<sup>27</sup> “To find God in all things” and “contemplation in action” are expressions used in Ignatian Spirituality. They express a concrete way of relating to God: His love of all created things invites us to discover all that exists as a place of encounter with Him, to feel ourselves as instruments in His hands and to collaborate actively in His creative mission. Cf. Sp. Exs. n° 23.

<sup>28</sup> XVI General Chapter, op. cit. page 29.



## Traditions which mark our identity

“ Mary, model and point of reference

### 21. Feast of the Presentation of the Child Mary

To commemorate this tradition every 21<sup>st</sup> November directs us to Mary. Jeanne de Lestonnac wanted to consecrate the pupils to her and she *“encouraged them to make their own personal consecration in homage of their heavenly Mother, promising to imitate her in the state to which God would call them”*<sup>29</sup>. In this way she emphasised that Mary is our model and frame of reference, a companion who is by our side and who shows us how to live and behave.

This feast, which is celebrated in different ways special to each context, has a common significance: the presence of Mary Our Lady in our projects.

### 22. Feast of St. Jeanne de Lestonnac

On 15th May, 1949, the Church set its seal of approval on the life and Educational Project of Jeanne de Lestonnac by declaring her a Saint. Every year on this day we celebrate the Feast of St. Jeanne de Lestonnac, in recognition of her and all those who have made and continue to make this specific style of education possible in different countries of the world.

*“To extend our hand”  
educationally, in the style of Jeanne de Lestonnac,  
gives meaning and relevance to the Company of Mary  
Institutions*

<sup>29</sup>H.O. op. cit. page 122



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