



ST. COLETTE CHURCH

In 1970, St. Colette was designated as the patron saint of the new parish, St. Colette, of Livonia, Michigan by the Archdiocese of Detroit. Rev. Joseph Ferens was named founding pastor.

Rev. Ferens served as pastor until his retirement in 1994 and was succeeded by Rev. Henry Roodbeen.

St. Colette Church of Livonia celebrates its 25th anniversary during the year 1995.

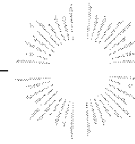


St. Colette of Corbie, France is taken from the "Short Life of St. Coletta", written by Sister Mary Theodore Hegeman, O.S.F., adapted from *Walled in Light: St. Colette*, by Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., of the Poor Clare Monastery of Our Lady of Quadalupe, 809 Nineteenth Street, Roswell, New Mexico 88201, with permission of the publisher: Franciscan Press, 1800 College Ave, Quincey, Illinois 62301-2699

Walled In Light: St. Colette is recommended reading to those interested in a more detailed account of St. Colette's life.

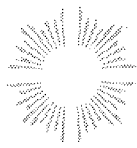
In addition to the Monastere de Ste. Clair in Poligny, France, there are ten monasteries in the United States originating from St. Colette's early foundation in Ghent.

These Colettine Poor Clare houses of primitive observance are located in Alexandria, Virginia; Aptos, California; Belleville, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Kokomo, Indiana; Los Altos, California; Newport News, Virginia; Rockford, Illinois; Roswell, New Mexico; Santa Barbara, California.



ST. COLETTE
OF CORBIE, FRANCE
1381-1447





EARLY LIFE

Colette Boellet was a spiritual genius while being completely lovable!

In 1380 Colette's mother, Margaret Boellet, was 59 years old and her husband, Robert, a few years older. Childless, they prayed to St. Nicholas for a son to be called Nicholas, but on January 10, 1381, a baby daughter was born. They named her "Nicoletta!"

The good people of Corbie agreed with the joyful parents in regarding the child's conception and birth as a miracle. Because of her aging parents, St. Colette has become a patron of childless couples.

At the age of three, little Nicoletta would trot along beside her carpenter father as he went to work at the Benedictine Abbey, the pride of the people of Corbie who were ruled by the Lord Abbot.

The sweet faced, affectionate child found her name changed to the diminutive Colette. Her mother taught her about the Passion of Christ and the sensitive little girl was moved to tears and penances. Her education was meager but she seemed to have infused knowledge. As early as the age of nine she understood the idealism of St. Francis and St. Clare when they founded the Orders of mendicant monks and contemplative nuns.

Colette remained dwarfed in stature until, at the age of 14 years, she made a pilgrimage to a shrine of the Virgin Mother and Child Jesus. She prayed that if it be God's will she would grow to the satisfaction of her parents.

Colette was 17 when her mother died. She took care of her father but before his death he asked the Benedictine Abbot, Raoul de Raye, to be her guardian. Colette was 18 when her father died. She gave away her possessions and, approved by her director, took a vow of perpetual virginity. Colette tried living as a Beguine, a Benedictine, a Poor Clare, but finally found God's will as a recluse.



THE RECLUSE

On September 17, 1402, Colette was enclosed in a small structure attached to the parish church. The people of Corbie were proud and happy to have the young recluse to pray for them. They came to her with their petitions.

The door was sealed but a small wicket was open to the townspeople. They passed in the necessary food and supplies. Colette could return to them the altar linens she made and the sewing/mending she did for the poor.

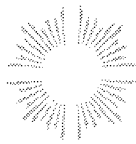
Colette's bed was a mat of straw on the floor of the inner room, with a small block of wood for a pillow. From her oratory another wicket opened into the church of Notre Dame and gave Colette a direct view of the high altar. Here she received Holy Communion and poured out her heart in prayer.

The early months of Colette's seclusion were filled with joy and the sweetness of young love. For all who came to her for advice she offered the comfort of infused wisdom and the gift of compassion. However, Colette knew that she could help them most of all by her prayers and her penances.

