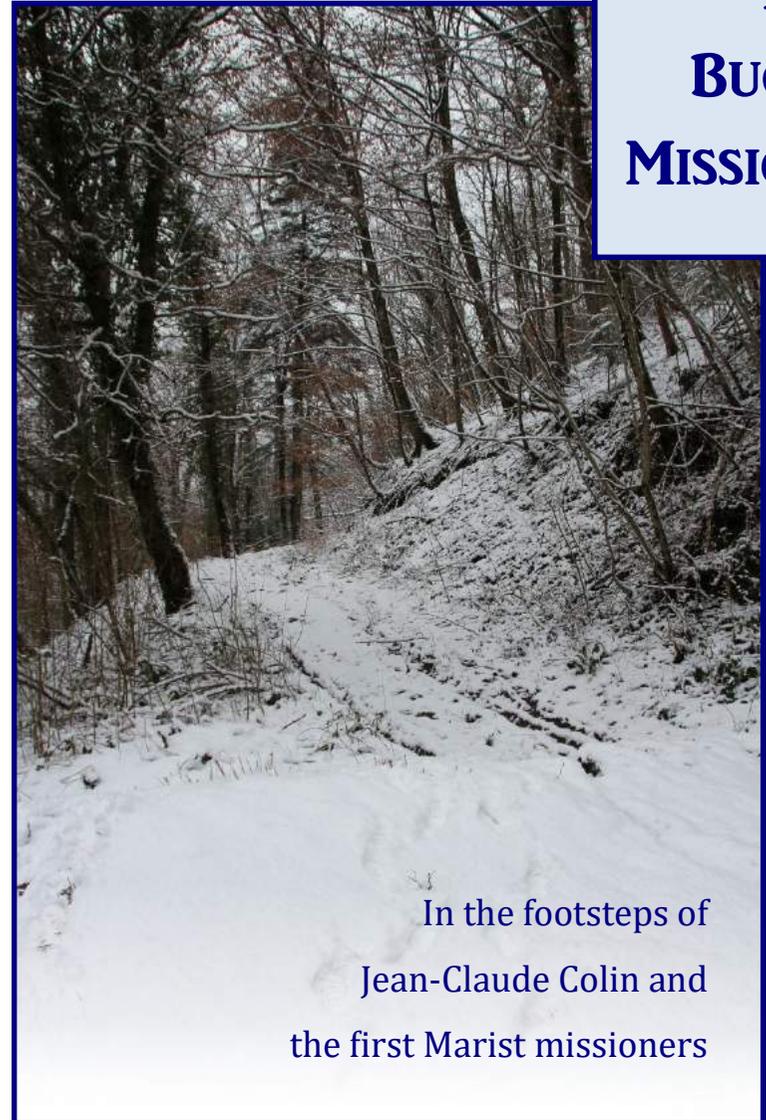




2

**THE
BUGEY
MISSIONS**



In the footsteps of
Jean-Claude Colin and
the first Marist missionaries



OPTIONS FOR PILGRIMS TO THE PLACES OF MARIST ORIGINS

With the reintroduction of the Beatification Cause of Jean-Claude Colin, Founder of the Society of Mary, *'Options for Pilgrims'* is a practical resource for those who would explore the Marist places. It is a companion to Fr Craig Larkin's *'Pilgrimage: a guide book to the places of Marist origins'*.

Whilst places associated with other pioneer Marists are included, there is an emphasis on those linked with Jean-Claude Colin.

'Options for Pilgrims' comprises four booklets, each downloadable from www.jeanclaudecolin.org:

1. **THE MARIST PLACES**
summaries and guide map
2. **THE BUGEY MISSIONS**
pictorial summaries of the 27 parishes of the pioneer missions of 1825-29
3. **TIPS FOR MARIST PILGRIMS**
places to stay, itinerary planning, travel tips, guide map, times and distances
4. **PILGRIMAGE TO THE MARIST PLACES - 9-DAY OPTION**
offering a nine-day pilgrimage option

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The descriptive text of this work is drawn from Marist authors **Jean Coste, Stanley Hosie, Donal Kerr, Craig Larkin** and **Justin Taylor**. Access to each of the Bugey's 27 churches was possible only through the assistance of **Sister Teri O'Brien SM**.

Photography and editing: Ron Nissen SM (Sep 12, 2016)

INTRODUCTION

On Oct 29, 1824, in the village of Cerdon, high in the mountains of south-eastern France, the Colin brothers, Pierre and Jean-Claude, welcomed a young colleague to their presbytery. With the arrival of Etienne Déclas, that same day Pierre Colin wrote to the bishop of Belley: *'Today the Society of Mary has begun!'*

'So you want to be missionaries?' asked the bishop. *'Then go to the parishes of the Bugey.'* Ten weeks later the Marist missions commenced.

The mountainous region of Bugey is part of the great massif separating France from Switzerland. Its many rural parishioners had been ill-treated by the French Revolution. Parish priests had been killed or exiled by the revolutionaries while others remained disheartened and ineffective.

It was to these remote communities that the Marists were sent to restore faith and hope and to bring the mercy of God to a neglected people. So many marriages were irregular; spiritual needs were immense.

Missions in rural areas of France were part of the huge revival of the Catholic religion during the period after 1815. In 1823 Bishop Devie had urged his priests to have missions in their parishes. At his request the Marists shared in this project of rekindling faith among the people, but with their own special spirit.

