

Dear JMJ Sisters,

You are most welcome in the Frisian Church, the National Church of The Netherlands in Rome.

Today we honor Sister Josephine Gopu JMJ and Sister Margaretha Thekkekara JMJ. Sr. Josephine was the first superior of the first Indian JMJ-community in Rome: the one of the Pontifical Dutch College, which was located in 1985, the year that the Sisters arrived, on the Aventine Hill.

This community took care of the Dutch bishops when they stayed in Rome, and of an international community of student-priests who studied in Rome at one of the Pontifical Universities. The Rector of the Dutch College was also the procurator and the permanent representative of the Dutch Dioceses (the Dutch Ecclesiastical Province) to the Holy See.

One of the student-priests, present in the Dutch College, was the actual Cardinal Peter Turkson, who is now one of the most important collaborators of Pope Francis. Many other former student-priests of the Dutch College are now working as bishops in many different parts of the world, and also in The Netherlands the actual bishops conference is mainly composed of former student-priests of the Pontifical Dutch College in Rome, like f.i. Cardinal Wim Eijk, bishop Jan Liesen, bishop Jan Hendriks, bishop Hans van den Hende, bishop Ron van den Hout, bishop Ted Hoogenboom, bishop Herman Woorts and bishop Everard de Jong.

Also Sister Margaretha made part of the first Indian JMJ community in the Dutch College, from the very beginning. She received the many guests of the College, together with Sister Josephine, and she took care for the two main Chapels of the College, one of which was built by the Dutch artist A. Gresnigt O.S.B. who also worked in the Abbey of Monte Cassino and in Vatican City (the Chapel and the Tomb of Pope Pius XI are from his hand). Every week, the flowers of these Chapels were conserved by her, and she always asked Mario Damoneschi, the driver of the Pontifical Dutch College, to bring these flowers to the Frisian Church. Also in the Frisian Church the Sisters took good care for many different duties, and we can say that they have been the first volunteers of our National Church in Rome.

When the Sisters heard that the Pontifical Dutch College would be closed, the Superior General, Sister Benedict and Sister Cletus, have asked me to search for a good second location for the JMJ-Sisters in Rome. Together with Sister Margaretha and Sr. Jacinta, we searched and searched, and then we found a very nice compound with a big house and a big garden on the Via Monte Senario in Rome, close to the Via Nomentana. Sister Margaretha was appointed as the first superior of the second Indian JMJ-community in Rome, which was called in that period the "JMJ Convent".

Now this house became the Generalate of your Congregation, worldwide.

Sr. Josephine and Sr. Margaretha were Sisters who have been very dear to us. They served God in a very particular way, fully applying in their lives the Evangelical Councils, one of the charismas of your Congregation.

That is why these Sisters and all the Members of the Congregation of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (JMJ) will remain eternally in the memory of the Frisian Church. In their and in your memory, we will fix a Glass Cross on the wall of our Memory Chapel.

After the Holy Mass, celebrated by our Rector, Fr. Antoine Bodar, I invite Sister Innamma, the Superior General of JMJ, to bring the Glass Cross to the Memory Chapel, together with Father Tiemen Brouwer.

There, the Glass Cross will be fixed symbolically and permanently, as a sign of the great and unforgettable contribution of the Congregation of JMJ to the Frisian Church in Rome.

Rome, June 6, 2021

René van Hees