Colette enjoyed divine consolation for about a year. When the inevitable dryness set in, Satan began to tempt her with suggestions that her solitude was too hard to bear. Colette recognized the seductive voice of "the enemy of man." She ignored him and relied on the strong defense of faith. "He who cast you out of paradise will not permit you to harm one hair on my head."

When Satan appeared in person and asked, "How can you stand this life for twenty, thirty, or even sixty years?" Colette retorted, "How will you be able to endure the torments of hell....for all eternity?"

Next loathsome creatures crawled around on the floor which Colette kept spotlessly clean. Ugly snakes undulated over



the straw mat where she slept. With her crucifix and her anguished prayer, "Oh, dear Lord!" Colette drove the slimy creatures from her tiny room.

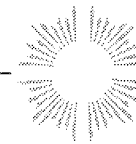
Then Satan tried to ruin her reputation, but Colette's confidence in Our Lady thwarted the evil one. She was led deeper into the mystery of her vocation by a series of visions. From the threshold of hell, she saw souls plunging into the eternal agonies. Seeing countless souls sucked into the tormenting fire left a frightening image in her soul until death. She prayed with more fervor than ever for the salvation of souls, and that evils in the Church and society might be uprooted.

Next, to show her the full malice of sin, Our Lord appeared to her as He looked at the time of His Crucifixion. Until the end of her life Colette became insensible with grief at any mention of His Passion.

God consoled Colette by the understanding that much of the reform needed in the Church and society would come through restoration of the primitive observance and fervor in the Franciscan Orders. In her devotedness to St. Francis and St. Clare, Colette was happy to share by prayer and penance in repairing the insults to God's honor.

Then came the climactic vision. Colette saw St. Francis pleading with Christ for the reform of his Order. With one pierced hand he drew forward a woman in a garb like his own. The other pierced hand was extended toward Christ in a pleading manner. His prayer was granted and then Colette began to tremble. The nun chosen by St. Francis and approved by Christ was herself!

For days Colette could not eat nor sleep, protesting her unworthiness for such a mission. Enclosed as a recluse for life, how could this work be possible for her? She confided in her confessor to find if it might be a deceit of the devil. The Franciscan Friar humbly related how he, too, has been instructed in a vision. He insisted that she must follow God's will and His



grace would sustain her. Colette left all things in her confessor's hands, but he died soon after.

To overcome her reluctance, Colette was struck dumb, and then blind. From the pure anguish of these trials, Colette learned complete obedience. Her heart formed the words, "Lord, I am Your handmaid," and immediately she could speak the words and again could see.

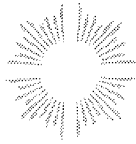
Colette waited for further manifestation of God's will for her.

THE END OF SECLUSION

In 1405 there was confusion over who was the true Pope. Innocent VII was favored by most of Italy. Benedict XIII was supported by France. The unwieldy and illegal council of Pisa would soon elect a third "pope."

In the meantime a fervent Franciscan, Fr. Henri de la Baume, started his mendicant journey as a pilgrim to the Holy Land. In Avignon he was told by another recluse, Marie Amante, to go to Picardy and assist Colette of Corbie in restoring primitive fervor in the Franciscan Order. Himself dedicated to the ideals of St. Francis, his agony of soul over the confusion in the Church was intensified by those who argued that the Franciscan ideal was no longer practical. Fr. Henri believed in the Gospel as a guide for life and sanctity. He prayed unceasingly that his Order would be restored to the first ideals of its founder.

In the company of the Baroness de Brissary and her entourage, he followed the carriage to Corbie and approached the hermitage. When Colette looked into the face of Fr. Henri, she was filled with an inspiration she could not resist. She ordered the servants of the Baroness to break down the door of her hermitage.



Colette and Fr. Henri, representing the First and Second Franciscan Orders, began together to chant praises to God. Then, kneeling with her eyes on the tabernacle, Colette dedicated herself “in health, in illness, in my life, in my death, in all my desires, in all my deeds, so that I may never work henceforth except for Your glory, for the salvation of souls, and toward the reform for which You have chosen me. From this moment on, dearest Lord, there is nothing I am not prepared to undertake for love of You.”

