

Diagram of Ceramic Relief The Story of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Coesfeld



The ceramic relief is divided into four almost symmetrically arranged sections. The left side shows some important events in the life of St. Julie Billiart while some of the events in the life of Sr. Maria Aloysia are worked in on the right. The two sides are joined in both form and content with two middle sections, arranged above and below one another. The upper picture places the three foundations of the Sisters of Notre Dame: Namur, Amersfoort, and Coesfeld in perspective.

The central picture (A) shows Julie Billiart holding the Constitutions and gesturing with her right hand which holds the Cross toward Mère St. Joseph. Mère St. Joseph hands on to an Amersfoort sister in the lower part of the picture the text, “*Ah, qu’il est bon, le bon Dieu.*” Standing between Julie and the Amersfoort sister, Sister Maria Aloysia also accepts this text in one hand. The raised hand of Julie Billiart with her Constitutions indicates that her spirit has influenced all three Congregations.

Directly under this central picture (B), as a bridge between the Namur and Coesfeld foundations is a picture of the first motherhouse of Amersfoort. The text written below it reads: “Mother Marie Joseph to the Bishop of Münster, Amersfoort, June 23, 1855. ‘It will be a joy for me that the Coesfeld Congregation works to the glory of God and the salvation of neighbor.’”

The side sections of the relief show a parallel connection between the life of Julie Billiart and that of Hilligonde Wolbring.

The left side: (1) Julie's life begins in Cuvilly. The birthplace and parish church remind us of her birth and baptism. (2) Julie instructing children in the truths of religion at her parental home. (3) The glowing sunflowers are changed into flames that depict the French Revolution. (4) The deep friendship between Julie and Françoise Blin de Bourdon is brought out. In order to illustrate the union between them, a text from one of Julie's letters is given: "*Tenons-nous la main, ma chère, pour nous faire avancer l'une l'autre vers la céleste patrie...*" ("Let us join hands, my dear, to go forward together towards the heavenly homeland.") (5) The vision at Compiègne. Under the beam of the Cross the words can be read: "*Ce sont les Filles que je te donne dans l'Institut qui sera marqué de ma croix...*" ("These are the daughters that I will give you in the Institute which is marked by my Cross.") (6) Shows Julie after her healing as she comes down the stairs from the chapel to the refectory. This is the beginning of her journeying throughout Northern France and finally all the way to Flanders. (7) On foot, riding on a donkey, and walking along in the company of two soldiers. Representing all of the goals of her journeys, the background shows a bridge, the Cathedral of Amiens, the Cathedral of Namur and the house in the Rue Neuve.

The right side: (1) The life of our Foundress, Sister Maria Aloysia Wolbring, begins in Rotterdam, Holland. The harbor and the church in which Hilligonde Wolbring was baptized. A second area in her life is the Wolbring farm. (2) A view of the church of St. Lambert in Coesfeld and of the two schools in which Hilligonde Wolbring and Elisabeth Kühling were teachers. (3) Hilligonde and Elisabeth standing before Director Elting at the moment when they greet the first three Dutch Sisters. (4) Aldekerk on the Lower Rhein becomes the first mission for Sister M. Aloysia. "What is of greatest importance is... uniting all of our works with the work of the divine Savior... Thus we make gold out of stones." (Sister M. Aloysia, 1881) (5) The Kulturkampf in Prussia under Bismarck. The first law of the Reich of July 4, 1872 forbade all work of religious orders, so the Sisters left Prussia and made their way to the "New World." One of the greatest political opponents of Bismarck was Ludwig Windthorst, shown here in a diagonal position to Bismarck. (6) The Sisters have just left the ship and the flag shows that America becomes their new place of labor. In the background is the first provincial house in Cleveland and a part of Mt. St. Mary's, the place where Sister Maria Aloysia's life found its completion.