

“IN THE SERVICE OF LOVE”

Lives of Some Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing

by Sister Mary John Manazan OSB

Rome, Italy, September 1985

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FOREWORD

“Modern journalism often traces the hidden sins of men.... But I hope likewise, that modern Catholic Journalism will trace the hidden saints, those modest and humble men and women, who teach the youth, care for the sick, lift up the oppressed, those hidden servants of God, who live truly according to the message of the Gospel.”

These words of the Holy Father, John Paul II, spoken on March 21, 1985 to the members of the Council of the World Organization of the Catholic Press are an inspiration for the following pages, which will tell us the life stories of some of our deceased Sisters.

May their example inspire us to live fully our vocation as Missionary Benedictine Sisters, each one on the place where providence has placed us.

I would like to thank all those who have helped in getting the information, writing or relating events and interesting happenings in the lives of our sisters.

I would like to thank especially Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB, who accepted the task of the English edition; also Sister Marita Schweiger, OSB, for her collaboration in translation and secretarial work, as well as those who had helped in one or the other way to finalize this booklet during the Centennial Jubilee Year.

It is meant to be an expression of our gratitude to all of our 793 deceased Sisters.

Rome, Feast of the Assumption, 15. August 1985

M. Edeltrud Weist, OSB, Prioress General

INTRODUCTION

When I was asked to edit the following stories of our sisters, I was faced with the problem of how to go about the task. Reading through the various manuscripts, I noted the different styles, lengths, points of view, not mentioning the differences in the languages they were written. How does one put these into one booklet with some sort of cohesion? As I reflected on the task, I seemed to find something that bound the stories together, and that was the message each story wished to communicate. However short or long the individual sister lived, a single point, a single problematic, a single statement seemed to sum up her life. For one: it was the struggle to make sense of dying at the peak of one's life, for another it was living with the reality of a life of seeming uselessness as an invalid strapped to a wheelchair. For another it was the acceptance of the burden of a loathsome disease with a social stigma. For still another, it was the living and dying in a foreign land. And so on.

In working through the manuscripts, I was struck again and again at the amount of accomplishments that could be accumulated in a lifetime of a sister; how the Convent could challenge hidden resources in a person dedicated to God and the service of others.

I have also been encouraged in my own struggles by the examples of our courageous sisters who succeeded in seeing a meaning in their own unique suffering or in finding answers to the incomprehensible questions life poses. I have been edified by the serenity of spirit they gained after going through their own struggles.

I wish the reader a similar fruitful encounter.

Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

Oblate Agneta Chang, OSB (1910-1950)

PRIORY OF WONSAN, NORTH KOREA

Who is this Oblate Agneta, for whom martyrdom was reserved? One of the 10,000 Koreans who, during the 200 years of Christianity in Korea, gave their lives for the faith. She was murdered brutally on the 14th of October, 1950, in the prison of Hamhúng, while other sisters survived 4½ years of forced labor in the Concentration Camp at Oksadok.

It was during the night of May 10th to 11th, 1949, when the sisters were rudely awakened and arrested by the Communist Secret Police; they were taken from the Priory House at Wonsan and brought by truck and animal car to the distant town of Pyóng-yang. Hurriedly dressed and with only the Holy Eucharist, whom they managed to consume secretly, they had to leave their convent. That was the prelude to a long time of suffering.

Sr. Agneta actually belonged to the community at Hamhúng. But during the raid of May 10th to 11th, 1949, she had been at Wonsan for retreat, and therefore, arrested with the sisters there.

Several reports tell about the life of our Oblate Agneta Chang. From Sr. Chrysostoma Schmid, the chronicler, who had also been one of the four foundresses of the “Immaculata Priory” at Wonsan, North Korea, we have the following information:

“After our arrival on the 18th of November 1925 in Seoul, Mother Mathilide Hirsch and her three companions were soon visited by some young girls who wanted to become sisters. With them was Jacobo Chang, catechist and parish-elder, who was highly esteemed by all the Christians. Both he and his daughter Agatha (later Oblate Agneta) were well known by the German Benedictines of Seoul. Agatha would have liked to follow us at once to Wonsan, We were hardly established there, when Mr. Chang with wife and daughter Agatha moved to Wonsan, close to our convent.

“Agatha took care of her very sick mother. But during the day, she often came over to us and helped with baking hosts, in the sacristy, or wherever she could be of service. Soon afterwards her mother died.” So far the account from Sr. Chrysostoma.

Agatha was fourth among the candidates who entered on the 1st of April 1927 in Wonsan. A year later, on the 1st of May 1928, the first group of postulants received the black

veil. To her great disappointment, Agatha was not among them. Mother Prioress Mathilde had come to know only then, that 18-year old Candidate Agatha had been married and was already widowed. (She was born in 1910 in Hwang Hae-Do, North Korea). According to the general thought of the time, it was impossible for a young woman who had been married, to become a professed religious. Agatha had often assured her fellow-sisters that she had never lived with the man to whom she had been given in marriage. With tears she claimed to be a virgin. Yet, she had legally been married. In those days it was the custom that parents would promise their children already at a very early age in marriage. The children did not know their partner, and saw him for the first time only on their wedding day.

In the same way, Agatha had been betrothed as a child. When old enough, she and her fiancé received the Sacrament of Matrimony. The wedding banquet was duly held, to seal the marriage according to Korean custom. The bridegroom—then already suffering from severe tuberculosis—died shortly after the wedding. Also, this young man had been a brother to our Sister Benedikta Paek.

For Agatha, it was a great disappointment not to become a full member of the religious community which she loved so much. It was a sorrow she felt throughout her life. Upon Mother Prioress' advice, she decided to remain as an oblate. But, every feastday, every new reception into the novitiate, as well as celebrations on the occasion of religious profession were painful for Sr. Agneta, as she was now called as an Oblate. It also meant to be excluded from attending Chapter, for the rest of her life. But Sr. Agneta said "yes" to all these deprivations and submitted to them.

Her longest employment was at the parlor in the priory house at Wonsan. She also did missionary work in the parish of Christ the King, in Wonsan. Whatever task had been entrusted to her, she carried it out faithfully and with dedication. Well-loved by the people of the town, she was approached for advice and help. She prepared catechumens for baptism and visited people in their homes. Her special charism was to teach men, trying to get the catechism and the most necessary prayers across to the old grandpas.

When one of the sisters became sick and in need of a night nurse, Sr. Agneta would offer her assistance. Whenever there were occasions that drew many visitors to the convent, e.g., at the death of a sister when, according to Korean tradition, relatives and friends would come at any time during the day and night to pray the Yondo for the deceased, she had a kind word and consoling smile.

Mrs. Christina Yu, catechist in Seoul, recalls this about Sr. Agneta: "I lived in Wonsan. As a Protestant student I attended several times the religious instructions of Sr. Agneta with a friend; but then I stayed away. One day, during the noon hour, I felt very strongly that I should become a Catholic. I should return to Sr. Agneta for further instructions. Why? No one had even mentioned the subject, but I felt a movement within me, as though God had given me a command. I just knew, I had to do it. When I rejoined the class some days later, Sr. Agneta said to me, 'You have come back, because we prayed for you. God has heard us.' Later, she admitted that she had asked all 14 sisters to give up their noon rest in order to pray for a particular student. Then she invited me to come to Holy Mass the next Sunday."

Sr. Agneta's heart always went out to poor people. She kept Mother Prioress Ambrosia informed about their needs and would be anxious to procure articles of food for them. However, she could be serious towards loafers and did not mince words. She also reminded them of their responsibility towards God.

But, as to her own needs, she was thrifty, almost too thrifty. She darned and mended her clothing so much, that at times the original material could hardly be seen. Even though her sisters teased her about it during recreation, she took it good-naturedly and laughed along when she was made the object of funny scenes.

Sr. Agneta was diligent at prayer. She loved the Common Office and tried also to learn praying and singing the Latin well. Often she prayed the rosary. During exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on First Fridays, she used every spare minute for adoration, even though this meant running up and down the stairs repeatedly, to answer the doorbell.

When Sr. Agneta was arrested, together with the other sisters of the Wonsan community in 1949, the Korean sisters were separated from the Europeans before they were brought to different prisons at Kam-yang. The booklet *Schicksal in Korea* describes somewhat the conditions in the prison cells there:

The sisters were deprived of their veils, but they refused to take off the habit. Always five of them were stuck into one room. On the floor, glossy with filth, were pieces of what at some time had been straw mattresses. The bucket in the corner emitted an unmistakable stench. That was all the furnishings.

Sister Agneta and the other Korean sisters were released after one week. Since there were no relatives with whom she could have stayed, Sr. Agneta was put up by Anselmo Yu, a Christian in Hamhúng. There, she had a small room and worked in a brickyard, earning her livelihood. She cooked and took care of herself. Day after day she had to mend the gloves which were torn from the heavy work.

Constantly watched by the Secret Police, she could make no unnoticed move. Despite this fact, in summer 1950, she undertook to visit some Korean sisters who were living with relatives at Pyóng-yang, after their release from prison. She also hoped to find a priest there, for she wanted to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. She succeeded in meeting an Anglican priest to whom she went to confession and received Communion.

Had she been watched? After her return to Hamhúng, Sr. Agneta was arrested on the 25th of June in the house of Anselmo Yu. It was the day when the Korean War began. Besides Sr. Agneta, many other people in town were taken to jail on suspicion of being subversive against the Red Regime.

Since that day, Sr. Agneta's whereabouts could no longer be followed. It seems, everyone in town was preoccupied with his own affairs, so much so, that none of the Christians visited Sr. Agneta in prison. One can only surmise what she suffered there.

On the 7th of October 1950, South Korean soldiers, together with the US Army, occupied Hamhúng. Some days previously, the Red Army had fled the city; and when the South Korean soldiers took over the prison, they found many bodies which the Communists had tried to hide. Even the well was filled with corpses.

The town people were alerted to come to the prison to search for missing relatives and to help identify the dead. Some who returned from there informed Mrs. Pia Choo, a Christian, that they had found a woman who resembled Sr. Agneta. Together with the catechist, Mrs. Christina Yu, they went to find out. This catechist reports:

“On reaching the prison gate we saw many South Korean and American soldiers. The Koreans told us, ‘Don’t cry; behave in a quiet way, because of the Americans. Move on quickly, as there are many in search of their relatives.’ The women’s bodies were on one side, those of the men on the other. Identification was difficult. Therefore, we waited until most people had gone. Then we searched again and found the Sister, wearing prison number 4 on her chest. It was now 6 p.m. and we had to leave the jail in order to be off the streets before the curfew. But, we reported that the dead woman with the number 4 belonged to us and that we would return the following day.