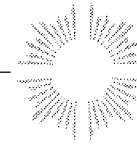
The Lord took her at her word. The door of her hermitage was open but Colette was bound by a solemn vow. The first thing she needed to do was to be dispensed from it. In her clear, swift hand she wrote her reasons, and tears came to her eyes. Fr. Henri said, “If you did not love the enclosure, you would not be strong enough to live outside of it!” His soul was intuitively perceptive to the young spouse of Christ.

The dispensation was granted and announced in Corbie. The people did not want to lose their famous recluse. Abbot Raoul was angry because he had not been consulted. Never again did he come to Colette’s aid, although she needed his help in the trials that lay ahead.

COLETTE AS ABBESS GENERAL

At Nice, Benedict XIII received Colette and Fr. Henri. Then he seated himself and accepted her petitions: (1) to follow the apostolic and evangelical state according to the primitive Rule of St. Francis by entering his Second Orders; (2) to be authorized to undertake the restoration and reformation of the Orders which St. Francis had instituted.

Benedict XIII granted several more audiences and was



amazed at Colette’s intelligence, and at her learning when he had been told that she was uneducated.

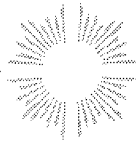
He was won by her humility and accepted her vows. The Cardinals protested, but Benedict tried to win them over to her support. The plague came to his assistance, spread quickly, and snuffed out the lives of those strongest in their opposition.

In a solemn public ceremony, the pope received Colette into the Second Order of St. Francis and reverently placed the Rule of St. Clare in her hands. He placed Sister Colette under the protection of Fr. Henri, who was never to leave her, and declared Colette to be abbess and mother of all who would accept her reform. She returned to Corbie with the intention of founding the first monastery of her reform in her own home town among the people she loved. She thought with joy of the welcome that awaited her in Corbie. Fr. Henri did not share her happy anticipation. They were received with hostile silence. Former friends were now cold-faced strangers.

The only shelter Fr. Henri could find for Sr. Colette and her companions was in an abandoned quarry outside the town. “Holy Father Francis is teaching us poverty...” was Sr. Colette’s comment. Fr. Henri left the quarry and went back into town to see what might be done.

THE REFORM BEGINS

Two of Colette’s girlhood friends, Marie Senechal and Guillemette Chretien, observed her silence and serenity in the face of abuse, slander and rejection. They went to the quarry-monastery and said, “We want to join you; to enter your reform.” They quoted the words of Ruth to Naomi: ...“wherever you lodge, we will lodge, your people shall be our people, and your God our God.”



The three set out with Fr. Henri for Amiens in Picardy, but soon discovered that these people would not receive them. Vicious gossip had preceded Sr. Colette and she was treated with contempt. Also, the Poor Clares were satisfied with the life of comfort they were living. They had many privileges and poverty was not one of them. With the townspeople, the Poor Clares rejected Sr. Colette as a fanatic.

A return to the old quarry outside of Corbie proved pleasanter than the monasticism where nuns who were neither poor nor daughters of St. Clare masqueraded as Poor Clares.

Sister Colette was commissioned by God Himself to restore, not to destroy. If she had been asked to establish a new Order in the Church, this would have been child's play compared with God's actual task for her: to restore a lost ideal.

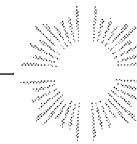
There were some monasteries of the Poor Clares that clung with joy to the primitive way of Franciscan life, but Sr. Colette's mission was not to these. Her vocation was to restore those in which the spirit had collapsed.

After the rejection in Picardy, Fr. Henri wrote to Pope Benedict XIII asking permission for Sr. Colette to begin her restoration in another part of France. Hospitality was offered by Fr. Henri's brother Alard at the de la Baume castle.

Sister Colette's tears as she bade farewell to Corbie were like those of Christ over Jerusalem. The three young women made their way to Frontenay with Fr. Henri begging food for them on the way. They stopped in towns and villages to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion.

When they reached their destination, Alard greeted them with the words, "My wife is dying," late in her pregnancy. He asked Sr. Colette to come and pray. She followed him swiftly to the room where the dying woman lay, her face like a death mask.

