

Torreateko was the fortified manor house positioned outside the wall alongside the City Gate where the convent building now stands.

The first convent of the Order of Carmel in the province of Gipuzkoa was founded here in 1614.

Francisca Labaien Hernández Torre (1568–1630), founder of the enclosed Convent, had been the owner since 1587. When she inherited the Torreateko fortified manor house along with other properties, upon the death of her mother. She continued to live there with her aunt, María Ramos de Iturain y Labaien, both of them devoted to the Virgin Mary, and working on their mission of dedication and assistance to the sick and needy.

For almost 400 years, from 12 December 1614 up until 17 March 2008, the date when they left the convent, 170 Discalced Carmelites of Saint Teresa of Jesus took their vows at the Convent of Saint Joseph in Zumaia.

Francisco **Bouquer Barton** was a merchant and shipowner, who also served as Mayor of Zumaia for 4 years and was a great friend of her late father. Aware of Francisca's wish to found such an establishment, he suggested the patronage of a convent of the Order of Carmel in Torreateko, promising his assistance and a good income for the Community. Teresa of Jesus had by then founded 16 reformed convents of the Order in question.

Francisca had a great religious vocation, and decided to profess her faith in the **Reformed Order of Discalced Carmelites of Teresa of Jesus**, with 6 nuns joining in 1608.

Following many years of tribulations, obstacles and disappointments in winning the favour of the church and civil authorities, in 1614, with the blessing of the Royal Authority and the Assemblies of Gipuzkoa, Bishop Prudencio de Sandoval officiated at a religious ceremony at which the 11 nuns took their solemn vows, and unanimously designated Francisca Labaien as their superior.

At the bishop's suggestion, the establishment was given the name of the **Convent of St Joseph**.

Her parents:

Juan Labaien, a ship's captain and shipbuilder, son of San Juan, born in Beintza-Labayen, Navarre, set sail as a carpenter on board a ship sailing the Indies Trade Route. At the age of 21 he built his first ship, followed by several more.

Around 1567 he married Marina Hernández Torre y Martínez de Yruna, owner of the Torreateko fortified manor house. In 1568 their only daughter, Francisca, was born. She was to inherit the house upon her mother's early death in 1587.

When Francisca refused to fulfil her father's wishes to see her married, he left Torreateko in 1589. Francisca remained at Torreateko in the company of her aunt, María Ramos de Iturain.

Her father died in 1598, leaving behind debts which his daughter settled with the sale of other properties.

Turnstile

The turnstile positioned at the entrance served as the connection with the outer world. Goods were received from outside via this rotating door, while the nuns provided hot meals for the poor.

The “turnstile” sister, was responsible for supervising the device and the entrance. Visitors rang a bell to announce their presence.

Locutory

It was here that the nuns could converse with people from the outside, through bars and behind curtains, by candlelight. This rule was abolished by the 2nd Vatican Council. The “turnstile” sister organised the visits requested by local people. The convent had electrical power installed in 1897.

Carmelite life

New Carmelite life proclaimed by Mother Teresa of Jesus.

"A life of prayer in their cells, fasting and abstinence from meat, intense and sisterly community life, renunciation of communal or individual income and properties, and the practice of silence".

The community of each convent of the Reformed Order of Carmel was to be made up of no more than **twenty-one nuns**.

Clerical or chorister, sisters able to pray and sing the Divine Service, the "main service of the nuns", who contributed a particular dowry when they joined.

Lay sisters, who did not make a financial contribution to the convent. They had no breviary, but were granted dispensation for choral prayer, even though they did not bring a dowry. They performed household duties.

Spring and water tank area

This storage area was set aside for the earthenware water tanks. The small window and to the right was used to bring in produce sourced from the outside: sacks of flour, oil... thereby avoiding direct contact with the outside world.

In the late 19th century, in 1889, the Local Authority alleviated the nuns' needs by installing pipelines providing free access to a spring, supplying water which was kept in a tank for use.

