

Connections Across Time and Place

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In the [origins of the FCJ presence in England](#) and of [Maria Fidelis School FCJ](#), Father John Nerinckx, the pastor of St. Aloysius Church in Somers Town, London, and his sister Mary Ann played a pivotal role. A third Nerinckx sibling, Charles, traveled to the United States and helped to establish the [Sisters of Loretto](#) in 1812. Sr Cathy Mueller, SL, tells the story of this FCJ and Loretto connection. This article first appeared in the [Loretto Community](#) website and is used here with permission.

Connections Across Time and Place by Cathy Mueller SL

This past May when I attended the meeting of the Union of International Superiors General ([UISG](#)) in Rome, I was at the table with Claire Sykes, a Faithful Companion of Jesus (FCJ) sister from London. She asked me if there was a connection between John Nerinckx, who was significant in their community's history, and Charles Nerinckx. I quickly emailed Eleanor Craig, who sent me pertinent information from William Joseph Howlett's [Life of Charles Nerinckx](#).

The Nerinckx siblings

Charles was the oldest of 14 siblings. John was his younger brother, with 15 years between them. When the French revolutionaries and soldiers descended on the Flemish countryside and towns in 1793-94, several of the Nerinckx siblings were already priests and nuns, among them John and his sister Mary Ann. One of the ways that Charles knew for sure that his own life was imminently in danger in 1797 was that three of his brothers also were banned by the government. John was captured and deported, sent to French Guiana in South America. He escaped with other captured clergy and they managed to get to England, where John made his home in London. Mary Ann also was forced out of her Flemish convent and eventually made her way to England to join John.

Meanwhile, Charles went into hiding in the Flemish hospital where his aunt, Mother Constantia Langendries, was superior of a community of nuns. Charles petitioned the Bishop of Baltimore to accept him in America. He helped to establish the Sisters of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross in 1812. When Charles traveled from Kentucky back to Europe in 1816 and again in 1819, he spent time with John and Mary Ann in London.

John Nerinckx welcomes Marie Madeleine

Parallel to our story, in 1820 [Marie Madeleine d'Houët](#) founded the Faithful Companions of Jesus Sisters in France, a society of



St. Aloysius Church, Somers Town, England (Image courtesy of Cathy Mueller)

In 1830, during one of the several French insurrections, Marie Madeleine was advised to look beyond the boundaries of her country of origin. She went to Belgium to make a foundation; however, she was discouraged from starting a foundation there. She was given an address in London, which led her to Father John Nerinckx, the pastor of St. Aloysius Church in Somers Town. He welcomed them and offered Marie Madeleine the house and school. Five days after her arrival, she took possession of the house and assumed responsibility for the educational establishment then known as St. Aloysius' Charity School for Girls. The FCJ Sisters continue to have a school on this property. [Maria Fidelis School FCJ](#) has moved into a totally new school building.

Loretto and the FCJs: A wonderful connection

The FCJs were the first of the “new” congregations to arrive in England after the Reformation. Older congregations such as Benedictines had returned after the French Revolution. After 1830 Marie Madeleine founded other houses in England and Ireland.

In 1841 Marie Madeleine bought [Gumley House](#), a fine property at Isleworth west of London. This is where Father John Nerinckx is buried. The Generalate is there and also a girls' high school of 1,200 students. The cemetery is in the corner of the property.

The FCJ Sisters currently serve in the New England area and in Argentina, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland, Romania, Germany, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and the Bailiwick of Jersey.

This wonderful connection with Claire reflects the relationships within the universal sisterhood of UISG, bringing us new and surprising ways our communities' lives have intersected.

For more on this part of our history:



“ Demandons à notre Seigneur de nous donner l'esprit de la Société de Jésus, et puisque nous avons ses Constitutions, la volonté de Dieu est que nous ayons aussi son esprit ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

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