Sister Colette traced the sign of the cross on the dying woman's forehead, and then asked to be taken with her companions to the chapel where she prostrated in prayer. An



hour later the castle was filled with rejoicing. A perfectly formed baby daughter was placed in the arms of the recovering mother.

This miracle explains why St. Colette is regarded as a patron of expectant mothers. The newborn baby was named Petronilla. Later, as Sister Perrine, she was a trusted intimate of Sr. Colette and the saint's faithful secretary.

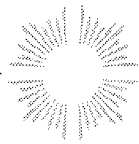
A wing of the de la Baume castle, closed to the household and stripped of all luxury, became Sr. Colette's temporary monastery. The de la Baume older daughters, Odile and Mathilde, joined Sr. Colette and became postulants in their own home. The chanting of the Office at midnight spread benediction over the sleeping household.

More young women came to join Sr. Colette and a monastery became necessary to their structured life. Countess Blanche of Geneva offered a choice, and Sr. Colette found the site located in the town of Balme to be acceptable. At least ten young women left the home of Alard de la Baume to live the primitive Rule in all its details. They observed a continual Lenten fast except on Christmas Day, abstained from meat, slept on straw mats, and kept silence except for one joyous hour of recreation.

The Divine Office was chanted day and night. Poverty was again honored as the "Lady Poverty" of St. Francis of Assisi.

THE MOVE TO BESANCON

Benedict XIII and Gregory XII disrupted the unity of Christendom by holding fast to their papal claims. Twenty-four cardinals, in 1408, took it upon themselves to convoke a general council at Pisa without the sanction of the pope, a schismatic



threat to the primacy of the vicar of Christ. Both Benedict and Gregory excommunicated the cardinals under their jurisdiction. These were men of high principle who desperately wanted to end the papal schism.

The council deposed both “popes” and elected Alexander V as a third pope. Clergy and people supported one of the three, with Alexander having the largest following among whom were most of the Franciscans. He lived only ten months, but long enough to confirm the reform of Sr. Colette who now moved her nuns into a monastery at Besancon. They were warmly welcomed by the Archbishop.

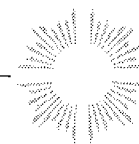
Two old nuns, the only ones living in the monastery, had heard rumors of Sr. Colette’s austerities, and they were afraid. The Archbishop presented her to them as their abbess, Mother Colette. The smiling young abbess embraced first one and then the other with the words, “May the Lord give you His peace! You are so good to let us come here.”

The Archbishop led Sr. Colette to the abbess’ chair, handed her the documents which gave her possession of the monastery, encouraged the people of Besancon to aid the community as much as possible, and then left his retinue after giving a final blessing.

The primitive Rule could now be lived: the daily fast, continual abstinence, bare feet, hard beds, mental and bodily labor in the midst of a life of prayer. Mother Colette disposed of all sources of regular income for the monastery. The people never failed in their esteem, their loyalty and generous support.

Although Mother Colette used unerring discrimination in accepting applicants, by the end of the first year the new community was overflowing the old monastery. A second foundation would need to be established.

Mother Colette watched carefully over her fledgling Poor Clares. None of her young subjects was ready for so vital an



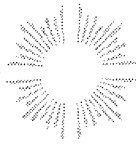
office as mistress of novices. She watched particularly for signs of discouragement knowing this was Satan’s tool. The truer the vocation, the more insidious would be his attacks.

While life in the monastery flowed on, confusion in the Church was growing. When the schismatic “pope” of the council of Pisa died, the Cardinal Legate of Bologna, Baltazar Cossa, was elected and took the name of John XXIII. There was the true pope, Gregory XII, the first pretender Benedict XIII, and now the worst consequences of the unfortunate council of Pisa.

However, Mother Colette found it necessary to found a second monastery. Fr. Henri advised her to trust in God and go ahead. The village of Auxonne was chosen by Mother Colette in agreement with the Duchess of Burgundy whose husband, John the Fearless, donated the land and declared it tax exempt. He then used his influence with the Pisan “pope” to authorize erection of a monastery.