Their missions were possible only during the harsh months of the Bugey winters when farmers and their stock were housebound. Fr Colin and his confrères were often housed in deserted, run-down presbyteries and preached in unheated churches. In such conditions Fr Colin was to say *'never was life so difficult, yet never were we happier.'*

The missions were undoubtedly severe. The Marists evangelised villages which were 500 to 1,000 metres above sea-level and mostly under snow between November and March.

From 1825 to 1829 the Marists who made up the mission teams were Frs Jean-Claude Colin, Etienne Déclas, Antoine Jallon and Jean-Marie Humbert. Pierre Colin helped at various times. Twenty-seven parish missions can be identified. In addition there were several Jubilee missions and retreats given by the Marists.

This period ended for Jean-Claude Colin during the mission at Ruffieu (1829) when he was called by the bishop to run the minor seminary of Belley.

The Bugey missions continued, thanks notably to the ministry of Etienne Déclas. Their spirit was to continue when Marist groups were called to other regions of rural France in subsequent years.

This booklet...

.... offers a glimpse at each of the twenty-seven parishes of the pioneer Bugey missions. They are listed alphabetically. The detail passed on from the early Marists varies from parish to parish and very little is known of several of the missions. But there is sufficient here to follow the footsteps of the Bugey missionaries throughout their first five winters ...



**Parish of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows
Mar-Apr 1826**

In their second winter of missions the Marists preached in the northern Bugey parishes. From Vieu-d'Izenave they took the road south to Aranc. It was the largest village so far visited (in 1832 its population was 1,232).

The parish priest, Joseph-Marie Jacquet, was also known to Fr Antoine Jallon who had been pastor of Izenave (see p 15). The presbytery was in good condition, also the church, at least its interior. Fr Déclas blessed two marriages on Apr 11, otherwise we have no details about this mission.



**Parish of St Peter
Apr 1827**

The final mission of the winter of 1826-27 was given around Easter at Arandas, which the missionaries reached by walking into higher country south west of Tenay. Despite its remoteness, this place had a relatively large population (1,176 in 1832).

The parish seems to have been in a good state, both materially and spiritually. There was a presbytery and a church with pulpit and confessional (not always the case in rural parishes).

Besides a resident priest, there were visiting schoolteachers, also volunteer catechists who taught in neighbouring hamlets.

In 1823 four boys from the parish were studying in seminaries of the diocese. We have no information about the mission, but may presume the parish priest requested it, or at least welcomed the bishop's proposal, and that the exercises were well attended.

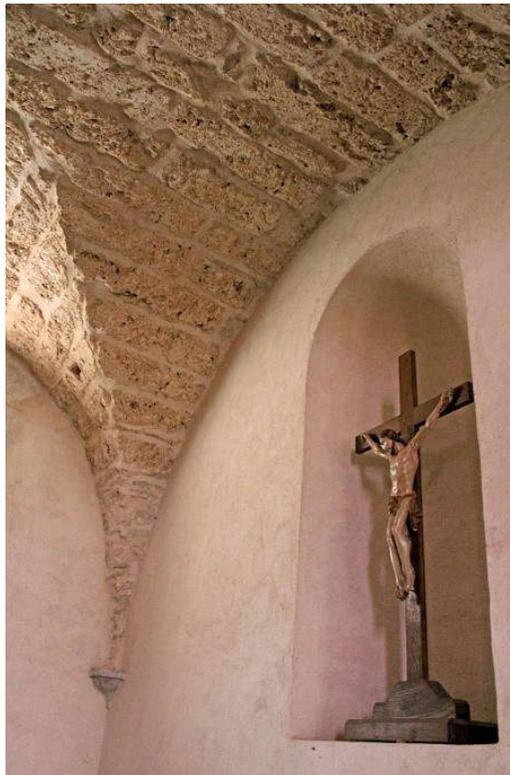
BÉNONCES



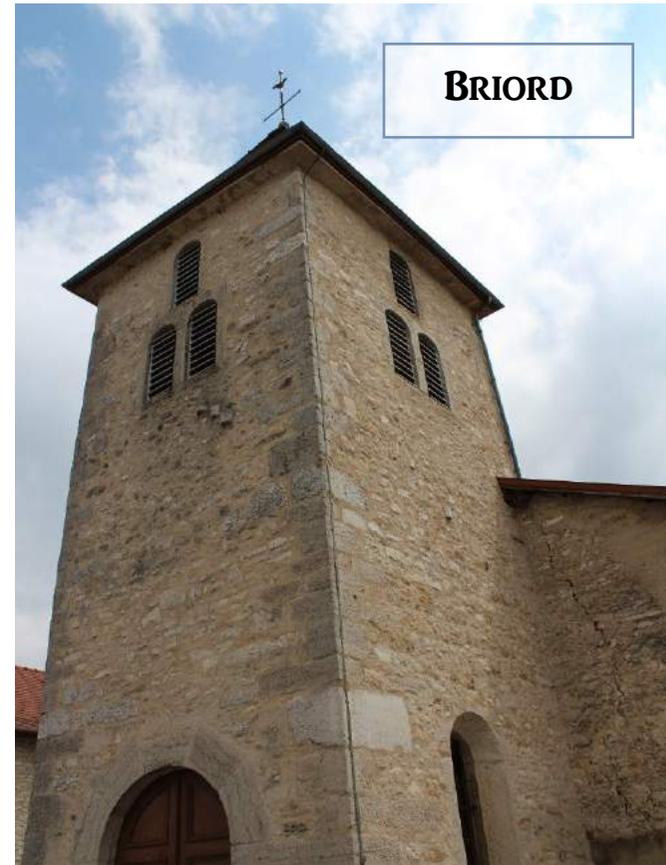
Parish of St Peter 1827-28

From mid-December 1827 until late April 1828, the Marists preached missions in a cluster of villages near the left bank of the Rhône.