“Next day, we came back with some men and also the mother of Anselmo Yu, at whose house Sr. Agneta had been living. When she saw Sr. Agneta, she cried out, “Oh, this is our Mother Agneta!” and broke into loud weeping. Just at that moment, bright, fresh blood exuded from Sr. Agneta’s mouth without anyone having touched the body. On her forehead there was a wound; likewise at the chin. And at the back of her head was a gash like from an axe.

“We placed Sr. Agneta on a stretcher and took her to the convent. Although the parish house and the living quarters of the sisters had been burned down, there remained a room in the former clinic which, for some time, had been used as an office by the police. There, we brought the dead Sister. When the Christians saw Sr. Agneta they exclaimed. ‘Sister Agneta, now you are again in the convent!’” At that moment, a discharge of fresh blood again oozed from her mouth, as though she wanted to give us confirmation. Then we dressed her in a shroud of poor material, since hardly anything could be bought in those times. When changing her clothes we noticed that the body must have been lying in water for some days, as it was bloated. We marveled all the more at the fact that fresh blood had come from her mouth.

“Then we buried Sr. Agneta about 200 m behind the church, upon a hill. Next to her, we stuck a bottle upside-down into the ground. It contained a piece of paper with the name AGNETA CHANG. Some Christians gave her the last honor praying the prayers for the dead there.”

Oblate Sr. Agneta is resting now in North Korea, waiting for the Resurrection. It is with pride that she can be numbered among the sisters.

Sister M. Baptista Battig, OSB (1870-1942)

PRIORY OF MANILA, REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

To new Scholasticans like myself, shortly before World War II, Sister Baptista was a legend. She was a small Sister, slightly stooped, whom we met regularly towards noontime, crossing the Social Hall, invariably reading a little book (which we learned later was an Office book), looking neither to right nor left, but, as we were to discover, noticing whether we had good manners, greeting persons whom we met.

Before long, we learned that she was THE Sister Baptista Battig, directress of St. Scholastica's Conservatory of Music. We heard that she had been a famous concert pianist in Germany before she entered the convent. We had a glimpse of the picture of a lovely young woman in the fashionable pinch-waisted, full-skirted gown of the late 19th-century Europe—this was Sr. Baptista before she gave up curls, make-up and fashion for the wimple, veil and habit. We reached the conclusion that she must have loved to dress up and dance as a young girl, when we heard music students boast that Sister had advised them to “powder and rouge” carefully so they would look nice and healthy and that she had encouraged them to dance. And when one day she danced the Minuet before her class—that certainly added credence to all our surmises.

She had come to the Philippines when there was not yet any formal music education in the country. Soon after her arrival in 1907, a story is told that Mr. Augustus Gndt, a benefactor, went up and down the streets of Tondo, ringing the bell and announcing the arrival of a piano teacher and inviting students to take lessons with her.

When the Sisters needed funds for their new school in San Marcelino, she had to give a public recital for which permission had to be obtained from the Archbishop. Contrary to the myth that she played behind the curtain, Sr. Baptista played before one of the most distinguished of Manila audiences, who wondered at this nun playing with such skill and mastery. The response was indeed enthusiastic, and the performer highly acclaimed. A year later she gave another concert, her last public performance. These concerts gained many students for the school.

Sister Baptista was likewise an excellent teacher. No wonder, since she was the pupil of the noted Ludwig Deppe, himself a disciple of the great Franz Litz. Already in Germany, she had become an accomplished performing artist and teacher. Critics considered “tonal beauty and poetic touch” to be the distinguishing marks of her pianistic art.

She gave up her brilliant career when she entered Tutzing in October of 1902. For some time she could touch the piano only on Sunday, in accordance with convent regulations then.

The Filipinos' love and gift for music brought Sister Baptista to the Philippines. She introduced formal music education to the country, and her venue was St. Scholastica's Conservatory of Music.

Reminiscing 25 years later, Sister Baptista wrote, that from the very start she had endeavored to inculcate into her pupils the principles of true art in the realm of music. And

she could wax lyrical about the progress of her students: “How well they found out that a repeated phrase must not be rendered in the same way as the first one; that the melody naturally should increase when rising and decreasing when falling.... They soon perceived that one phrase seemed to contain a question, the other supplied the answer to it; that one composition expressed deepest grief and another expressive joy.” Her pupils learned that no good music can be produced without hard work. They proudly related that Sister Baptista “drove” them to perfection.

The music education that Sister Baptista brought to the Philippines did not only consist of piano and voice lessons. Besides the art of music, there is the science of music for depth of understanding and appreciation. Thus her students were introduced to the music sciences: forms, theory, history of music, harmony, counterpoint, music appreciation and later on, original composition. It was through these offerings that St. Scholastica’s figured prominently in the establishment of formal music education in the country.

That was Sister Baptista, the musician, the music teacher, the directress of a conservatory of music. But she was first and foremost a missionary and a religious. In spite of her very busy schedule, Sister Baptista took time to teach religion and singing in the women’s reformatory and in the state prison. Because she was a “bad sleeper”, Sister Baptista spent her siesta time in adoration in the chapel.

Reviewing Sister Baptista’s other assignments in the convent, one wonders how much energy was stored in and spent by such a small nun of less than five feet. In the early years she was subprioress, infirmarian, mistress of ceremonies, organist—all, in addition to her work in school.

During feastdays, Sister Baptista was invariably a performer, not only at the piano but as an actress, also as scriptwriter and composer.

Like a true artist, she was intense: intense in work, in faith, in love. She had faith in God and in people. She loved people as she loved God. Her faith and love were wellsprings of her life of prayer and work. In spite of her work schedule she was most regular in the community. Far from being an “absent-minded artist” she was remarkably thoughtful, remembering the feastdays of all the Sisters and of her students with little notes of greeting. Recreation time she spent mending clothes of those who were absent; or preparing hand-me-downs for distribution among the poor.

She had a great love for the country and its people. “The Philippine Islands have become a second home to me,” she exclaimed. On November the 21st, 1938, she embraced Filipino citizenship with Don Felipe Agoncillo as her witness.

The same love that offered “every tone for the love of God” sustained her in her last difficult weeks in early 1942, when the war blackouts, bombings, evacuations, the take-over of St. Scholastica’s College—first by the American military forces, then by the Japanese—took their toll on her sensitive soul, her compassionate heart and her delicate body. At 7:32 p.m. on January 26, 1942, as the American forces were bombing Manila, Sr. Baptista lay dying. As explosions rocked the city, beautiful music and monastic chant rose at Holy Mass in

the darkened St. Scholastica's Chapel to usher Sr. Baptista from the shattered harmony of a war-torn world to play in peace the music of the skies.

What portrait emerges from the many vignettes, love and history have etched around Sr. Baptista's life? Paying tribute a hundred years after her birth, a Benedictine monk expressed the near inexpressible: "In today's parlance, she would be called a 'hyphenated nun'—the female counterpart of the 'hyphenated priest': the artist-nun, the teacher-nun, the pianist-nun. But the hyphen did not exist for her." No, Sister Baptista was a non-hyphenated nun. She was a musician, missionary, artist, religious, teacher, loved of God, daughter of Benedict, handmaid of the Lord—all of these without any hyphen; a beautiful creature of God, who in her lifetime magnificently reflected His image and likeness, His harmony and His peace.

Sr. Benedicta Paek, OSB (1910-1946)

PRIORY OF WONSAN, NORTH KOREA

"Bali, Bali, Benedicta," meaning "quickly, quickly, Benedicta," could often be heard in the Immaculata Convent at Wonsan, North Korea. Small, chubby Sister Benedicta, with an endearing smile on her childlike face, had received from God a rather slow temperament. In the novitiate, and later among the sisters, she had to take many a teasing, but nothing could ruffle her. Perhaps the sickness which was to lead to her early death at age 36, was already draining her physical strength, unknown to her or others. Besides, her round face and figure were deceiving, and also her skillfulness in many things.

But the words "Bali, Bali, Benedicta" have not stopped after her death. Many of her sisters and even people in other countries who heard about Sr. Benedicta realize how quickly she responds and helps in various needs. "Bali, Bali, Benedicta"—and some difficult task is easily done. Today, Sister Benedicta is helping so obviously that one thinks of a second St. Anthony. But who is this Benedicta?

Sister Benedicta Paek, whose name was Magdalena before she joined the convent, was the second-oldest Korean Sister. She was the daughter of good Christian parents and was born on the 26th of December 1910 in Mae Hoa Dong, Mae Hoe Village, in the Province of Hwang Hoa, North Korea. It is presumed that she was baptized at a very early age. She attended elementary school. Already in 1927, at age 17, she entered the Convent of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters which had just been established in 1925. May 1, 1928 was a joyful day for her and the entire Wonsan community because the first nine candidates took their next step, being received as postulants. Among them was also her sister-in-law, Agatha Chang, the wife of her brother. Agatha lost her husband only a few months after their wedding. She died later a martyr's death as an oblate.

All who knew Sr. Benedicta recall that in spite of her youth, she was a mature, quiet, but always cheerful person. Although she was reserved, she never seemed to lose her beautiful smile, and brought cheer to community recreations through her wit.

Sr. Chrysostoma Schmid, directress of the Guardian Angel School at Wonsan, recognizing the talent of the girl, made the postulant an assistant teacher. At that time Korea was under Japanese occupation and, therefore, teaching had to be done in Japanese. Sister Benedicta usually taught the 3rd and 4th year elementary school. All were surprised how she could organize her boys and girls. Although of a rather gentle and sensitive nature, she had authority and could be firm, if necessary.

On May 24, 1930, she was one of the first six postulants to be received into the novitiate, where she became the second-oldest novice. Already after one year, on May 25, 1931, she was allowed to pronounce her religious vows. At that time, Mother Mathilde Hirsch was prioress and mistress of novices till she was elected prioress general in 1933.

Sr. Benedicta enjoyed reading, and would go over some books even several times. A fellow-novice tells: "She had a good memory and read smaller books so often that she knew them almost by heart. I believe that she always lived in the presence of God; she often spoke about heaven, so that we sometimes teased her, because we got the impression she was already there. Also, because of her slowness, she was the object of a lot of teasing."

Sr. Benedicta managed never to complain or speak adversely about others. She did not lose these qualities even after she became sick, while still being very young, when it became necessary—due to danger of contagion—to isolate her from the community and she spent many years in her cell.

It happened already, when she was still a junior sister, that after a day's excursion with the children into the mountains, she would return in the evening and relate that she had spat blood. Mother Prioress took it seriously and went with the sister next day to see the doctor. He, however, was not able to find anything out of the ordinary. Sister Benedicta had a healthy complexion, and besides, there was no x-ray machine in Wonsan in those early times. Sr. Benedicta went on teaching as before.