Organisation of the Convent

POSITIONS AND FUNCTIONS:

Governing Council of the Convent:

Superior or Prioress, serving as the Head of the Community for 3 years.

Deputy Prioress, standing in for the Prioress in her absence. Not authorised to take decisions. Responsible for supervising choral prayer.

Keyholders, numbering 3, who kept the keys to the "ark of the three keys", where the Community's deeds and documents were kept.

Novice mistress and assistants, with the task of instructing the novices.

Angel, the youngest sister, charged with teaching the most recently recruited novice in performing household duties.

Sacristan, in charge of preparing mass and liturgy for the church.

Turnstile operator, responsible for the turnstile and gate house.

Refectorian, in charge of keeping the refectory in order.

Laundress, responsible for the habits and wimples.

Clothier, in charge of the convent's linen.

Nurse.

Aside from these roles, there were also other mandatory roles performed by one or two different nuns each week: singers, psalmists, verse singers, prayer readers, organists, tuners for the singing, cleaning of the different rooms, facilities and showers, fonts and kitchen garden, cooking of meals.

Altar rail

The church was open to outsiders, and had previously been a chapel, which ultimately proved too small. It was built in the 19th century, with subsequent construction work in the 20th. The nuns followed the mass from the lower choir, separated by bars. They received communion by opening the cabinet hatch.

Refectory

This was a communal area for eating and prayer. The "refitolera" was the sister responsible for getting the room ready for mealtimes, with the lamps lit, while the "tañedora" sister had the task of ringing all the bells for the community to attend their meals.

After the bells were sounded each day, the nuns came to the refectory and while they ate in silence, the "reader", assigned every two weeks, read out religious passages.

One or two nuns, who also took turns every two weeks, would serve the food from the kitchen via a hatch. Lunch and breakfast were cooked by two different sisters.

Aside from their daily meals, on special feast days they prepared rice pudding, a particularly prized dessert, which they would distribute among assistants, friends and benevolent people, in token of their gratitude.

Cemetery

With capacity for 15 burials. The gate was always kept locked.

Whenever a nun died, the funeral was held in the church and she was then buried anonymously in this space, and after a time, following decomposition, the remains were placed in an ossuary together with those of all the other nuns from the convent, located in the left-hand wall.

Terrace

This area was made up of three spaces:

The novitiate, where the novices lived and were educated, had 5 cells.

The Chapterhouse was one of the most important areas. It served as the gathering place for the Chapter made up of the nuns who had taken more solemn vows. They would meet every three years to renew their positions. Alongside they would pray to God at a small altar for assistance in duly fulfilling their vows.

The clothes lines took up the largest area.

Cells

21 cells, with each nun having her own place to live in silent prayer.

Positioned around the 4 sides of the cloister, they were spacious enough to allow the nuns to walk freely with the carts carrying their belongings.

All the cells were the same, comprising: a small window, bed, a wardrobe to hold a few belongings, clothes, books for prayer, desk, chair for reading.

During the early years of the foundation "they worked hard to restore the House in the form and manner of a Convent". The nuns undertook the work themselves, avoiding the need for men to enter the cloister, as well as saving the cost of their wages.

They built all the dividing walls of the Cells, and the stone stairs.

They organised the convent around the cloister:

1st floor for communal life: canteen, service areas, kitchen, sacristy.

2nd floor: the nuns' cells. Medical dispensary.

3rd floor: the terrace included a space for the novitiate, the chapter house, and an area for drying laundry.

Garden and kitchen garden

The garden, which was the area closest to the building, had flowers used to decorate the church with floral offerings for the Virgin Mary and the Saints. Herbs were also grown here.

A separate kitchen garden was tilled with the help of the surrounding residents, growing fruit and vegetables which served as their basic sustenance.

Mother Francisca gave instructions to build a chapel dedicated to St James the Apostle at the top of the kitchen garden, right alongside the pathway, to provide a place of prayer and shelter for pilgrims travelling to Santiago de Compostela.

The same sister who had the task of filling the fonts with holy water on Sundays, was also responsible for sweeping the pathways around the kitchen garden.