One of these was Bénonces, where both presbytery and church were in poor repair. The planting of a commemorative cross occasioned a dispute between the church wardens and the carpenter.



BRIORD



Parish of St John the Baptist 1827-28

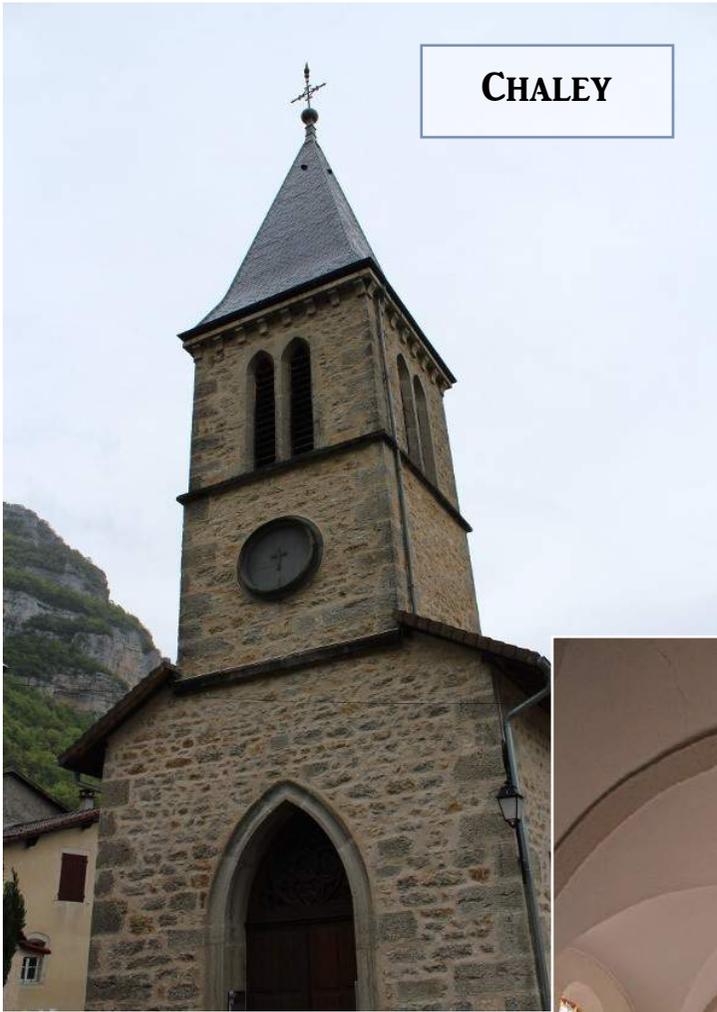
Another of the villages near the Rhône, Briord had been compared by a former parish priest to *'Japan in St Xavier's time'*.

The Marists preached here during their fourth winter of the Bugey missions.

In general they preferred to call themselves catechists rather than missionaries. They were very respectful to the parish priests, and they made sure they gave no offence to the more sensitive and prickly among the people.

There was a special emphasis on the catechising of the children.





CHALEY

Parish of the Assumption Oct 1825

In the high mountain region between the industrial town of Tenay and the isolated village of Lacoux, Chaley was visited by the Marists during their second winter of missions.

It is likely that they walked to Chaley from Lacoux to offer catechetical classes and mission exercises.



CHÂTILLON DE CORNEILLE

Nov 1825

During the missions of their second winter the Marists went to Châtillon de Corneille in the northern Bugey. At this period Mass was never celebrated in the church and there was no presbytery. One of the missionaries, probably the eldest, Fr Jallon, found a bed with parishioners.

The other missionaries found lodging at the *Hôtel du Nord*, but there was only one room for both innkeeper and guests. On the first night, Colin and Déclas took possession of the room and locked out their hostess. As they had to share the same bed and tried to keep each to his own side, they did not get much sleep. Presumably they came to some amicable arrangement with the landlady for the remainder of their stay, which was probably quite brief.

The population of about 200 showed no enthusiasm for the mission. The Marists went about with a hand bell to call them to the mission exercises, at first with poor results.

One woman in danger of death refused the last sacraments, saying: *'I don't need you.'* [The story concludes at Poncieux, see p 21]



