

# Our Foundation

## [Our IJ Story](#)

### [Origins and life of the Institute in France 1662 – 1852](#)

Our story begins in 17th century France with a young priest, Nicolas Barre, and two young women, Francoise Duval and Margueritte Lestocq. Moved with compassion for those living in great deprivation and who knew little about God, he sought ways of guiding them towards meaning and direction in their lives. [... read more](#)

### [Our History continues from 1852...](#)

Our story in Singapore starts with Fr Beurel's request to the IJ Superior General, Mother de Faudoas to start a girls' school in [Singapore](#). The first five French sisters set sail for Singapore but landed in Penang. Mother Mathilde with some sisters then came to Singapore.

Long after the introduction of the Gospel at St Francis Xavier's visit to Japan in 1549, the persecution of Christians, the ban of all foreigners, another wave of persecution, did the sisters eventually arrive in [Japan](#) in 1872.

Two attempts to begin a mission in [Thailand](#) saw an aborted expedition from France (to include some IJ sisters) to Siam. Another mission from 18885 to 1907 was short-lived, due to cholera outbreaks and decreasing numbers of pupils. Eventually in 1957, the IJ sisters from Ipoh, Malaya started the present Thai community.

In the mid 1980s, a Japanese sister visited Negros, a very deprived area in the [Philippines](#). Touched by the plight of the poor children, she went back to Japan, organised a team of both religious sisters and lay people to respond to the needs of the children and their families. This same type of ministry is continued by Sr Neriza, a Filipina IJ sister, since 2010, after her return from mission in Nigeria.



Sr Neriza with one of her students

## Our Story continues...

For the past three hundred years or more we, the Infant Jesus Sisters, are still continuing to find ways of responding creatively and courageously to our original inspiration.

In the course of our history, this has led us to many needy areas in our world wherever human beings are without access to the ordinary means of human development, unable to express themselves, without knowledge of God's love for them or unable to find meaning in life.

From the beginning, involvement in schools was seen as one of the most effective means of helping people develop humanly and spiritually. These schools, both academic and practical, were always characterised by a concern for those who were disadvantaged in any way.

However, our Sisters also sought to respond to people's needs by a variety of other means, such as going out to people in their surroundings, especially young women who had lost direction in their lives, being involved in parish catechesis, reaching out to those whose lives were generally regarded as valueless, including the sick and abandoned, offering retreats and prayer experiences which would help people grow in the knowledge and love of God.

Whatever means were used, emphasis was given to formation of the people who could then continue the work and to whatever would enable each one to become more free and responsible for their future.

Our story develops: The words "Go out to the whole world...", echoing in the hearts of many Sisters, led them to set out for other shores in a spirit of total trust in the God who says: "I will be with you".

Having begun in France (1662), our Sisters were led by the Spirit to Malaysia and Singapore. Following an adventurous journey around the Cape of Good Hope, they set foot in Asian soil in 1854.

From there foundations were made in Japan (1872), England (1892) and Ireland (1909). In the meantime our Sisters also went to Spain (1860) and Italy (1905). Thailand followed in 1957. Some seeds sown by our Sisters in China, California and Australia are now being reaped by others. In more recent years we have been seeking to respond to calls from Peru (1967), Cameroon (1968), Nigeria (1983) and Bolivia (1992).

Already our African and Peruvian Sisters are taking up the challenge in their own countries. At the same time we are reaching out to people in the Philippines, Laos, Romania and the Czech Republic.

Today, as a group of women within the Church, being multi-cultural and multi-racial is very enriching for us. In many of our meetings, East meets West and North and South sit down together. This gives an opportunity to bear witness to the universality of the Kingdom of God where people of every race, nation and mentality are gathered. "Union of heart, mind and mission" is not something we want to live only among ourselves but it is something we wish to share with all those who, whatever their faith, are searching to live by the same values in today's society.

The wisdom gleaned from 300 years of tradition is a great source of strength for us as we ask ourselves the question: what kind of meaningful response is called for in today's world, where God's work is not measured by statistics?

The Institute which has its origin in the heart of God, still seeks to remain close to the desires of God's heart today.

We are continually being invited to go down to the potter's house (jer 18:1) and allow the Lord to shape our lives in accordance with his desires for us. This spirit was echoed by Nicolas Barre when he wrote: "I desire only... what you desire and as you desire it".

The potter has been shaping the "vessel" over the centuries, restoring it, remodelling it, adjusting it to the new environment, to the changes that have always taken place or are still taking place, even more rapidly, in our world, in our universe.



We seek to open our hearts to the new global consciousness that is emerging everywhere. We try to re-read the Gospel in the light of a new awareness of the universe and of God's action in our world today. In an attitude of contemplative listening, we seek to draw water from the well of God's Word in order to discover our way of entering the Mystery of the Incarnation in the world of our time.

We know that Jesus is particularly concerned about people who are poor, oppressed, alienated, despised, underprivileged. Choosing to follow in all His ways, we are led today to reach out to all those who have not come to know the love of God, who live on the margins and who struggle to find meaning in life. Believing in God's love and care for each human person, we focus on finding ways of enabling each one to reach her or his full potential and become a fuller expression of God's creation.

Our spirituality invites us to identify with Jesus who left heaven - the home of the blessed, and came down to earth - where we all struggle with the limitations of human nature.

As we become more aware of our nothingness and total dependence on the God who saves, we find the courage to forge new ways of being in our world. This courage brings us onto the streets, into the barrios and villages, closer to those on the fringes of large urban developments; to places where the children have been abused, rejected or made homeless; to the youth who seek direction in life; to parents who struggle with relationships and are anxious about the future; to those whose voices are not heard and whose dignity is not respected: women, elderly, migrants, prisoners, refugees...

We go in partnership with our lay brothers and sisters. Together we desire to say "no" to dehumanising situations and "yes" to God-in-the-world. We go because these people are genuinely seeking to find God in their lives, even if for many God is still the "unknown". Together we come to know the God of love and compassion, described by Nicolas Barre in his Spiritual Canticle:

"God of all depth and mystery,  
Who dwells in the darkness  
of light inaccessible,

Before whom all creation silent falls,  
The soul, in its unknowing, sees only by  
the light of faith".