On May 26, 1934, she had her companions take their final vows. When Sister Benedicta returned to school it could be noticed that her health was impaired. To improve her condition she was sent to Sin-Kosan, a station which had been established on March 19, 1933. The convent contained a chapel, refectory, and some cells. In this one-story house she could get on well, as there were no stairs to climb. Back in Wonsan it had been hard to get up the many flights of stairs. Sin-Kosan had a beautiful garden with trees and vegetables and a small farm as well, which provided enough food and milk.

Sr. Benedicta was expected to recover there. For some time she still helped with teaching in school, but then it became obvious that her health was steadily declining. In 1938 she was sent to her family for a short while, in the hope of getting better there. Now it was clear that she had contracted tuberculosis. Yet at that time there existed no remedy. The only treatment was to rest much and to be isolated from others. From that time on until her death in 1946, i.e., eight years later, she could be seen during the summer months in a corner of the garden, lying in a deck chair under shady trees. The one and only convent goat was her friend. The dog also would stroll around to see her and be fondled. The chicken cackled and pecked the

grass around her. The sisters of her community were not allowed to come close, except for short visits, to avoid contagion.

Sr. Benedicta was still more lonely during the winter months, when she was resting in her cell, hour after hour. As long as she was able, she fetched her meals from the kitchen and washed her dishes in her room. She was very careful about having a basin with disinfectant solution in her room, near the door, and she watched that each visitor would rinse her hands on leaving her, to prevent catching TB!

As Sister Benedicta was by nature unselfish and concerned for others, she never wanted that anyone would sleep with her in the same room, even during the very last weeks before her death. She insisted that her nurse—Sr. Walburga was the last one—would sleep in an adjoining room. Only during the last days did she ask for help—just for a stick to handle the window—when she had to struggle for air during the night.

Sister Immaculata Martel, then also a young sister who spent the last years with Sister Benedicta in Sin-Kosan, was close to her. During the last weeks they often talked about their Eternal Home. Sr. Immaculata reminisces that she had hardly ever met a young person (Sr. Benedicta died at 36) who was so well prepared to accept her approaching death. Although she must have suffered, she hardly ever complained and seemed to be in a state of contentment. For years, Sr. Benedicta could no longer join the sisters in choir, nor at recreation, though she heard them laugh and sing. But she accepted all this as her lot. Shortly before Sr. Benedicta died, Sr. Immaculata asked her to intercede for her in heaven. They sealed their promise—to pray for one another—as Korean friends would do, by hooking the little finger of each one's right hand. She added, "Even though I'm just a little sister, I think Jesus will listen to me. When you want something, just tell me, and I shall tell it to Jesus." And, winking with her little finger and smiling with her eyes, she went on, "But I shall help only in little things, not in big ones." This promise she really seems to keep, not only towards her friend, Sr. Immaculata, but also towards many, many people.

We know about her death from Sr. Walburga, then her nurse and superior. "Throughout the last days we could see that God would take her soon. I had asked her to knock at the wall if she felt ill or needed something. During the night from the 15th to the 16th of June 1946, I suddenly awoke and thought I heard Sister Benedicta push the window shut with her stick. I found her already dead, stick in hand. She must have passed away just then, quietly, without disturbing anyone, still smiling peacefully.

No more is known today of Sister Benedicta, and when the sisters speak of her, this is what they tell—similar to the Little Flower, where a fellow-sister was said to have remarked, "What could we tell in the account of Soeur Térèse's life? There was nothing special about her." It was just like that with Sr. Benedicta, yet those who have experienced her help agree that this quiet sister with her gentle smile and slow temperament is today a powerful intercessor with God.

"Bali, Bali, Benedicta!"

Mother M. Clodesindis Lüken, OSB (1880-1942)

PRIORY OF MANILA, REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

When Scholasticans hear Mother Clodesindis' name mentioned, they think right away of the Sister who died with a child in her arms, in the Sacred Heart Courtyard of St. Agnes' Academy during the bombardment of the city in World War II. This was, of course, not all which made the life of Mother Clodesindis remarkable, but it is what stuck on the mind, and in a way, symbolized her life of offering oneself for others.

Clara was born the seventh child in Dortmund on August 8, 1880. One lung not functioning, she was in a precarious condition and for years her health continued to be below par. This did not prevent her, however, from being cheerful and vivacious. Gifted in many ways, she breezed through examinations with playful ease. She was also musical and studied piano and violin.

As early as her teens she wanted to become a missionary. But her father would not hear of her leaving the country; so she accepted a teaching position in an institute for the deaf in Beuron in order to bide time. She was an excellent teacher.

In 1901, she traveled secretly to St. Ottilien to apply in person for admission into the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters. However, it was only after her father's death that she could actually enter. Convent life was not easy for a person of Clara's temperament and upbringing. She had been trained for mental work, for the arts and sciences, and she was independent-minded. Now, she found plenty of manual labor, and relaxations were rare.

On the Feast of the Presentation, 1908, Clara received the habit and the name Sister Clodesindis. The following year she pronounced her first vows. As she had excelled in methods of teaching, she was assigned to teach in the convent school.

In 1916, Sister Clodesindis and Sr. Pia, together with two postulants, were assigned as war nurses to Mesopotamia. In three years of military nursing service they matured more than if they had remained in a quiet convent under ordinary circumstances in a longer span of time.

Traveling through war zones in a carriage drawn by mules up the 5000 m of the Taurus, in imminent danger of gliding into a ravine where birds of prey were feasting on carcasses; passing through fields studded with skulls of Armenians slaughtered by Turks, and balancing oneself in a wagon drawn by donkeys that could slip any moment down the slopes and disappear from the face of the earth, meant being ready to die any moment. Having no clean water to drink and to wash themselves with, huddling together for mutual protection, sleeping in soldiers' barracks, in deserted stables, in the open—how different from even the severest practices in the peaceful convent.

The sisters had to fight diseases. In fact, both sisters got so sick that they were advised to return to Germany to recuperate. Sr. Clodesindis also had to fight military and civil officials who wanted to be served at mess. Sister had a ready answer: "You have your lackies and orderlies. The High Command commissioned us to serve the common soldiers." When the

officer-in-charge reprimanded her for wanting to be in his place, she replied: “The cock is in command in the poultry yard. He struts around. The hen has the right to cackle. She does not want to be the master.”

The most dangerous situation that faced the sisters came from the Pasha who invited them once to an entertainment and insinuated that one of them should stay behind with him. Sister Clodesindis fearlessly explained to him that they were espoused to Allah, which struck fear into the heart of the sensuous man, and he countered with professing his faith in the Supreme God.

When peace returned, the sisters received orders to go home. The soldiers, however, begged them to stay to protect them from the maltreatment of their officers. So they remained until the soldiers were ready to move. When they finally reached Constantinople, they learned that of the one hundred cars which had left the war-torn territory in a convoy, theirs alone had reached its destination without mishap.

Sister Clodesindis was appointed Visitatrix in 1920 and led 14 other sisters to the Philippines. They had to board the steamer in Barcelona. Knowing no Spanish, Sister Clodesindis, in asking a policeman the whereabouts of a church, simply sang “Dominus vobiscum” and the enlightened policeman showed them the way to the nearest church. The devaluation of the German money left them with less than they needed to buy their tickets. Sr. Clodesindis approached one consulate after another. Finally, Princess Maria de la Paz, sister of the King of Spain and wife of Prince Ludwig-Ferdinand of Bavaria, arranged with the shipping company to accommodate the sisters on credit, which Mother Angela, on their arrival, lost no time in settling.

As Visitatrix and later on as Mother Prioress, she studied the condition of the country in depth and came to the conclusion that religious instruction was the greatest need in the Philippines, and that schools would be necessary to cope with the situation. Procuring more sisters from the Motherhouse in the years from 1920 to 1926, she was able to put up in quick succession ten schools all over the country, even as far as Camiguin Islands! She also set up a program of in-service training, and she herself took time to show the sisters how to teach. Aside from this, she also trained catechists for parishes and public schools and institutions, and introduced vacation missions.

The General Chapter of 1927 elected Mother Clodesindis as prioress general. On her travels, she would ask her companions to call her “Sister Maria”, so as not to disclose her position. She always yielded her seat to a nursing mother, a pregnant woman, or one who was not well. She also made use of traveling time, as on one occasion, she gave her young companions a lesson on Proverbs 31. A fellow traveler, the Princess of Saxony, was so interested that Mother Clodesindis had to give her added explanation. Prince or pauper—she treated all alike; she neither disdained the poor nor bowed to the mighty.

She also had a rare insight into people, as when she told a novice struggling through her “dark night”: “You are in doubt whether you should remain with us or enter a contemplative convent. I can tell you, this is a temptation you have to overcome.”

At the visitations, Mother Clodesindis invariably looked into the health of the sisters, their prayer life, their observance of charity and their spirit of silence. She felt that when these points were in order, whatever apostolate they were engaged in would prosper. With characteristic wisdom she writes in one of her chronicles: "The charitable organizations do very much, but it is a pity that everything is over organized in minute details and, consequently, love has grown cold with many. But there is nothing more important than personal contact with the poor. Visits to their huts are indispensable and more potent than hours of statistical work in a bureau. Not in vain does our Holy Rule say: 'A good word is above the best gift.' The poor and sick love to get some encouragement in their hard hours of suffering."

In 1931 she had the joy to visit her beloved Philippines, and at the General Chapter of 1933 she was reassigned as prioress of Manila, to the great joy of the sisters, students, and friends. Important events occurred during this time. In 1935 the Philippine Commonwealth was inaugurated. Mother Clodesindis presented a copy of the Holy Rule to President Manuel Quezon, convinced that if he would follow its principles, his administration would be successful. For the International Eucharistic Congress in 1937, she set aside some quarters of the school to accommodate the sisters' relatives and foreign priests. At the blessing of St. Hildegard's in 1938, to which Vice President Sergio Osmeña was invited, the latter remarked, "If Mother were to run as mayor of Manila, she would easily win!"

One of Mother Clodesindis' greatest achievements, if not the greatest, was the fostering of native vocations. When she first arrived in the Philippines, there was only one perpetually professed sister. During her first term as prioress, eight professed sisters were added. On her second term, she redoubled her efforts at collecting "human stones" to build the ecclesiola of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters in the Philippines. Her breadth of view, her understanding of the Philippino psychology softened for many Filipinas the difficulty of adjusting to a predominantly German community.

See Christ in everybody and under every circumstance, Mother Clodesindis was available to take everybody inside the convent and outside. According to Sister Withburga, Mother Clodesindis was ingenious in relieving all kinds of misery, and that it was impossible to cite all the charitable undertakings she was engaged in.