CHAZEY BONS

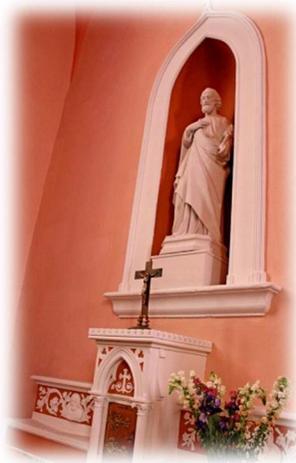


Parish of St Maurice 1828-29

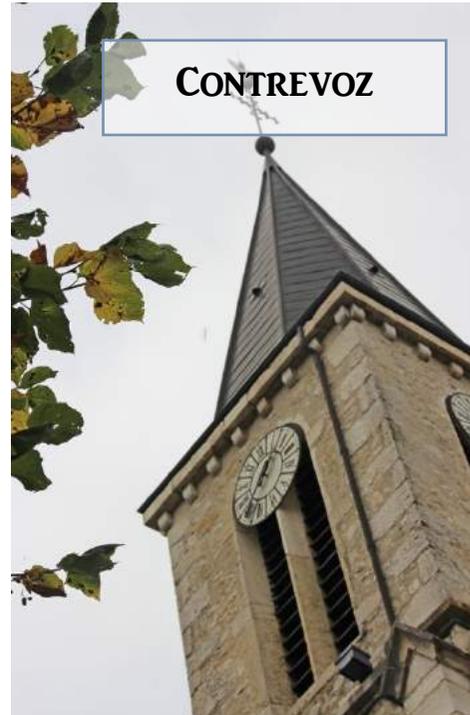
In their fifth winter of missions Frs Déclas and Jallon preached at the parish of Chazey Bons in the south-east corner of the Bugey and quite close to Belley. At that time it was formed out of two neighbouring villages (total population in 1832 of 671).

Some years before, in July 1825, Fr Déclas had been appointed parish priest of Chazey Bons, a post which he kept for three years. It is likely that he looked after his parish in the summer then took his place on the mission band during the winter when Fr Pierre Colin would go there on Sundays.

In latter years Fr Déclas came to be known as *'the apostle of the Bugey'*.



CONTREVOZ



Parish of St Romain Jan-Feb 1827

In the southern part of the Bugey the village of Contrevoz is about 7 km. from Belley and during the third winter of Marist missions was on the carriage road towards Tenay.

At the time of the mission the church and presbytery were reported to be in good repair. The parish register records a marriage solemnised by Fr Jallon.





CORLIER

Feb-Mar 1825

The second mission of the Marists was given at Corlier in the northern Bugey and not far from Cerdon.

At this period the tiny place was an annexe of the neighbouring parish of Izenave, whose pastor was the same Fr Antoine Jallon who had taught the young Jean-Claude Colin at the minor seminary of Saint-Jodard. He had studied with Pierre Colin at the major seminary of Saint-Irénée in Lyon. For some time now he had been Jean-Claude's confessor. So he naturally invited the missionaries of Cerdon to come to his parish.

The mission probably took place while Fr Jallon was resident in the little presbytery at Corlier. He appears to have taken an active part in the Marist mission there.

The people of Corlier did not match those of La Balme in eagerness to attend it. On at least one occasion Fr Colin found himself in the morning preaching to Jallon and one other person.

The same evening Fr Jallon preached to Colin alone, who afterwards congratulated the preacher on his short-sightedness, which enabled him to preach to one person as if to a full church.



CUZIEU

**Parish of St Oyen
Jan-Feb, 1829**

In late January, after a mission in Vaux on the western side of the Bugey, the Marist missionaries turned south to Cuzieu, not far from Belley.

In 1823 the parish priest of Cuzieu, Jean-Antoine Bonjour, had replied to the bishop that there was no room for a mission because the village was so small (population in 1832 was 384) and there was no money for one. The priest of the cantonal parish of Duvernay, on the other hand, reported in 1825: *'Cuzieu greatly needs a visitation from the vicar general; everything in the church and sacristy is dirty. The mayor seems well disposed to do all he can to buy the most necessary objects'*.

Fr Jallon had replaced the absent parish priest in Oct 1826 and no doubt reported that the place needed a mission. The one given by the Marists ended with the blessing of the cross on Feb 25, 1829, and a sermon by Fr Colin. Bishop Devie was present on this occasion and was impressed by Fr Colin's sermon, which may have revealed to him unsuspected qualities in the preacher.



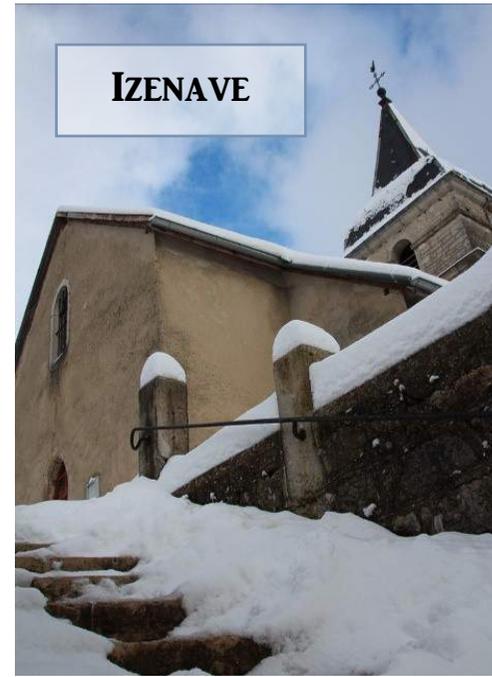
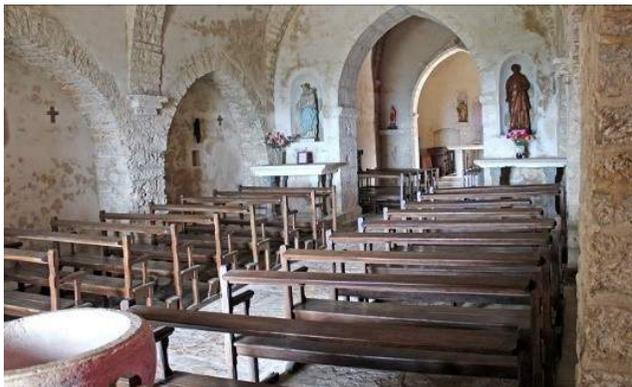


**Parish of St Laurence
Nov 1826**

The missions of 1826-1827 took place in that part of the Lower Bugey known as the Massif du Mollard de Don. The first was at Innimont (population in 1832 was 380) 16 km from Belley by a country track.