Mother Colette selected nine of her subjects for the new foundation. The votive Mass of the Three Kings was offered before Colette and her nuns set out on their journey in a covered wagon. Enroute they stopped at Dole where there was a monastery of Franciscan Friars some of whom wanted a return to the primitive Rule.

Mother Colette was admitted to their Chapter Room, not as a woman but as a saint. The abbess began to speak of Franciscan poverty, of the primitive Rule, and of Franciscan joy in the midst of austerity. At the end she was caught up in the spiritual realm where they could not follow. The same light that had brought peasants running from their fields as she made her way from Besancon poured from her face in the Chapter Room. The Friars fell on their knees. For the moment, at least, she had won them.



THE MONASTERY AT AUXONNE

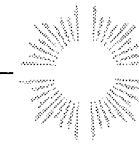
When Mother Colette and her nuns arrived on October 28, 1412, the monastery at Auxonne had not yet been built. Colette wanted to supervise the construction. After the pageantry of a public welcome, a temporary residence was found near the parish church of Notre Dame. The abbess left early each morning and gave orders to the workmen with the precision of a construction boss. She wanted her first monastery to be a model for future foundations, small and poor as St. Francis and St. Clare wanted them to be.

Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, added a permanent chapel to the monastery. If Colette wanted her monastery to be plain, nothing could be too beautiful for her Divine Spouse!

The new monastery flourished but Mother Colette's health did not. She had worn a chain around her waist for so long that it became imbedded in her flesh. In obedience to Fr. Henri, who asked if she was wearing a chain, Colette tore it off but flesh came with it. She joked about obedience being more painful than sacrifice. She suffered also from neuralgia, chills, fevers and insomnia, besides having a constant fear of going blind because of pain in her eyes.

The sisters and friars wanted Mother Colette to remain longer at Auxonne, but the abbess general felt the need to return to her first daughters. At the time of departure she seemed to have regained youthful vitality. "There is work to be done," she said.

Like with St. Theresa of Avila, health improved when God's glory called. Now Colette needed her renewed strength. The abbot and some friars at Dole were having second thoughts about returning to the primitive Rule of St. Francis. Others wanted to remain true to their resolve and the assurance given to the young abbess general.



The divided Community moved toward reform while the luxury loving abbot took a vacation. Upon his return he found that Fr. Henri had spared no effort to implant the primitive Franciscan way of life. Meals were plain now. Ornate furnishings had been sold and the money given to the poor. Coarse habits replaced expensive clothing. Guests were no longer lavishly entertained. Donations from wealthy friends were given directly to the poor.

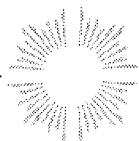
In his anger at Fr. Henri's persistence, the abbot brought the matter into public court.

Mother Colette's influence so inspired the defending lawyer that the case for the reform won out. This fact so enraged the abbot that he left the community of Dole rather than join the reform.

Mother Colette, who was known to bring peace and joy wherever she went, grieved to the point of death over the disunity. Then, in a vision she saw St. Clare and St. Francis in opposite petitions before the throne of God. St. Clare asked that God would call Colette to join them in heaven. St. Francis pleaded that she continue her reform. St. Francis prevailed and Colette's health was restored.

However, the former abbot used his influence with the townspeople against the friars of the reform. "If they want to fast, help them! Give them neither food nor alms," was the essence of his advice.

The Poor Clares of Auxonne had meager supplies, but Mother Colette urged that all the flour be baked into bread for the hungry friars. Colette sent word that the nuns would supply bread as long as it was needed. A Franciscan brother with a donkey made the trip twice a week to bring bread for fifty men, but the Poor Clare's supplies never decreased. The greater miracle was the conversion to the Reform of the prior who had opposed it so strenuously.



THE MONASTERY AT POLIGNY

Of all her foundations, Poligny was the saint's favorite. Colette lived there nearly seven years as abbess, and frequently returned to this loved haven.

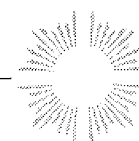
Before her death, Colette promised to keep a celestial watch over Poligny. Her body remains there even now.