After her term of office as prioress, she was assigned as superior to Legaspi. With a narrower scope of responsibility, Mother Clodesindis could attend personally to whoever might need her attention. She taught some classes, instructed lepers in religion and comforted them in many ways.

On December 21, 1941, the Japanese invaders landed at Legaspi City. Shortly after, they wanted to occupy St. Agnes. Politely but firmly, Mother answered, "This is a school. Besides, Germany and Japan are allies. So you cannot take the school." It was her personality rather than her logic that caused the Japanese to withdraw.

As the underground movement was active, many suspected guerillas were arrested and tortured. At the risk of her own life, Mother Clodesindis would plead for their lives, appealing

for justice and mercy. With the community's prayer and her own bravery and sacrifice, she saved many Filipinos from military cruelty and from death.

During the bombings in September 1944, many sought and found refuge at St. Agnes. She braved the bombings to bring food and clothes to the lepers. On Holy Saturday, the sisters shortened the Office because of the bombings. Sensing danger, Mother Clodesindis addressed the community: "It is impossible to leave the house now; but after five this afternoon when things are quiet, you may all go to the air-raid shelter. I shall remain at my post." When the carpet-bombing started, the sisters realized that St. Agnes was within the target area and, leaving the chapel, they hurried to the shelter. As usual, Mother was at the rear to look after everyone. Just then she met the Alejandrino children who were crying in fright. She got them candies and led them to the Sacred Heart statue to pray with them and calm their fears. In was there that an incendiary bomb struck the main building, hit the statue and killed Mother Clodesindis.

On April 4, some American soldiers brought to the sisters the bones which were believed to be Mother Clodesindis' remains.

After the War, on August 11, 1945, there was a solemn transference of the bones to the cemetery at Albay. Afterwards, they were brought to the sisters' cemetery in Baguio. There, sisters come every day to pray and ask for help. Mother Clodesindis' presence still prevails.

Sister M. Dolores Kunkel, OSB (1903-1948)

PRIORY OF NORFOLK, USA

"Benedicite!" From the warmth in Sister Dolores' voice as she extended her hand in welcome, Mary and I new that she was glad to meet us postulants from Norfolk.

Benedicite!" we responded a bit shyly, approaching her bed. This was our first visit to Lynch and, therefore, our first meeting with Sister Dolores. Ours was a short visit, but I will never forget it. As we conversed and felt Sister Dolores' presence to us, a sense of reverence and esteem arose in me which remains with me even today.

Sister was so frail, sitting there, supported by back rests, in her white bed with its white coverlet. Our novice mistress, Sister Consolata, had told us of the accident an resultant paralysis when Sister Dolores was a postulant; but we could see as well as sense that Sister's frail body housed an ardent spirit which moved her to a life not only of suffering but of useful activity.

Sister Dolores was born Maria Franziska Kunkel on January 25, 1903 in Starnberg, Germany. She spent her youth in her native town where she received her early education. She completed her secondary education in Tutzing, in the Girls' Middle School, and later also enrolled in its mission school in 1920.

At that time the Missionary Benedictine Sisters had undertaken a new foundation in the United States at Raeville, Nebraska. Because of the problems experienced by the four pioneer

teachers in the evaluation of their certification earned in Germany, Mother Melania, then Prioress General, thought it prudent that future teachers from Germany receive their education in the States. Thus, Maria and another Mission School student, Francisca Brey, were sent to America. They left Germany on January 13, 1924. The two postulants related that on their arrival they did not know where to go and almost had to seek refuge in a police station. Fortunately, two sisters who had arrived a day earlier from Bremen gave them directions how to reach Raeville.

During the following months, the newcomers assiduously studied English. In the early fall, they entered school at the Benedictine Sisters at Atchison, Kansas. On holidays they came home to Raeville.

On the fateful day of August 28, 1925, Sister Diemud, who wanted to give the two postulants a well deserved relaxation after strenuous studies, took them with her to the new hospital in Lynch with Fr. Frigge and Mr. Pat Carey. On the way they had a disastrous accident. Maria was the most seriously injured. Pinned beneath the car she received an injury to her spinal column which resulted in paralysis. She was brought to the Lynch hospital. Thus began her painful journey through the rest of her life. In spite of her injury, Maria was allowed to be received into the novitiate on March 21, 1926. It was an unusual investiture, with the novice-to-be in a wheelchair decorated with a red cloth and flowers. She received the name Dolores. In his homily, Fr. Frigge described the mystery of suffering and the dignity with which the new sister has carried her cross.

Especially during those first years, the paralysis caused Sister Dolores considerable mental suffering. Resignation was particularly difficult because of her great desire to be a classroom teacher. Slowly she came to accept her condition, offering this deprivation for the success of the teachers. The community appreciated Sister's presence in their midst. Many graces they received seemed to be attributable to her intercession. The school children also loved her, and every morning they would bring her little gifts, such as an apple, a piece of cake, or even a bird.

On March 26, 1927 she pronounced her first vows. Now a professed sister, Sister Dolores continued her apostolate of love. She would be carried to her bed in the community room or onto the porch where she was available to those who came. She tutored pupils who needed it. It was touching to see how people tried to give her joy. A 70-year-old gentleman, Fr. Schrad, for example, chopped down a little cherry tree so that Sr. Dolores could have the joy of picking cherries in bed. And in giving joy to her, they received even greater joy—such is the mathematics of generosity.

The sisters of Raeville continued to hope and pray that Sr. Dolores' spinal injury and paralysis could still be cured. They heard of a noted chiropractor in Marion, South Dakota. It was a painful treatment, but Sr. Dolores submitted to it. Unfortunately this treatment proved to be harmful. She sustained internal injuries from it, which led to infection and a dangerously high fever.

On March 29, 1930, Sister Dolores pronounced her perpetual vows. She needed periodic medical care, necessitating a trip to Lynch and a stay of two or more weeks.

Sister Dolores was a very talented person, and it can never be said that she buried them in the ground because of her disability. She gave music lessons from her wheelchair. She also typed, drew, and painted tirelessly. She gave English lessons to the newly arrived German postulants and did so in such an appealing and interesting manner that they learned almost painlessly. She also taught them U.S. history and government in preparation for their citizenship examination.

In the summer of 1935, Sister Dolores was transferred to Lynch where she could receive better nursing and where the climate was more favorable. There, a large sphere of missionary service awaited her zeal. Since there was no parish school, she assumed the responsibility for religious instruction on Saturdays. She prepared the second-graders for First Confession and Communion. The influence of Sister Dolores was instrumental in bringing several families into the Church or to the practice of the faith. The Slaughter family was especially close to her. An amusing story about their little boy is told. Gordon, four years old, was especially fond of her. One day while attending a Sunday liturgy, the whole family was surprised to see Gordon folding his hands and making a genuflection to Sister Dolores. His mother turned him around towards the altar, but Gordon apparently thought Sister Dolores deserved a genuflection.

Besides teaching and giving religious instructions, Sister Dolores continued typing and copying, as well as other clerical work. Her assistance was often sought in unexpected emergencies when something had to be finished. She was always ready to help when help was needed.

An outward expression of Sister's love for the Holy Eucharist was the care with which she provided for the altar. She embroidered, painted and hand stitched burses, tabernacle curtains, purificators and altar linens.

Music was one of Sr. Dolores' special gifts. She was chantress for many years and entertained the sisters in recreation by playing the zither and the ukulele. She never lost her sense of humor in spite of the constant pain of her wounds which did not heal. Sr. Elfleda, who nursed Sr. Dolores, said that in all the time she took care of her, Sr. Dolores was never cross or unkind.

On September 12, 1946, Sister Dolores made a trip to Butte, the county seat, took her examination and became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

From the spring of 1948, one could observe a gradual decline in Sister's condition. She tired very easily. She had to give up her weekly religious instruction. In early November, she became ill with influenza which weakened her even more. For several days she lapsed into unconsciousness. On December 3 she received the last anointing. During these days Sister was carried to the hospital. Gradually her condition became critical. How she suffered—both mental and physical anguish! The sisters were deeply moved. One sister observed the attending physician, Dr. Kritz, wiping tears from his eyes as he concluded his visit to Sister.

December 11th was to be the day of her death. Towards noon, the sisters assembled about her bed to pray. When they sang the *Suscipe*, Sister Dolores, weak as she was, tried to raise her arms in a gesture of her wholehearted offering of herself to God, just as she had done

on her profession day. She died on a wintry day, one of the most severe winters experienced in that region. But on the day of her burial, the sun came out, making the snow glisten.

In speaking of Sister Dolores, Sr. Elfleda's words epitomize the sentiments of all the sisters and the regard they had for the deceased sister:

“For 23 years, Sr. Dolores was never able to move her legs, but in spite of her handicap, her ardent love for God and neighbor, and her heroic faith helped her to bear her cross to the last hour of her life.”

Sister Evangelista de Godoy Cremer, OSB (1908-1981)

PRIORY OF SOROCABA/OLINDA, BRAZIL

Sister Evangelista, known and loved by many in Recife as the “Mother of Dois Rios”, was one of those persons who are born to make new beginnings, to spearhead some project, to venture into the unknown. Her great desire to become a missionary led her into our Congregation where she hoped to spend her life in Africa, to serve the poor.

Sister Evangelista was one of the early Brazilian vocations. Born on November 19, 1908 in São Paulo, she grew up in a family of five children. Already a teacher with six years of music study, Maria Isabel entered in 1930 in Sorocaba. She stayed there for the next 17 years, till she was sent to the Priory of Olinda to prepare herself for the African mission of Angola. But—the visa for immigration was not granted. “I had to be sent to Recife (Olinda) to find ‘my Africa’ in Dois Rios,” she would later remark as she saw God's plans with her unfold.

But even in the Priory of Olinda she continued her apostolate as a teacher, just as she had done in the various schools in Sorocaba and Rio de Janeiro, so now in Recife and Caruaru. She taught music for 13 years and mathematics for 36. She was an excellent teacher who knew how to combine firmness with patience and gentleness. Many students came to her when they had problems, sure to be helped. Aside from teaching in all departments of the school, elementary as well as secondary, she was the school's secretary all through the 36 teaching years, and librarian for five years; 28 years were devoted to catechesis.

In 1968, at age 60, Sister Evangelista came to “her Africa”: Dois Rios, a poor, underdeveloped suburb of Recife (Ibura-Recife). She was assigned to pastoral work and had to commute at first daily from the Colégio NS Carmo to Dois Rios and come back late in the afternoon.