The village was looked after by the parish priest of neighbouring Marchamp. Bishop Devie had visited Innimont in July, 1826, and found that its church needed repairs and that the presbytery was uninhabited and unfurnished. The place was extremely poor, to which fact the parish priest, in his written report, attributed *'great crimes'* and *'these great abuses'* that were *'impossible to remedy'*. It was hardly surprising that the bishop put Innimont at the top of the list for a Jubilee mission.

The Marists arrived shortly after All Saints 1826. They had no time to enjoy the magnificent view. Fr Colin recalled sweeping out the presbytery, stuffing holes in the windows with straw and rags contributed by the parishioners, sleeping on straw for want of mattresses, and borrowing skirts from the womenfolk to cover the beds – all this with laughter and good humour. As the Marists left at the end of the mission, the people shouted their appreciation, and one woman threw her arms around Fr Colin's neck and kissed him. He does not tell us that he recoiled in horror, as he might once have done; but he prevented another from embracing him.



**Parish of St John the Baptist
Mar 1825**

In the northern Bugey Izenave is about 8 km from Cerdon as the crow flies. The missionaries seem to have gone there after Corlier to give their third mission, in which Fr Antoine Jallon, then its parish priest, very likely took an active part.

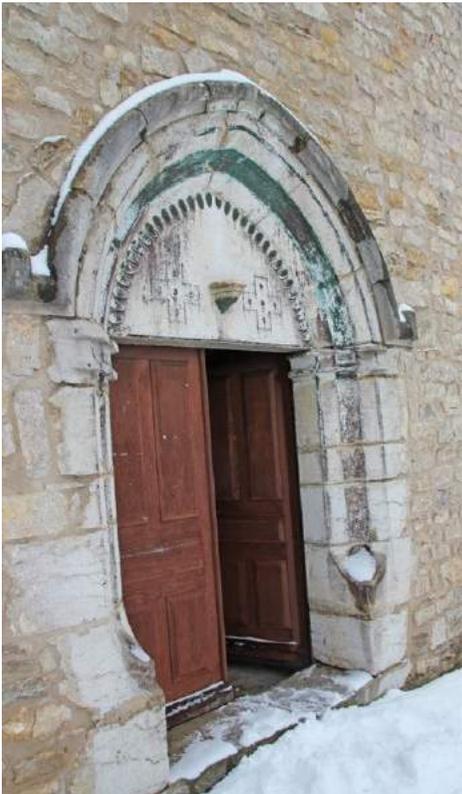
Fr Jallon had a reputation for being the most learned priest of the diocese. He believed in giving his parishioners solid teaching and Fr Colin could say that he had never found a parish so well instructed and people so remorseful for their sins.

It may have been at this time that Fr Déclas suggested to Jallon that he join the Marists, which he subsequently did.





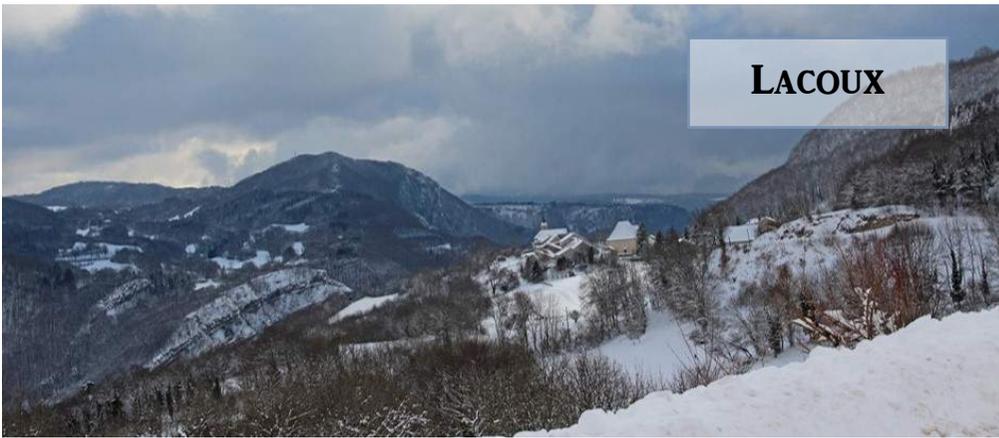
LA BALME



**Parish of St Amand
Jan 1825**

This little village (population in 1832 was 434) was the first to receive a mission from the Marists, ten weeks after the arrival of Fr Étienne Déclas to join the Colin brothers at Cerdon (Oct 29, 1824).

It is situated about 2 km above Cerdon on the road from Lyons to Geneva. Fr Colin liked to recall the spectacle of Fr Déclas stumbling up the steep track every morning reciting his breviary.



LACOUX

**Parish of St Etienne
Oct-Nov 1825**

The first event of the Marist missionaries' second winter was a mission at Lacoux in the central Bugey beginning on Oct 23, 1825, and lasting a month. It was given by Frs Colin, Déclas and Jallon. They probably took the stagecoach from Belley to Tenay and walked the rest of the way, at first on a good road as far as Chaley, then climbing a steep and difficult path to their destination.

