

BIOGRAPHY of René DESBONS (Brother JEAN)



René Desbons, son of Georges Desbons and Marie-Louise Barbé, was born on 12 December 1933 in Paris (14th arrondissement). He was baptised on 27 January 1934 and confirmed on 25 May 1944 in Paris.

While he was looking for his way, Providence directed him to Niderviller, where there was an *aerium* (shelter for tuberculosis patients) run by the Camillian religious. For six years he was employed as assistant to the director. This employment gave him the opportunity to get to know the Camillians and to reflect on his vocation.

He asked to enter the Order as a brother religious and was admitted to begin his postulancy in Lyon on 16th March 1953. He received the novice habit on 31 October of the same year. As there was already a brother named René in the Province, he was asked to change his baptismal name and chose John Baptist. Thereafter, he always wanted to keep this baptismal name.

His temporary profession took place in Lyon on 1 November 1954. He stayed there for a few months and in March 1955 was sent to the Marbach Preventory as an assistant. But in January 1956, suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, he had to spend 2 months at the Hôpital Pasteur in Colmar, then 2 months at the Hôpital Saint Camille in Bry-sur-Marne, then 3 months convalescing at the Villa Saint Camille in Théoule-sur-Mer. On his return to Marbach, he was assigned to the medical secretariat: he made his solemn profession in this community on 9 December 1957.

On 16 August 1966, the Provincial entrusted him with the secretariat and reception of the *Villa Saint Camille* in Théoule-sur-Mer, where he remained for ever. In November 1977, with the arrival of the new team consisting of Fathers Martin, Ketterer and Muller, who had come to give the Villa a more social purpose, he was appointed bursar, a post he occupied with great pleasure (in his own words) until 1990. From 1990 to 1992 he worked as a multi-skilled employee at the Villa. On 1 July 1997 he retired as an employee of the Villa.

From 1970 to 1978, Brother Jean was a member of the diocesan vocations team in Nice, where he had a weekly meeting and reflection camps to deepen his baptismal vocation. It was a rich, dense and fascinating service for him.

He was appointed Superior of the community on 15 March 1994 for one year and on 6 August 1995 for another three years. He was also provincial councillor from 1992 to 1995.

After retiring from active life, Brother Jean wanted to engage in external ministry and became prison visitor. In addition, the prison chaplain asked him to attend the Eucharist regularly, every Saturday,

to meet informally with prisoners and pray with them. He also visited isolated people who had difficulty coping with their widowhood and continued his human formation.

Thanks to the diverse welcome he received at Villa Saint Camille, Brother Jean was happy to meet many people, in addition to the staff of the House. He was fortunate to meet some excellent teachers who passed on to him a taste for reading, general culture and research. He was "an autodidact in constant evolution".

Very friendly and open to everyone, Brother Jean undeniably had a sense of welcome. He did his utmost to get people back on their feet, and to do so he lived his religious consecration and his Camillian charism in an exemplary manner, until illness exhausted him more and more. He also supported the Camillian Missions by collecting stamps to sell to a collector.

Brother Jean died on the morning of 5 July 2025 at the Clinique Sainte Brigitte in Grasse. "Lord, give him eternal rest.

*I am waiting for you, Lord. It is you who must come. But already night is falling towards the horizon.
I am ready for you.*

Peace descends to me from beyond the hills, like a second birth that makes everything eternal.
(Pastor Alain Houziaux)

Translated from the original in French.