

**Saint Louise de Marillac:  
First Visitor of the Charities  
Organiser of the Charities throughout France  
Jo Edun, President of AIC-UK**

St Vincent first met St Louise when she was in her early thirties, and married to Antoine le Gras. It was at a time when there was war, starvation, physical and spiritual poverty all over France.

A number of years after their first meeting, St Louise had become widowed and with her son in boarding school, St Vincent asked her to make a visit and review the Charities he had started some years back.

Louise, as Visitor, rose to the challenge and over the next four years, she would set off with a friend or servant using public transport visiting the Charities. She learned from St Vincent how to prepare well, go easy and think long-term. St Vincent's guidance to her as Visitor of the Charities gave her the security she needed.

On arrival at each of these Charities, she would lodge in an inn, introduce herself to the parish priest and Charity members. She would pray with them; remind them of their rules and duties before dealing with what needed reforming. She would stay with the group for a day or two or more where there was need. She became instrumental in developing new Charities herself. She was assertive, tactful, diplomatic and was not afraid to confront problems.

Being from a wealthy background herself, St Louise was comfortable in dealing with country women, as well as the wealthy Ladies and people of ranks. In visiting Paris, one main problem was the culture that determined what a Lady should or shouldn't do. Although they were very good at organising, financing and managing relief, they were not keen on home care – that is, serving food, washing, toileting, cleaning – as this was the work of servants, so, servants were sent and care was not as it should be.

The Ladies however, achieved a great deal. They financed, founded, improved hospitals, hospices, prisons, schools and improved the lot of children. St Louise, as Visitor, knew that the country Confraternities would have risen to the challenge so, on her follow-up visits, she organised training for new recruits and they worked under the direction of the Ladies. Four years after the very first visit to the Charities, almost every parish by now had a Charity.

With the Ladies of Charity (AIC) well established, in 1633 she began to train young women and this little company of good village girls grew under Louise's care to become the Daughters of Charity. She remained a Lady of Charity until her duties as Foundress needed full time attention. She had left the Charities stronger, more committed, more effective than before her visit.

Saint Louise de Marillac, pray for us.