"Our Lady of Pity" was the name Colette chose for the Poligny monastery. She always had great compassion for suffering. At the age of 34 years Colette realized that the state of France and the Papacy in 1415 was sad enough to arouse pity in hearts less tender than hers. The true Pope, Gregory XII, was almost ninety. He rallied to the magnanimous gesture that was to elevate his mediocre life to final greatness. He humbly handed in to the Council at Constance his formal resignation of the papacy.

Colette prayed, and in the village of Domremy a girl named Jeanne d'Arc listened to the voices of St. Michael and St. Catherine.

In 1417 Perrine de la Baume, the niece of Fr. Henri whose life Colette had saved at birth together with the life of her mother, entered Poligny as an aspirant too young to become a novice. At the age of eighteen she pronounced her vows. Sr. Perrine became the confidante and biographer of St. Colette.

Also in 1417, at the Council of Constance, after the resignation of Gregory XII and the deposition of false popes John XXIII and Benedict XIII, Cardinal Colonna was elected and became Pope Martin V. His Holiness confirmed the approval Colette had received from the antipopes. She imitated St. Francis in his reverence for God's representatives. She insisted, also, that the Divine Office be recited with all reverence, dignity and devotion. Colette loved silence, too, and looked upon it as a guardian of reverence.



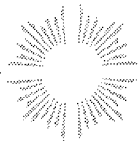
In 1417, with the papal schism ended, the abbess-general began planning a fourth foundation. First she wanted to put into writing her regulation which would show her future daughters St. Clare's rule in action. As Colette began this task, a Dominican saint came to call on her.

THE CROSS OF VINCENT FERRER

Fr. Vincent Ferrer had been laying the firebrand of his eloquence and zeal on religious apathy in Spain and France. His gift for preaching reached the most hardened hearts. He was at his peak in 1417 when the people of Poligny received the good news that Fr. Vincent Ferrer was coming to preach in their city. He remained several days, preaching to the people during the day and addressing the Poor Clares at their gate in the evening. In a vision he had been directed by Our Lord to go and confer with Colette Boellet.

When the two saints met, Colette was thirty-six and Vincent Ferrer was fifty-seven. She informed him that he would die within two years, not in his native Spain where he planned to return, but in France. He left his great mission cross with Mother Colette. Both saints worked miracles, but recognized that the greatest miracle is the total surrender of oneself to God.

An admonition that Colette gave her nuns after Fr. Ferrer's departure was, "As long as charity and peace shall reign among you, Our Lord will not forsake you, and our houses shall endure and prosper." The abbess loved to see joy reigning in her communities. Like St. Francis and St. Clare, she knew that joy is the fruit of charity.



NEW MONASTERIES

The duchess Margaret of Burgundy wanted to raise up house of prayer and penance after the assassination of her husband, John the Fearless. Abbess Colette agreed and in 1420 began the greatest period of activity in her life. There had been three monasteries founded in the past decade, and the next ten years would yield three times that number.

Martin V, the Pope whose election in 1417 ended the great schism, had already given full approval to Colette's work of restoring the primitive Rule among the Poor Clares. The amount of work involved took great toll of the abbess-general's strength and she had to contend with clergy who did not want primitive Franciscan nuns as close neighbors. But Colette's reverence for priests was as boundless as her love for peace. She bitterly blamed herself when strife faced a new foundation. As she grew older, she became more stern with herself. She resisted the title "Mother" for herself, but gave it to another abbess in whom she confided.

No matter how exhausted the foundress might be, she always managed to direct the beginning of construction at each monastery and to make certain that all would be in line with her ideals of poverty and simplicity.

One of Colette's foundations was near a large monastery of Dominican nuns. At her arrival they ran out to meet her with open arms, reminding Colette of the day when St. Francis and St. Dominic first met on the streets of Rome. Saint recognized saint in the beginning of friendship between the two great Orders which continues to this day.