After some time she felt that what people needed most was a school since there was much illiteracy. She started with a program of alphabetization—first, under a mango tree with one hired teacher, then in a grass thatched shelter, and finally in a one-room school erected with great effort. Since the many poor children could not be accommodated, Sister Evangelista appealed to local and German agencies. With the help of Misericórdia and Adveniat she enlarged the school and soon had an all-purpose Center where courses in typing, hairdressing, sewing and carpet making were introduced.

When she saw the women was the clothes of their ladies in the river, she organized the building of a laundry with washing and ironing facilities—again, at the cost of great effort. She helped the women in the sewing course to put up a shop where clothes and footwear could be made and sold cheaply.

But the “apple of her eye” remained the school. As the years went by it progressed, with Sister Evangelista being its jack-of-all-trades—directress, secretary-treasurer, procurator—as there were not enough sisters to go around. She started a daily school lunch program, knowing that “hungry stomachs cannot study”. She procured all the materials needed in the various courses. The Education Department prescribed uniforms but many families could not afford them. Children would be ashamed to come without shoes, without the necessary stationery. To encourage attendance as much as possible, Sister Evangelista provided school supplies at low cost or free.

Of great importance were feast days: Saint John’s, Christmas, Mother’s Day, Children’s Day.... The pupils would find lots of fun, something special to eat, and little gifts which had been given by Sister’s friends and co-workers, one of whom, the former pupil Madeleine, is still a faithful helped at the Center.

Her influence as a catechist was enormous. She prepared the lessons herself and gave copies to another sister to instruct lay catechists, who in turn would teach groups of 60-100 children. She also trained women, who at times could not even read or write but had the ability to grasp the matter of faith and to communicate it to other women, usually in groups of ten, who then would instruct groups of adults. Thus thousands benefited from this kind of multiplication method.

Sr. Evangelista’s organizational ability was widely acknowledged. One school inspector remarked: “Of all the schools I have to visit, this is the best organized.” For such kind of work a tremendous amount of energy and creativity are needed. One sister describes her: “You cannot easily forget such a person; a strong woman, robust, active, prayerful, having a great love for the poor—a missionary after the heart of the Church. She gave all her time and energy to serve others. Even her siesta time was spent helping some old people fill out forms to get their pension.

“Her choleric temperament could make her react strongly at times, but when this happened she was so humble and eager to make amends that no one could store rancor against her. On the contrary, her childlike simplicity made her all the more loveable. During the 12 years she stayed with the community of NS Carmo, she cheered the sisters in recreation with her sense of humor, in making the daily happenings sound most interesting.”

Her sense of the situation never left her. When she saw how badly the houses of the poor looked, she established a sort of credit program where people could borrow money to improve their houses and pay their debts in installments. Much red tape had to be gone through to get the legal recognition of the Social Center. That is what the “school” actually had become. A rare gift in an organizer was the fact that she prepared an able successor to continue the work, when she knew she would have to leave soon because of her advancing age and growing weakness.

Sr. Evangelists did not realize that her growing tiredness was due not only to age but to a developing cancer. Since she never complained, it was too late at the time of diagnosis. She was still put into intensive care but the disease was gone too far. On December 23, 1981, she died.

At the funeral mass, the church was full of people whose lives were in some way touched by Sister Evangelista. If one can be canonized by popular acclaim, the people of Dois Rios would have made Sr. Evangelista a saint. They did the next best thing. They called her the “Mother of Dois Rios”, and this apt summary of her life, coming from the hearts of the people she loved, serves as an epitaph written on her tombstone.

Sister Frances Leick, OSB (1908-1954)

PRIORY OF NORFOLK, USA

The first US-born Missionary Benedictine Sister never left her own country for the foreign missions. Sister Frances Leick served in rural Nebraska and Minnesota. Yet only God knows how far her prayer, sacrifice and heroic suffering reached in bringing Christ to those far from her in the mission fields.

In her rather short life of 46 years (born February 13, 1908) and her 24 years as a religious, Sister Frances experienced many “firsts” and thus became a trailblazer for others to follow. She was baptized Veronica, the first of 12 brothers and sisters.

Veronica, from early childhood, learned to trust those she loved. This early trust matured into an unwavering obedience to her parents and a loving trust in God. Being the oldest child and often her mother’s helper, Veronica knew how to take responsibility. Yet it rested heavily on her young shoulders when, at the age of 14, she had to assume care for her brothers and sisters when her mother fell ill and injured her knee. This developed into blood poisoning, and her mother was unconscious for some time.

Veronica attended a small country school in Iowa. She finished her high school in three years, after which she returned home again to assist her mother. Already before her graduation she expressed the wish to serve God in the religious life.

In a diocesan newspaper, her parents read of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters at Raeville, Nebraska. Her mother wrote a letter to the sisters to inquire about their way of life. Veronica herself wrote later and she visited the convent with her parents. As Veronica stepped over the threshold into the convent hallway, an overwhelming sense of belonging came over her, as if the Lord were telling her she had found her second home, where he wanted her to be. In September of 1928, Veronica was accepted into the convent. She received the name Sister Frances on her clothing day. On October 8, 1930, she pronounced her first vows in the beautiful parish church at Raeville, blazing the trail for other American girls to follow in becoming Missionary Benedictine Sisters.

Sister Frances obtained a teaching certificate after having spent most of her summers at Creighton University in Omaha and at Chadron's Teachers' College. She then taught elementary school classes at Raeville and Madison. Years later her students remembered her as a good teacher. They sensed her love and kindness and admired her firm but fair treatment.

When, in 1935, the sisters opened Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Norfolk, it seemed advisable to have more sisters trained for health care. Sister Frances was willing to change from a teaching career to hospital service. After attending courses in Wichita, Kansas, she obtained her registry in medical technology for clinical laboratory work in 1945, the first of our sisters in the field. Now, in perfect timing, Sr. Frances was able to take over the hospital laboratory in our newly acquired Holy Trinity Hospital in Graceville, Minnesota. She was a trailblazer again among the first sisters who left for Graceville on October 15, 1945, to prepare the convent for the sisters.

In Graceville, Sister Frances, with the other pioneers, continued her quiet, unassuming life of service. She was always willing to pitch in where help was needed. She had many natural gifts and had also been taught practical skills from her parents. Besides doing the laboratory work, she took care of the chapel and sacristy and relieved the sister in the hospital office. To meet hospital accreditation standards, a medical record librarian was needed. Sister Frances mastered the required courses through home study and passed the national medical record librarian examination to qualify. Then she taught Sr. Bernadette the basics of medical record science so that she, in turn, successfully passed the registry examination without formal training.

Sister Frances was respected by the doctors and staff for her technical and professional knowledge. In those years, blood banking was complicated by the need to find and attract local blood donors. She was on call around the clock, very conscientious, yet able to cope with the pressure of the exacting work in the lab. After the successful initial inspection for accreditation of the hospital, Sister Herma remarked, "A big share for the good outcome goes to the credit of Sister Frances."

Although Sr. Frances was a serious-minded person, she also knew how to share a joke and to have a good laugh at her own expense. She had the rare gift of knowing when to be silent and when to speak. She became known as an unassuming, patient and cheerful person, always composed and calm, making other people feel at ease, always ready to be service. She was very reliable, completing any task assigned to her, even if it took a long time to complete it. She generously shared her knowledge and experience, teaching others. One doctor, not a Catholic, said of her: "She is the ideal sister—so good that one feels God's presence in her."

By her patience and cheerfulness, even when suffering from ill health, she inspired others. Without complaint she endured a period of misdiagnosis until an abdominal growth was detected. In September of 1952 Sister Frances underwent surgery and cancer with metastases was diagnosed, with possibly three months to live, or longer if x-ray treatments were effective. She received the verdict with her usual calm, gentle composure, but not without an interior struggle, then peacefully followed the doctor's directions. Her main concern was not being a burden to anyone because of her special treatment and diet. She knew

what to expect at all stages of her disease, and she accepted all the suffering as a gift which permitted her to grow in closer union with God.

After completing the x-ray treatments in Minneapolis, Sister Frances returned to Graceville. Sister Paula, her blood sister [also a Missionary Benedictine Sister], came to work in the laboratory. Sr. Frances taught her all she needed to know for the work. She also tutored her in medical records work so that Sr. Paula could also pass the examination and obtain her registry before Sr. Frances had to leave Graceville.

On August 10, 1953, Sister Frances returned to the priory house at Norfolk. She continued to make herself useful from her wheelchair or bed as long as her strength permitted. She remained mentally alert and tried to take care of her personal needs as long as she could. Later, she gratefully accepted help from the sisters. Even in her last illness, she tried to live the spirit of the Rule selflessly. Her practice of poverty was admirable and her obedience exemplary. Her inner joy and peace were evident to all who visited her.

She celebrated her 46th birthday a month and a half before her death. A week before, she received the last anointing and Sr. Paula was called from Graceville to be with her. Her other blood sister, Sr. Germaine [also a Missionary Benedictine Sister], was ill and unable to come. Sr. Frances was conscious to the last and tried to join in the prayers. At about 11 a.m. on March 30, 1954, the chaplain and the sisters were called to her room. They prayed and sang the *Suscipe* which she joined in full awareness. At noon, Sister Frances quietly and almost imperceptibly slipped away to find the place prepared for her from all eternity. Once again she was a trailblazer who showed her sisters how to go to God.

Sister Fruktuosa Gerstmayer, OSB (1898-1952)

PRIORY OF WONSAN, NORTH KOREA

It could have been a nightmare or a thriller film: heavily booted soldiers marching into the convent, rounding up the sisters, herding them into a truck to an unknown destination. It was May 10, 1949 in Wonsan, Korea. Sr. Fruktuosa had no idea that such an experience awaited her when, 28 years earlier, as the youngest of 33 candidates who entered that day, she stepped into the gates of Tutzing at 9:00 p.m. She had actually arrived in Munich earlier in the day, but she decided to have a “last fling”, making a thorough visit of the city. With three other latecomers she found herself on the last train to Tutzing. Since they came so late there was no time to give them instructions, so the three newcomers still had a midnight picnic with the chocolates they had in their bags, and told each other their life stories until the wee hours of the morning of the new day which was to begin their convent life.

As a postulant, however, Sr. Fruktuosa had no trouble observing novitiate rules as soon as she put her mind to it. At the age of 24 she was invested. She was such a big, robust girl that she was nicknamed “Heaven’s Dragon” by the men at St. Gallen where she was assigned after her profession in 1923. She almost did not make it, due to an infection she contracted while working in the kitchen. A wound on her arm which she left unattended became so infected that the arm almost had to be amputated. With characteristic determination Sister

Fruktuosa fought to keep her arm by daily bathing it with herbal medicine until the danger was over. She feared less for her life than for the fact that a one-arm novice might not be allowed to make profession. So she was able to pronounce her vows on February 2, 1923.

