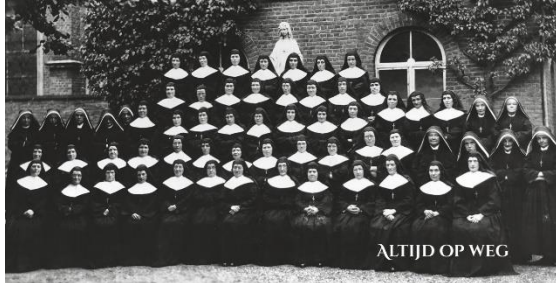


Dear Sisters and Associates/Companions -- Today, on this second week (January 22) of our 2024 Global Coordinating Group calendar, we are invited *to listen to the heart of the world* and hold in our prayers the Sisters and Associates serving in **Belgium** as well as all the people of that nation.

Three Congregations – the **Institut de Souers de Saint Joseph, Chambéry, and Lyon** -- are present in Belgium serving in education, pastoral care and various social activities. The Institut de Souers de



Saint Joseph has created a very interesting [website](#) and public exhibit in Belgium (see image left) which provides an historical overview of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the country. The exhibit begins in September 1895 when four sisters disembarked the train in the small station of Munsterbilzen (in the northeast). As noted in the history section of the website: upon their arrival, the Sisters “immediately went full stream

ahead for their dual missions: to provide primary education for girls and to care for mentally ill women in a psychiatric centre, which they had yet to set-up themselves...”. Another interesting history is the founding of the Lyon mission in Belgium. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Bourg grew out of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Lyon which had been disbanded during the French Revolution. In 1819 a daughter house was established in Bourg, which became an independent congregation in 1823. By 1962, the Bourg Congregation had six provinces, three in Europe: Bourg, Switzerland and Belgium, and three in the United States. In 1996 the Bourg congregation re-joined the founding congregation of Lyon, as part of the latter's European Province.



Country Background: ‘Burgundy’ and ‘Flanders’ were the first two common names used for the Burgundian Netherlands which was the predecessor of modern Belgium. Historically, the Belgium revolution (1889-90) eventually culminated in the establishment of The Provisional Government which issued a Declaration of Independence on 4 October 1830 – thus creating modern-day Belgium. Today, Belgium’s population (11.6million-2024) is comprised of two main linguistic groups: the Dutch-speaking, mostly Flemish community (approximately 59 percent of the population), and the French-speaking community (about 40 percent). Moreover, the country is divided into three highly autonomous regions: Flanders in the north, Wallonia in the south, and the Brussels-Capital Region. Belgium is one of the six founding countries of the European Union and hosts the official seats of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and the European Council as well as a seat of the European Parliament in the country's capital, Brussels. In addition, Brussels hosts several of the EU's official seats as well as the headquarters of many major international organizations such as NATO. By most standards, Belgium is a developed country with an advanced high-income economy. It has a high standard of living, quality of life, healthcare, education, and is categorized as "very high" in the Human Development Index. It also ranks as one of the safest countries in the world. With that said, [Amnesty International](#) has reported several concerns around the treatment of asylum seekers, structural discrimination against non-nations and ethnic minorities, and other human rights concerns. (Sources: Amnesty International, CSJ International Centre website, Human Development Index, Institut de Souers de Saint Joseph website, Lyon Congregation website, United Nations, Wikipedia, Worldometer)



United in prayer, the Global Joseph Family, 7850 Sisters, 5700 Associates, 34 Agrégées in 45 countries, listening to the heart of the world.