Colette greeted each Dominican sister with a smile and kiss, but one white-robed nun held back and stood apart. Colette learned that the nun was a leper, but did not hesitate. She walked



directly to the leprous nun, put her arms around her and kissed her warmly. The nuns fell back in alarm, but they no longer had a leper who had to live apart from them. The sister who had not experienced a human embrace for many years, was now healed of her leprosy.

In 1429 Colette returned to Moulins where her nuns welcomed her with boundless joy. The people, too, were enthusiastic for they looked upon her as a "saint." Another saint also came to Moulins in 1429, not a nun but a soldier: Jeanne d'Arc.

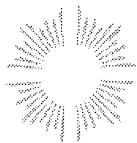
COLETTE AND JEANNE D'ARC

In 1429 the Maid of Orleans was at the height of her brief career. This maiden at age seventeen rallied the noblest French hearts around her in a campaign to restore the dauphin to his royal rights and to crown him as King of France.

When Jeanne d'Arc rode into Moulins she had, in a sense, fulfilled her mission. The dauphin had been crowned as Charles VII. While half of France was wild with joy, the other half was desperate with hatred for the girl with flashing sword who could summon noblemen to peaks of heroism.

The duchess of Burgundy, Colette's old friend, loved Jeanne d'Arc as a mother loves her favorite daughter. Her young son, Louis, was the warrior saint's loyal lieutenant.

Since Colette was a frequent and honored visitor at the Bourbon palace, and Jeanne d'Arc was considered as a loved daughter of Duchess Marie, it is reasonable to believe that the two saints met. Jeanne d'Arc may have implored Colette's prayers for peace in war-torn France. Colette was as patriotic a French



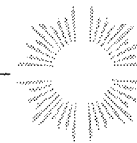
woman as the young leader of France's armed forces. However, her mission was not Jeanne d'Arc's mission. The Poor Clare abbess was loved by Burgundians as well as Bourbons, and to the house of Burgundy she owed the construction and protection of her first monasteries.

Jeanne d'Arc laid siege on Burgundian territories and her life was in constant danger. Colette was welcome in both Bourbon and Burgundian domains. Therefore, it is easy to see that any meetings between Jeanne d'Arc and Colette Boellet would be kept secret. Tradition takes for granted friendship between the young warrior and the middle-aged nun. The Maid of Orleans spent three full days in the chapel of the Poor Clares, on Retreat, while Colette was on the other side of the grille. Jeanne d'Arc would hear her voice chanting the Divine Office. A prayer, written by Sr. Colette in her own hand, "Blessed be the Hour," is still recited in every house of Colette's restoration after the midnight Office.

In 1431, the year of Jeanne d'Arc cruel martyrdom, the King of France made a personal donation to the abbess-general of the Poor Clares. It may have been a pathetic attempt to quiet his conscience by sending a royal alms to the friend of Jeanne d'Arc. He held his throne only because of the loyalty and courage of the girl from Domremy but he did not lift a finger to save her from months of imprisonment and death in the flames.

Sister Colette had her Constitutions approved in 1439. Due to her prudence and foresight they needed only minor adjustments five hundred years later when submitted for revision according to the new code of Canon Law.

For several years Colette journeyed between her thirteen monasteries but did not found any new ones. Instead, she busied herself with the spiritual guidance of her sisters. Although their numbers reached into the hundreds, she never overlooked an individual nun's needs. Her motherly tenderness endeared her to



them more and more each day.

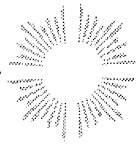
Sister Colette's best friend on earth was taken from her when Fr. Henri de la Baume died in 1439 at the age of seventy-three years. Thirty-three of these he spent trudging the roads of France with Sr. Colette, helping in the foundations of her monasteries, advising and consoling her. Before death he was anointed at the foot of the altar where he had often offered the Holy Sacrifice for the Poor Clares.

JOHN CAPISTRAN AND THE REFORM

John of Capistrano worked with St. Bernardine of Siena for the restoration of primitive Franciscan life in Italy. In his meeting with Colette, John Capistran urged unity of the Observants, who followed Sr. Colette's reform, with the Coventuals who lived according to a mitigated rule. Colette explained that her Constitutions were approved by the Holy Father. Strict enclosure, absolute poverty, recitation of the Divine Office by day and by night, intellectual and manual work, silence, perpetual fast and abstinence were the way of life for her nuns.