Sister Fruktuosa studies nursing until her perpetual profession three years later. In August of the same year (1926), she and Sister Eva Schütz were sent to the Korean mission, arriving in Wonsan in October.

Foundations, especially in a foreign country, are always hard. Sister Fruktuosa was part of such a beginning in Korea: an unfurnished house, a difficult climate, new environment, new culture and different customs and way of life. The learning of the Korean language was especially hard for her, and even after more than 25 years there, she needed an interpreter to make herself understood. But this did not hamper her mission.

After spending some time in the kitchen, she had to exchange the ladle with the thermometer. She was assigned to put up a clinic. This consisted of a 2-by-2 meter room in a Korean house with a dark antechamber that always had to be heated because of its damp floor. This clinic later on extended to four rooms arranged according to European style and furnished with better facilities. There would be Sister Fruktuosa's field of work for about 26 years.

She did not just wait for patients to come to the clinic. She sought them out in house visitations which brought her to all the nooks and corners of the town. She herself said that there was no part of the town unvisited by her. According to Sister Chrysostoma, everyone trusted in her healing powers more than in the skills of doctors. In spite of her language difficulty, she had a remarkable rapport with the people, communicating with gestures and gesticulations, accompanied by gales of spontaneous and infectious laughter. She was understood because she spoke in the language of love. She had a special love for children and with glee she called them by her accustomed German pet names. Many almond-eyed little tots answered to her Butzele, Ferkele, Dreckspätzle. The mothers of the children enjoyed the strange names which she gave to their children with obvious affection. She also took special care of the dying and, according to legend, was responsible for 5,000 deathbed baptisms.

This fruitful apostolate which Sister zealously did day after day for many years came to an abrupt stop when on February 25, the clinic was raided by the police and, for no reasonable cause, closed. Korea at that time was at a turning point in its history. The Japanese had been driven out and the Russians had taken over.

Sr. Fruktuosa went back to the kitchen as though nothing had happened. But something worse was in the offing. Two months later, on May 10, 1949, North Korean soldiers entered the Wonsan mission and took all the sisters away to the distant Pyóng-yang, where the Korean sisters were separated from the Europeans and detained in different prisons. The German sisters as well as the Benedictine monks were later taken to the concentration camp of Oksadok where they would be detained for five long years.

One can imagine the anxiety and insecurity of the detainees. The sisters were forced to wear men's clothes and to work in the fields along with the men, or in the kitchen to prepare

the food for the other prisoners. They suffered from the cold in the damp, unheated barracks, especially during the bitter Korean winters. They saw their companions get sick and die in their midst, sometimes not being able to bury them at once.

When Sister Fruktuosa came into detention she was already sick from rheumatism and had twice suffered typhoid fever, which she had contracted from her patients. The fever had caused her to become hard of hearing, which—together with the language difficulty—made her feel acutely lonely and isolated. But she never lost her good humor. In fact, she tried to cheer up her cellmates from their depression by telling stories and cracking jokes, for which she had a unique knack.

In spite of her swollen legs, she worked in the kitchen until August 1951, when she suffered a mild brain stroke. After some time she rallied and wasted no time in gathering all her strength to make herself useful. By the dim light coming from the paper window of the barrack, she tried to patch the already overly-darned clothes of the monks and sisters, making them last until they almost fell apart by themselves. After some time her condition got worse. She was in such pain that no position, sitting or lying, could give her any relief. By the middle of August she could no longer get up. She was all swollen, and the skin of her legs became tough and leathery. While receiving the last sacraments, she offered her life for Korea.

She suffered a second stroke, from which she never regained consciousness until her death during the night of September 15, 1952. She died in detention, one of the 16 who were not able to survive the life at the Oksadok concentration camp. Like them, she had no coffin. She was simply wrapped in a straw mat, but the sisters covered her body with all the flowers they could find in the mountain meadows.

Sr. Fruktuosa lies today, together with her companions in the camp cemetery on the lonely mountainside of North Korea. In life and in death she was a real missionary.

Sister Hedwig Espinas (1894-1978)

PRIORY OF MANILA, REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES

Eduvigis Calleja of Libon, Albay, married to Agapito Espinas of Daraga, was on the Catanduanes Sea when the boat she was traveling on sank. Being pregnant, she was doubly determined to save herself and her unborn baby. She swam several miles and won the battle against death.

Baby Elisa was lucky to be born on June 14, 1894. She probably inherited that spirit of determination, for she grew to be a person of strong character, sure of herself in everything she said and did. At the age of scarcely three, she lost her mother and was brought up by her maternal grandmother, whose indomitable will and business acumen were likewise inherited by Elisa.

During the Spanish-American war, the family had to evacuate to the forest where life was so primitive that the child got ill. Relief came from a Franciscan uncle who brought them

fresh supply of food. He also announced at the end of December 1898, that they could again return to town safely. Elisa's father, however, who did not want to surrender to the Americans, remained in hiding. Learning that his child was ill, he came home, only to be arrested by the soldiers. He had actually escaped the first encounter, but was wounded and captured. After he had sworn allegiance to the United States, he was restored to his position as judge.

At the age of six, Elisa once asked her father, "Why did God leave us all alone, on earth, only the two of us? He took Mama and my six brothers and sisters home to heaven. Why did he spare just me?" Then, like a philosopher, she gave her own answer: "Probably God has something in mind for me to do."

After learning her CARTILLA from a private tutor, she enrolled in Albay elementary school where she studied under the Thomasites. Father Calleja, parish priest of Albay, became her guardian. Hearing of St. Scholastica's College making a name in Manila, Father Calleja invited the German Benedictine Sisters to establish a girls' school in his parish. Governor Samson vacated his own residence to give the sisters a convent. Miss Agnes, Bishop McGinley's sister, provided money to start the school. In appreciation, Father Calleja called the new institute Academia de Santa Ines (St. Agnes Academy).

In response to Fr. Calleja's invitation, Mother Angela and Sister Ferdinanda arrived in Albay in March 1912 to inspect the place and to discuss its management. When the sisters went to the Albay church for holy mass, Elisa knelt directly behind them. Their red sash [cincture] enchanted her. She loved to wear red clothing as a child. At the time, she did not think of it as a symbol of martyrdom. She thought to herself, "If only I could speak to them and inquire how I could enter their Order...." The opportunity offered itself when the sisters felt that they needed an interpreter. They knew no Spanish and the people could not speak English. The parish priest recalled that the American superintendent had offered his niece Elisa a teaching job after her graduation from the 7th grade. He asked Elisa if she was willing to give up that opportunity in order to help the sisters. Elisa was willing, if she could do what the sisters wanted her to do. Sister Ferdinanda enumerated the tasks she had mapped out for Elisa: to work in the parlor as interpreter, to accompany Sister Alexia to each class and explain in Bicolano her lessons in religious as well as in other subjects, to teach the first grade, and to stay in school as a boarder. Elisa carried out her tasks meticulously. Seeing the young girl's talents, Sister Ferdinanda taught her bookkeeping, typing, and stenography. Within a year these skills were put to good use. Elisa taught typing and assisted Sister Superior in keeping the school accounts shipshape.

Some time earlier, Elisa had written a letter of application to Mother Birgitta, the prioress general then. The answer was, to wait a little till she was older.

After World War I, Mother Angela told her she could be an oblate since there was as yet no novitiate in the Philippines. Elisa, however, wanted to become a Sister. So she applied again to Mother Birgitta. At first, Mother Birgitta invited her to make the novitiate in Germany, but Elisa wrote a beautiful letter saying that she feared her health would not permit her to survive the cold weather in Germany. Mother Birgitta then answered that she would

send a visitatrix to see the possibilities of opening a novitiate in the Philippines. The visitatrix, Sister Clodesindis, arrived on May 31, 1920, with fourteen other sisters. She visited Santa Ines, only to find out that Elisa was physically exhausted. She advised her to rest, after which she would bring her to Manila.

On May 19, Elisa found herself and a novice, Sister Conception Lacson, as the only members of the novitiate. They shared work in the sacristy, refectory, kitchen and laundry, and in other household chores. Sister Clodesindis, who became prioress, was also novice mistress.

On November 21, 1921, Elisa received the religious habit and a new name, Hedwig, in memory of her mother. On November 22, 1922, she pronounced her triennial vows and received the black veil and the red sash. Shortly after her profession, she was assigned to St. Agnes, where she made her perpetual vows.

Sr. Hedwig became a very good catechist, being in charge of the first communion class and other religious courses at St. Agnes. She visited the homes of the poor and started a kind of credit cooperative for them. She also had the rare gift of divining water with her “magic wire” which helped the barrio folks to dig wells for their needs.

When the law permitted religious instruction in public school, Sister Hedwig harnessed all possible resources to give these pupils the benefit of studying religion. She gathered volunteers to help get the parents’ permission. Sister started with the Albay Elementary School. Soon she was invited to organize religious instruction for the parishes of Legaspi and Daraga. She started to train the catechists needed for this purpose. In order to teach the Bicolanos to pray in Bicol, she collected prayers and wrote a Bicol book of prayers.

Upon invitation from priests, Sister Hedwig organized missions in barrios during the summer vacation. As companion, she would take along a fellow sister, some experienced catechists and some Agnesians. A family or two would vacate their houses for the visitors. Like the apostles of old, the group ate what placed before them and blessed the people upon taking leave. Instructions would be followed by confessions and marriages, baptisms and communions, sometimes accompanied by a banda musica.

In Buenavista, one of the barrios, Sister Hedwig endeared herself to the people so much that they channeled spring water from the mountains through split bamboos to provide a “bathroom” for the missionaries. Some kind of “heavenly intervention” enabled Sister Hedwig to catechize in the leprosarium. A leper woman, very much concerned about the state of her soul, dreamed that Our Lady was telling her call for Sister Hedwig to tell her all her worries. The woman did not know who Sister Hedwig was, but her neighbors and all the wardens did. After this incident, the superior permitted Sister to visit the lepers two times a month.

She also looked after the sick in hospitals and in their homes, and the prisoners in the municipal and provincial jails. No one in trouble ever parted from her without obtaining help.

In her dealings with the people she made no distinction between the rich and the poor. She gave them both equal time and equal treatment. Because of the big Calleja clan, almost

all Libon and a good number of influential citizens of Legaspi were related to her. She never bragged of her blood relations or of influential friends. However, she asked them for supporting the less privileged.

