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Company of Mary: 400 Years of Educating Women First Feminine Apostolic Religious Order Dedicated to Teaching

For four centuries, the Company of Mary, the first feminine apostolic religious order dedicated to teaching, has directed its energies to the education of women.

Following the educational plan of its founder, St. Jeanne of Lectonnac (1556-1640), this religious family today extends its activity to four continents, thanks in part to a network set up in 2003 to foster collaboration between laity and religious.

"Faith and discernment of the signs have enabled us to find in education the most appropriate response to the needs of every historical period," said Sister Beatriz Acosta Mesa, the order's superior general.

"To help each woman value herself as such, to feel she has a significant mission in the world, to verify the transcendence of her daily action and the transforming capacity of her presence and her options -- is and has been a task full of meaning that contributes to shaping a world with a heart and feelings of mercy," she added.

The Company of Mary, founded in Bordeaux, France, in April 1607, has set itself seven objectives to celebrate the fourth centenary of its foundation.

Most important among the objectives is for the order to further its understanding of "the challenges the 21st century poses to the educational mission in each of the contexts in which we are inserted and how to respond to them, modifying our life and our educational practices," explained Sister Beatriz.

The order's women religious also hope to "exchange criteria, points of view and experiences which will give us a broad and complementary vision as to how to respond to these challenges in a plural and ever more interconnected world," she said.

The Company of Mary currently has 1,755 religious and novices. See www.lestonnac.org.

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