They carried their few belongings, principally their 'treasures' – their sermons – in black leather bags slung over their shoulders. At Lacoux they found a village of some 300 souls and a parish priest, Jean-François Martelin, who was somewhat younger than themselves (b. 1796). He had replied to Bishop Devie's questionnaire of 1823 that he wanted to have a mission in his parish but could not afford the expenses it would entail; the bishop presumably replied that he would cover the costs.

Few details of this mission are known. The missionaries seem to have found the church and presbytery in good order and the people receptive to their message.





LOMPNAZ

**Parish of St James
Nov 1827**

During the winter of 1827-1828, the Marists preached missions in a group of villages in the Massif du Mollard de Don that were closer to the Rhône river. They also gave retreats at the seminaries of Belley and Meximieux.

The first mission of the new season was given at Lompnaz which at that time had no resident priest, as the priest in charge lived at Seillonaz.

A year before the mission, the presbytery had been recently repaired, but the church was reported to be in bad condition, with a leaking roof.

The church register records a marriage blessed by Colin and other marriages validated by the missionaries.

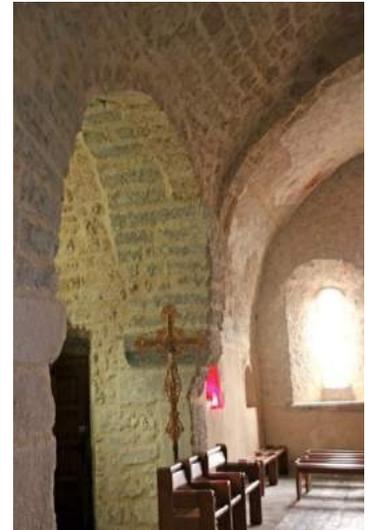


MONTAGNIEU

**Parish of St Didier
ca Apr 1828**

One of the cluster of villages near the left bank of the Rhône and in the south-west Bugey, Montagnieu, was visited by the Marists during their fourth winter of missions. The church had recently been refurbished but there was no presbytery and the priest lived in rented accommodation.

It was probably in this last place that Fr Colin remembers the Marists as poorly housed and nourished and forced to share the same bed. So ended the campaign of 1827-1828, of which Fr Colin recorded: *'The Lord blessed all these apostolic excursions.'*





ORDONNAZ

**Parish of St Anselm
Feb 1827**

Little is known of the Marist missionaries' visit to Ordonnaz. Situated to the south and not so far from Belley it was part of the Marists' campaign of their third Bugey winter.

It seems that Fr Déclas played a central part in the mission preached there. Near the door of the church stands one of the famous 'Sully' trees planted in the 17th century.



PONCIEUX

**Parish of St Bonnet
Nov-Dec 1825**

From nearby Châtillon de Corneille the missionaries went to Poncieux, a somewhat larger village. There was no resident priest and the parish was served from Saint-Jérôme. Here, however, the church was well kept, and the Marists were able to stay at the presbytery.

While the Marists were at Poncieux the death occurred at Châtillon of the woman who had refused Colin's ministrations [see p 9]. He returned to Châtillon to conduct her funeral, reasoning that no one in the village knew she had died without the sacraments. He used the occasion, which was no doubt attended by the whole village, to preach on the eternal truths and, in a second sermon at the graveside, to shake up his listeners.

Not long after regaining Poncieux, Fr Colin fell ill and had to return to Belley. As they drew near Châtillon once again, someone in the village must have thought that his arrival heralded that of the bishop, who was expected on one of his tours of visitation. There were shouts of '*Here's the bishop!*'; a drumbeat summoned the villagers to the church. Fr Colin seized the moment, mounted the pulpit, then heard confessions into the night. Bishop Devie made him stay at Belley and refused his request to return immediately to Châtillon.



PRÉMILLIEU

Parish of St Mary Magdalene Jun 1827

This was the only one of the early Marist missions *not* preached in winter. In the summer of 1827 the Marists went to Prémillieu, a village of about 300 situated in the central Bugey not far from the Lac des Hôpitaux. There was a resident priest, but no presbytery.

Although Fr Colin had insisted that the missionaries needed the summer for study, he seems to have been prepared to make exceptions, as with Prémillieu.



RUFFIEU

Parish of St Didier Mar 1829

In the fifth winter of the Bugey missions Frs Colin and Humbert went to Ruffieu. This village (population 549 in 1832) lies north of Belley in a region of the Bugey known as Valromey.