At recreation time she had stories to tell. Her dramatic narration of the daily joys and sorrows of the poor, of the struggles of hardened sinners who came to their senses, of the pranks of street urchins, provided relaxation from the strains of the day and strengthened the bonds of unity among the sisters, deepening their solidarity with the poor. Not only during recreation but also in the day-to-day working and living together, Sister Hedwig gave joy. It was so easy and pleasant to live with her. She always had an eye for the needs of others. Her tastes were simple. Even in sickness and old age, she was never demanding. Younger sisters looked up to her and wished they could grow old as gracefully as she did.

During the Japanese Occupation, Sister Hedwig's capacity for bearing inconveniences became very apparent. To help augment the income of the community, she would double-time, teaching Spanish and typing to children of rich families who needed something to do during their free time. She never got tired of dispensing food and medicine as well as words of comfort to the refugees who sought shelter at St. Agnes.

When St. Agnes had gone up in flames and Mother Clodesindis had died in the bombing, Sister Hedwig led the rest of the community to Bacacay, where the Matias family invited them into their big house. As soon as peace and normalcy returned to Legaspi, the sisters went back to St. Agnes and Sr. Hedwig took up anew her catechetical apostolate.

Sister Hedwig's long years of service without expectation of acknowledgment nevertheless received a public recognition in 1972, when Bishop Teotime Pacis called the entire diocese to celebrate Sister Hedwig's Golden Jubilee. In the Pastoral Bulletin, she wrote among other things: "In these days, when so many religious sisters are seeking for identity, Sister Hedwig never once in the span of fifty years wavered in her commitment to God and to the service of the Church as a Missionary Benedictine nun.... For all that she is and has done in the service of the Church, we feel it is our duty to join in the celebration." He himself was principal celebrant at the concelebrated mass in the cathedral. Participating were students, teachers, employees, catechists, civic and religious leaders, the rich and the poor, from all walks of life. Friends and alumni came from as far as Naga and Sorsogon. In the afternoon, the SAA Alumni Association offered a program of appreciation at which Mother Margarita Alovera, first Filipino prioress, extolled her as "a person comparable to a many-faced diamond". The late afternoon mass in St. Raphael's Church in Legaspi was also in her intention. The liturgy was extraordinarily beautiful. The first Filipina had reached her Golden Jubilee as a Missionary Benedictine Sister.

Another joy was in store for Sister Hedwig. Bishop Pacis did not find the diocesan participation in the jubilee celebration sufficient appreciation for her service. He and his council voted her to represent the Church of Legaspi on its 1975 jubilee pilgrimage to Rome. How the sisters rejoiced with her! The community prepared her "trousseau" for the trip. The priory and Generalate looked after the itinerary. Sister Hedwig's visit to Rome was climaxed

by the audience with the Holy Father. Sister would relate how a fellow pilgrim held her up to give her a good view of the Pope.

Her itinerary included seeing the Motherhouse in Tutzing. The eldest Filipino daughter of the Congregation was received with much love. Her meeting with the first veterans and her reunion with her ex-Filipinas, especially with Sister Amadea, defied all description. She felt: "Now I can die, Lord!"

She came home to die a slow, daily death..., then an almost sudden one. On the afternoon of June 1, 1978, she was found unconscious. Rushed to the hospital, she was anointed with the Holy Oils. She still lingered a few days and her sisters could still show their affection by taking turns watching at her bedside. She died on June 6. Her funeral was one of the biggest the City of Legaspi had ever witnessed—at tribute to the Bicolana and the nun who had lived all her life in service to her brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sister Liobalda Fetsch (1914-1969)

PRIORY OF OLINDA/SOROCABA, BRAZIL

LEPROSY! – a word and a disease that strikes fear and loathing in anyone's heart. But that was the verdict that Sister Liobalda's unbelieving ears heard from the doctor's diagnosis of her sickness. She was 32 years old, seeing before her the prospect of years of living death. It would mean not only stopping to work, but also separation from all she loved. She was thousands of miles away from her family in Germany. How would they receive the news?

Born November 21, 1914 in Leidling, a peaceful village south of Neuberg, near the Danube, she was baptized Josefa. Her father was on the war front; her mother, after whom she was named, had given birth to nine children, two of whom died in infancy, and two later on in the Second World War. One brother entered at St. Otilien—Bruder Petrus—who later was sent to the East African mission.

Josefa was a student in the Mission School at Tutzing and, as a 20-year old postulant, was sent to Brazil on April 13, 1934. In November of the same year she was received into the novitiate with the new name, Sister Liobalda. On December 21, 1935 she pronounced her first vows and then worked in school as aide to the physical education teacher. She had a good command of Portuguese and earned the Civil Diploma to teach physics and general science.

In 1945, she was appointed prefect of boarders in the newly founded College of N.S. Carmo in Recife. She was a quiet and friendly person and was loved by the students and teachers for her understanding and readiness to help.

In 1946, Sister Fortunata Danner, superior of the community, died and Sister Liobalda was appointed her successor. After only six months she noticed some symptoms which made her consult the doctor. The diagnosis was devastating: She had somehow been infected with leprosy which was a disease not uncommon in the poor sectors of Recife. Mother Prioress Sigillinde Weber took her to the vacation house at Rio Doce for some days of rest and

reflection. It must have been a terrific struggle, coming to terms with her situation. On the first night of January 1947, Mother Sigillinde had to tell her that she had to go to a sanatorium. To be afflicted with such a disease was bad enough. The news of her imminent separation from her community brought home, more than anything else, to Sister Liobalda the reality of what her sickness was: something she not even suffer in the midst of her sisters. She had to be set apart.

Sister was brought to southern Brazil, to the Sanatorium of San Angelo near São Paulo. The Sorocaba sisters would take over her care. Long afterwards, Sister Liobalda spoke of the “Jacob Struggle” in which she wrestled with God during that trip from northeastern Brazil to the south. She felt herself stretched like the Crucified between heaven and earth, and she shuddered at the abyss that yawned below her. She fought—and she won.

In the sanatorium she found a new way of serving. She shared her strength and energy with her fellow afflicted and helped them in their own struggles to see meaning in their seemingly shattered lives.

For twelve long years she stayed in that place. Not only was she able to help the sick, but also her administrative ability and talent for organization contributed very much to the smooth and efficient running of the establishment. The doctors, the nurses and the sick—all loved and admired her, and were grateful for her support in difficult situations. Everyone called her by her baptismal name. There was a young girl, Matilda, who found it impossible to accept her sickness and was on the point of despair. Being herself a “wounded healer”, Sister Liobalda knew how to help her overcome her dark night. All the years they lived together in the sanatorium, Sister was her constant consoler and support.

There were three other sisters from different Congregations. With them, she formed a small religious community, adopting a common habit and trying as much as possible to live like they were in a convent.

Sister Liobalda was not forgotten by her sisters in Sorocaba. They visited her as often as they could and wrote her frequent letters which kept her in touch with all that was happening in the Congregation.

After some years in San Angelo she received the permission to visit her sisters at Sorocaba. One can imagine her anxiety and timidity on her first visit, uncertain about her reception. But the sisters welcomed her so heartily that she decided to make more frequent visits. Unfortunately, on one such occasion, someone made a remark which hurt her so much that, for some time, she could not bring herself to resume her visits. The doctor, however, reassured her that the leprosy she had was not contagious, since it had been discovered early enough and treated at once.

In 1959, Sister Liobalda was well enough to leave the sanatorium and resume her community life at Sorocaba. A new life began for her. With amazing energy, she began to teach in the juniorate and gave private lessons in religion and German. When Mother Maria Lucas visited Sorocaba in 1960, she asked Sister Liobalda to help in the new foundation in

Portugal. For four years she poured her energy into the difficult task of undertaking a new foundation in another foreign country.

In 1965, the vanquished disease again reared up its ugly head. Sister had to return to Brazil. This time, however, she did not need to stay at the sanatorium. She was given a small house at the Convent of Sta. Escolastica, where she was treated by the same doctor who took care of her in the sanatorium at San Angelo. It was hard—this second relapse—because once again she had to undergo insecurity and alternating emotions of hope and disappointment, as her condition changed in an unpredictable manner; but knowing that her disease was not contagious, she used her time preparing adults for baptism, confirmation and communion, as well as for marriage. She also gathered a group of poor children whom she taught catechism.

In 1969, when her condition became worse, she had again to return to the hospital. But her body was so stuffed with all sorts of medicine throughout her long sickness that it no longer reacted to any medication. One week before her death, she fell into a coma. On June 26, 1969 she died, 54 years old, 33 years professed. Her epitaph sums up her life: “Hail, O Cross, My Only Hope.”

Sister Rufina Wengel (1899-1969)

PRIORY OF PERAMIHO, TANZANIA

Everyone has experienced the pangs of guilt in causing harm to others, even if one actually had no fault. There is, however, a unique anguish to causing the death, even how unwittingly, of people under one's care. Such a tragic event can break a person forever. Sr. Rufina suffered such a traumatic experience in the African mission station of Matimira, when she took care of the young African girls who were boarding at the convent. Someone who must have harbored a hidden hatred, either for the convent people or for the girls, came as a vendor of corn. Sister Rufina, who did not know the corncobs were poisoned, bought them to give her girls joy. One can just imagine how crushed she was when nine of them died from it. She was broken in body and spirit for a long time afterwards.

It is a blessing that one cannot foresee the future and its tragedies. Sister Rufina certainly did not foresee this tragedy when she presented herself in Tutzing to become a Missionary Benedictine Sister.

For her time, Sister Rufina was considered a “late vocation”, having entered at the age of 28. Being the eldest of seven brothers and sisters, she had to sacrifice higher studies in order to help at home. After her elementary schooling, she learned dressmaking and soon earned enough to help pay the expenses of sending her younger brothers and sisters to school. One of her brothers would become a Carmelite priest and a younger sister would precede her in entering Tutzing.

She was already 30 when she pronounced her first vows. Eight months later, on May 3, 1930, she was sent with four other sisters to the East African Mission. She became one of the foundresses of the Matimira station. In those early days the sisters lived in mud houses, just

like the Africans, until a simple house of bricks could be built. From the very beginning she was given charge of the education of the young African girls. With them she took care of the sewing room and the laundry.

Sister Rufina was called to the priory house in Peramiho where she had 60 young girls under her care; some of them were early school leavers and did part-time work at the mission to earn some money. Sister Rufina organized the girls into a sodality. When then she formed a theatrical group, presenting the lives of Old Testament personages, especially of women like Ruth and Esther. These plays were shown to the parish on a makeshift stage arranged by sister and her girls.

According to Sister Richardis, who worked for some time with her, Sister Rufina had a special insight into the needs of the African youth and tried to help them whenever she could. She had perseverance and patience in overcoming the difficulties of her work. She used to say: "To educate means to say the same thing a thousand times." At the same time she had remarkable empathy and compassion.