John Capistran produced documents with a new constitution for the nuns on which he had worked with Pope Eugene IV to unite the whole Franciscan Order. Colette asked for three days to consider and went to tell her nuns that the restoration for primitive Franciscanism hung in the balance.

Colette organized her nuns into squadrons for prayer. Finally, they formed a procession on their knees through the monastery imploring God's intervention. In a vision, John Capistran learned that God's will lay in the direction of the abbess' faithfulness to the mission He had given her. From that



time on Fr. John became one of the abbess' staunchest friends, "Two great souls in most perfect union." Peace and calm returned to the monastery.

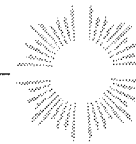
Colette prepared for a trip to Germany with plans for a foundation at Heidelberg, but the Council of Basle had started another schism by deposing Pope Eugene IV and electing her devout friend, Duke Amadeus of Savoy, as the anti-pope, Felix V. Colette wrote to try to dissuade him from being crowned, and warned her monasteries against giving obedience to him. Finally he recognized and admitted his mistake, repented and was forgiven by the true Pontiff in 1449, two years after Colette's death.

In 1440 Colette had extended her Reform beyond France by going to Bavaria. Attacked by bandits on the way to Heidelberg, Colette kindly reproached them in perfect German. The leader took off his cap, apologized to the French nun, and then offered to protect the party from the many other bandits by escorting them on their way. Under the safe protection of these outlaws, Sister Colette carried the ideals of St. Francis' primitive Rule into Germany.

PROPHECIES

At the age of fifty-nine Colette knew that she had only a few years to live. She also knew of this death of another nun in a distant monastery: "I saw her!"

Like St. Francis in his last years, Colette no longer protested when people called her a saint. She was beyond praise or blame, knowing that only as a person is in the sight of God really matters.



By 1444 Colette had become so ill and exhausted that she could hardly stand. She predicted the Protestant revolt and that some of her monasteries would be destroyed. There was only one more project Colette felt that she must complete before her death: to make a foundation in Corbie!

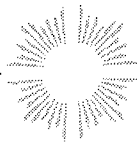
With a supreme effort the dying nun wrote to the city councillors of Corbie. These people who rejected her when she began her reform were now eager to welcome her. The Benedictine monks, however, opposed the foundation and caused Colette the greatest sorrow of her life. This foundation at Corbie was her only reason for clinging to the threads of life. She prepared to keep her tryst with sister death.

DEATH

At the beginning of February, 1447, the abbess-general told her nuns that death was near. On Friday, March 3, a friar read the Passion of Christ for the dying nun. Colette heard Mass the next morning and returned to her cell for the last time. She put on the veil which Benedict XIII had placed on her head in 1406 when he had named her abbess-general of all Poor Clares who would embrace the primitive rule.

Colette's last agony continued for two full days but she never lost consciousness. On Monday, March 6, 1447, Colette opened her lovely eyes for the last time. She spoke no word, but in the presence of her nuns in the monastery of Ghent, humbly gave up her soul to God.

For twelve hours her body kept its appearance of age and suffering, then was suddenly transformed with great and marvelous beauty. Her whole body was so lovely, so supple, so fragrant that it seemed to be entirely spiritualized with an angelic



purity.

For three days crowds of people came, and then she was buried in a simple grave. The friars built a flimsy wooden structure above it. After nearly a century her bones were exhumed and placed in a reliquary in the chapel at Ghent.

Because of the Huguenot menace, the expulsion of all nuns from Flanders, and the French revolution, the reliquary was carried from one hiding place to another, and finally was entrusted to the sisters in her favorite monastery at Poligny.

Colette was declared Blessed in 1604, and canonized in 1807. Her life had abounded in astonishing miracles and the prodigies continued after her death.

St. Colette, a devoted follower of St. Francis of Assisi, is patroness of the St. Colette School, owned and operated by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. A dwarf in childhood, Colette knew the experience of being different but used her talents generously for the work God gave her to do.