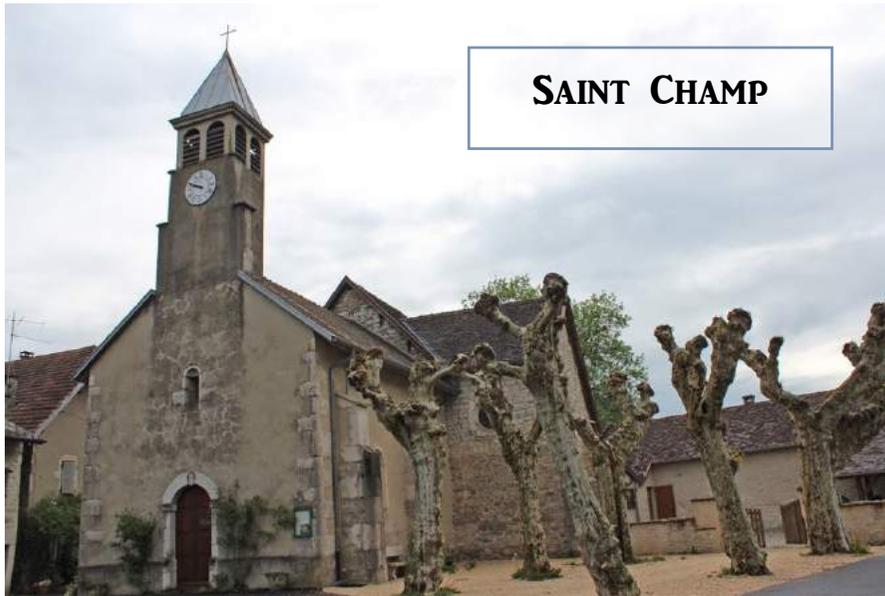
The parish priest, Damien Béal, had replied to the bishop in 1823 saying that a mission was 'very necessary', although there was no money for one. He reported that among his parishioners there was widespread indifference regarding religion and neglect of the sacraments.

The mission appears to have been a great success, and Fr Humbert remembered that '*the whole parish came to the sacraments*'. Fr Colin noted that the missionaries were overwhelmed by the demands made on them by the people.

At the end of the mission Bishop Devie came to confirm nearly 600 candidates, who came also from neighbouring parishes. The church was small, and Humbert, stationed in the tribune, relayed Fr Colin's sermon through a window to the crowd outside.

The Ruffieu mission was to be the last that Fr Colin preached. When the bishop arrived, he brought with him the news that the minor seminar director, Fr Pichat, had died a few days earlier. He instructed Fr Colin to return to Belley and shortly afterwards to take his place. Fr Colin's Bugey mission days were over.





SAINT CHAMP

**Parish of St Martin
1828-29**

Quite close to Belley and in the south-east extremity of the Bugey, St Champ was visited by the Marist missionaries in fifth winter of Bugey missions.

It seems that Frs Déclas & Jallon preached the mission.



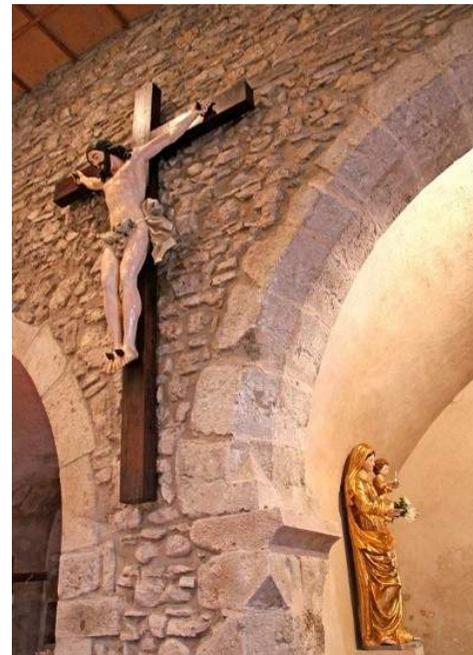
SERRIÈRES DE BRIORD



**Parish of St Peter
ca Mar 1827**

One of the cluster of four villages in the south-west Bugey visited by the Marists during their third winter of missions is Serrières-de-Briord.

Its 15th century church was in poor condition and the presbytery damp and unhealthy. The people of the parish were accustomed to work on Sundays, presenting yet another challenge to the missionaries.





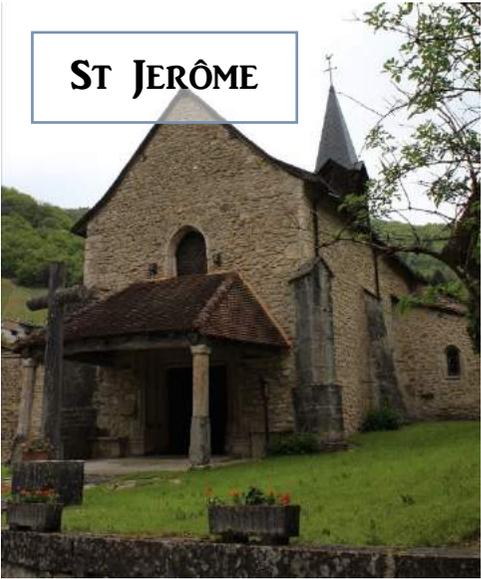
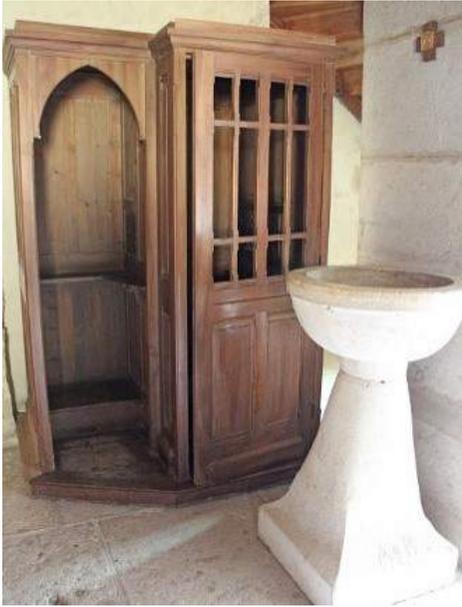
ST GERMAIN-LES-PAROISSES

**Parish of St Germain
Dec 1826 - Jan 1827**

After the mission at Innimont the Marists moved south in the direction of Belley to Saint-Germain-les-Paroisses.

In 1823 the parish priest reported that there had been no mission since the revolution and no desire for one, for lack of funds. The church and presbytery were, however, in reasonable state and there was a married schoolteacher who was satisfactory.

Belief in witchcraft was also reported. The only trace we have of the mission is the rectification of a number of irregular marriages.



ST JERÔME

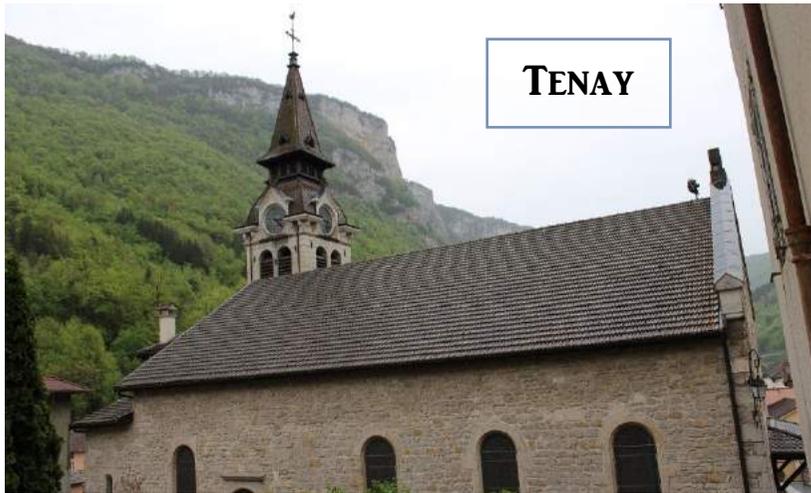
**Parish of St Jerome
Jan-Feb 1826**

Central to the mission of the second winter of Bugey missions was the principal place Saint-Jérôme (now Boyeux-Saint-Jérôme), with a population in 1826 of 573. Fr Colin seems to have been retained in Belley for reasons of health, and Frs Jallon and Déclas conducted this mission assisted by Antoine Montagny, priest of the diocese of Lyons, who had been at Saint-Irénée with Colin and Déclas.

The parish priest, Joachim Dubreuil, was a former constitutional priest and had a poor reputation: he never preached or heard confessions and had no one's confidence, except for one supporter, appropriately named M. Champion. To be sent to a Bugey parish was regarded by clergy as a penance. Little wonder that some priests were not up to their task.

We have no information about this mission, except that people from Châtillon, now in a more suitable frame of mind, came to attend it and receive the sacraments. The efforts of the missionaries in this region seem, in fact, to have borne good fruit.





TENAY

**Parish of St Andrew
Mar 1827**

A place familiar to Colin from his frequent journeys between Cerdon and Belley, Tenay was a small industrial town (population in 1832 of 1,130) specialising in weaving. For once, however, the missionaries were wanted. The parish had never had a mission, and the priest reported in 1823 that he believed his people desired one, despite lack of resources. The church was in reasonable state, and the presbytery, though small, was in fairly good repair. Tenay presented the Marists with some new problems. The population included a manufacturing middle-class and industrial workers, whose life and work were not determined by the seasons.

The mill-owners did not come to the mission nor give their workers time off to attend. So the Marists arranged times of mission exercises that suited factory hours and encouraged those workers who attended; these grew more numerous as time went on. Fr Colin excused the owners publicly on grounds of being so busy and thanked them for allowing their employees to come. A number of them did come to the cross planting, which took place on 25 March. Fr Jallon was the preacher and saw fit to denounce them for not coming to the mission itself. Fr Colin was annoyed and said a word at the end to compliment them on attending the ceremony.

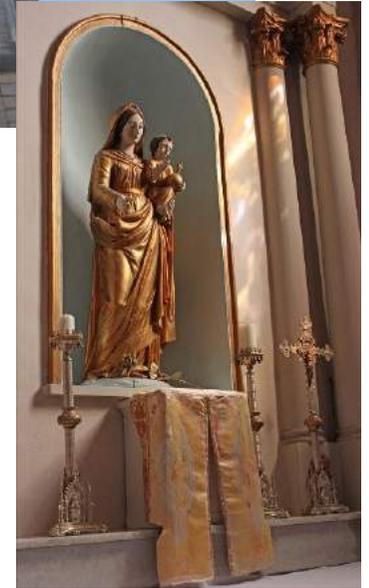


VAUX

**Parish of St Martin
Dec-Jan 1828-29**

All four missionaries took part in a mission at Vaux, a large village south of Ambérieu, where Fr Humbert's brother, François-Marie, was the parish priest. In 1823 he had expressed the need for a mission, but did not think the parish had enough resources.

Since then, he had called on the generosity of his people to rebuild the church, which had fallen into ruins, and repair the presbytery. The Marists were able to meet his wishes.





VIEU D'IZENAVE

**Parish of St John the Baptist.
Feb-Mar 1826**

Vieu-d'Izenave is north of Izenave, Fr Jallon's former parish, and was connected by a good road. In 1832 its population numbered 834. The parish priest, Philibert Rion (b. 1791) had been there since 1818 and was known to Fr Jallon, who had replaced him from time to time.

The church and presbytery were well maintained, and there was a schoolmaster who was well regarded.

We have no information about this mission, except that during its course Fr Colin came from Belley and re-joined the mission band.



THE BUGEY MISSIONS 1825-1829