She preferred light-colored dresses for the girls to wear because she saw in the brightness a symbol of a clean heart. "As fresh and clean as the dress, the heart should be!"

Anyone who has worked in the missions for some time begins to see the necessity of being flexible. Sister Rufina seemed to have learned the art of improvisation and playing it by ear quite well, in spite of the rather inflexible education of her childhood. She learned to take in a situation and to be ready for plans to be changed.

An event which Sister Rufina considers one of the most significant in her life was her Silver Jubilee, which she celebrated with great fervor. The years of life and work in the missions gave the renewal of her vows a maturity and a clear-sightedness that was quite different from the youthful enthusiasm and untried eagerness of her first profession.

Sister Rufina accompanied her African girls throughout their lives. She prepared them for the responsibilities of married life. They came to her as radiant brides to show off their bridegrooms. A married woman said about her: "She brought a motherly heart to our problems of heart and work. One could discuss anything with her. Our husbands and children are always welcome." A husband of a former pupil affirmed: "It is touching how much interest and concern she showed about our careers and every progress that we experienced in our lives. Anyone who gets to know Mama Rufina has to love her. She was understanding, and it is amazing what clever advice she gave, even in business matters."

After her first home leave in 1963, she came back to serve in the two small stations, Mpitimbi and then again in Matimira. It was on her return to this former mission station that she suffered the tragic event of the poisoning of her nine girls.

In February of that year, broken in spirit, she went back to the priory house in Peramiho. Lung cancer was discovered when she suffered from a severe cold. Suffering in body and spirit, she struggled to say "yes" to her situation. She grew weaker and more tired all the time. It is doubtful whether Sister Rufina had ever heard of Zen in her time and of the art of "dancing with the paper". This wisdom comes from the art of Chinese calligraphy, where the

paper is not fixed immovably for the pen to dominate the movement of writing. No, the paper is left free to move, and the artist applies his brush on the “dancing paper”. Zen devotees interpret this as learning how to write one’s life by dancing with the inevitable, the unchangeable, the unpredictable or the incomprehensible in one’s life. Zen was not known to Sister Rufina, but in her own way she had to learn to “dance with the paper” in the calligraphy of her life.

On February 19 she received the last sacraments. Four hours of painful coughing wracked her whole frame. When she was asked if she had suffered much in her life, the 69-year-old sister replied: “One must pass through the cold.” Even her last days were made bitter by misunderstandings and calumny. But even then she refused to say a word in her defense.

On the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1969, she renewed her vows with a fully clear mind and was given Viaticum. For hours she lay in agony, but five minutes before her death she suddenly opened her eyes, looked upwards and died peacefully.

An endless flow of Africans passed by her coffin to say goodbye and “Thank you” to their Mama Rufina. Her own sisters surrounded her last remains, reflecting on her simple, unobtrusive life, doing her tasks faithfully, never in the limelight, suffering tragic events without the aura of heroism. And they felt a sense of oneness and consolation because many of them, as many of our sisters, will likewise live such simple, daily lives of fidelity, unnoticed by the world.

Sister Ursula Timpte (1939-1980)

PRIORY OF TUTZING, GERMANY

One of the hardest facts to accept is the news of the death of a friend of one’s age group. It brings one face to face with the reality of one’s death, that can happen now and not at some hazy future. One tends to think that life must have a beginning, a middle and an end, like a novel. But reality shows that life can be cut off at any moment—like Sister Ursula’s. I first met her when she came to study in Münster, and remember her as a quiet person of refinement and sensibility, remarkably honest and authentic. The last time I saw her was one year before she died in the Tutzing infirmary. She had become extremely thin and her skin assumed such transparency, one could almost see through her. I was told she was dying of multiple sclerosis. Looking at her smiling face and her clear gray eyes resting on me, lighting up in recognition, I never guessed what superhuman struggle against despair, bitterness and resentment she had to go through to accept the fact that she was dying at the age of 41, all the academic preparations for her work as a teacher just behind her.

Ursula was born as the youngest of your children in Oberhausen-Osterfeld. From 1946-1951, Ursula attended the elementary school in her hometown, after which she went to the “Neusprachliche Mädchengymnasium in Bottrop. Then she spent six semesters of teacher’s training in Münster. After her graduation she taught half a year in the elementary school at Oberhausen. Then entered in November of that year (1963), she entered the novitiate in the

Motherhouse. On her clothing day she received the name Thadäa, which she later on joined to her baptismal name: Sister Ursula-Thadäa.

Sister Ursula's family had already given two brothers to the Church. The eldest became a Benedictine monk in Königsmünster, Meschede, and the other a secular priest. It was not easy for her parents when a third child entered the convent. But Sister Ursula had learned from her parents to see clearly what she would like to do and to go this way without compromise. Her strong faith, however, did not prevent her from having a crisis of faith and vocation while she was studying theology and English in Münster during the winter semester of 1969-70. It was just half a year before her perpetual profession. It is very edifying to read from spiritual books all about the "dark night of the soul", but it is another thing to suffer the misery, the meaninglessness and the unheroic depressive emotions which this actually implies. Going through and surviving this crisis was just a preparation for another and still darker night to come.

After a year of practice teaching (Referendarjahr) in München-Pasing, Sister Ursula started to teach in the Realschule in Tutzing in September 1972. But hardly a month passed when on October 20, the first symptoms of multiple sclerosis appeared and intensified so rapidly that she could no longer go to school. Check-ups were made at the clinic in München-Harlaching. She was also permitted to stay for some time with her sister who is a neurologist in a hospital in Bottrop. In between check-ups and medical observations, she would return to the convent of Marienfried in Olpe. One can imagine the anxieties, the hoping against hope, the disappointments which these check-ups entailed.

In May 1974 she asked to go home to Tutzing. By then she already had difficulty in walking and was given a wheelchair and a walker to go around. In summer of 1975 she needed more intensive care and had to move to the infirmary. Till 1976 she could still sit on a chair. But the disease went on its relentless course. Little by little her vital organs lost their ability to function, and during the last two years she had to stay in bed permanently and rely on others for all her necessities.

The physical suffering was one aspect of the situation. The mental anguish was perhaps worse. To stop teaching after only a month with all the many years of preparation just behind her was hard to accept. Still harder was the acceptance of a terminal disease and the confrontation with the reality of death. Sister Ursula had to struggle for a long time with questions that seemed to have no answers, with overwhelming waves of despair.

In the first year she still hoped that she could do some work here and there. But growing weakness and the progress of the disease snuffed out the hopes that welled up in her heart.

In 1977 she sent two tapes to her brother, Father Thomas, who was stationed at the Benedictine Abbey in Korea. These tapes document the struggle for meaning that raged in her heart. Again and again she expressed the conviction that her sickness could not possibly be the positive will of an all-loving God. In this misery and darkness she felt it was enough to believe in God. Jesus Christ, who shared the life of human being, became the focus of her faith and gave meaning to her own struggle to see light in her darkness of soul.

In the second tape one sees the gradual acceptance of her situation and her consequent surrender. "I am no longer afraid," she says, "whether I live or die. I am no longer afraid. That sounds strange. But it is so." And this inner freedom which she won at a great cost gave her an aura of peace which struck all those who visited her.

They came to her, one by one, with the burden of everyday life, their own private hells, their special concerns; and Sister Ursula took them all into the tide of her own suffering.

Another hope flickered when a pilgrimage to Lourdes was arranged for her in October 1977. But when she returned without being cured, she was no longer disappointed. When her traveling companions asked her, "Are you sad?", she answered, "No, now I really am sure what God wants from me—that I remain sick and will no longer get well." After this journey Sister Ursula expressed the wish to die soon. She had to undergo another process of purification to be freed even from this wish.

In all these years of trial, the psalms and the Office were Sister Ursula's great consolation. Whenever possible, on feastdays she would ask to be brought to the chapel in a wheelchair. When she could no longer be moved, she memorized her favorite psalms. The verse, "I sing my song to the King" she changed to "I moan my song to the King", and repeated this verse many times during the day. She could receive Holy Communion till the last day of her life. She had a great joy on December 28, 1979, when her brother, Father Ulrich, said mass for her in her infirmary room.

Every day she would have the day's Gospel and the important articles in the magazine "Christ in der Gegenwart" read to her. She remembered and thought of all the important events of her loved ones, even the birthday of her sister on the day of her death.

During the last weeks she could no longer speak clearly, nor could she make herself understood. Sometimes she would moan in what was heard to be "I can't any more. It is so hard."

After Christmas she became so weak that she could hardly breathe. She was producing too much mucus. During the last twelve days she had to have someone with her the whole time. On the night of the 15th of January, raging with fever, she asked: "Could I go home now?" After the long struggle to accept her dying at the peak of her life, she learned to await death with patience. Sister Ursula was a very warm and human person; she received and gave tenderness. She was capable of deep friendship. Especially in the last days she longed for human nearness and contact. Her face would light up just by hearing the approaching steps of her nurse. To Sister Dietgard, who was the special nurse, she said, "Through you I feel God."

January 26, 1980, was her last day on earth. Fifteen minutes before her death, Sister Dietgard whispered to her, "We are all with you." She answered with a smile that said, "Thank you. Goodbye."

Her parents, at age 77 and 79, must have wondered at the fact that their child would precede them in the hereafter. On her deathbed they said to her: "Ursula, we thank you for what you are. You gave us nothing but joy."

Sister Evarista Bucher (1889-1985)

BULGARIA (former member of the PRIORY OF TUTZING)

Maybe it sounds trite to say of Sister Evarista, “What a lovely person”, but that is what she was. In her personal notes there is a remark, “When I meet every event in my life with a smile and a ‘Yes’ in my heart, then I shall be happy.” An open mind, a loving heart in a worn, frail body, small and bent over—she sat in her rocker, looking over at the visitor with calm, intelligent eyes. Her shaking hands were no longer able to sew and embroider. The magnifying glass at the table beside her was now her steady companion for reading in the missal, the breviary and other books, among them the Rule of Taizé. The sturdy rosary, especially blessed by the Holy Father, lay in her lap. A picture of Our Lady hung next to the sewing machine. In fact, Sister Evarista could see this, her shrine, which she called “Maria Tann”, from every place of her former sphere of work: from the cutting table, the sewing machine, later from an easy chair, and at last from her bed in the corner of the sewing room. Ribbons with “Thank You” in golden lettering, and other tokens of gratitude are proof of her lively exchange with the Mother of God. (Anyone who visits places of pilgrimage in some countries will know of these votive plaques. Sister Evarista deeply appreciated her vocation in which she served for 71 years.

Elisabeth Bucher was born November 17, 1889, in Munich, the sixth of eight children. For seven years Lisi attended the school of the “Armen Schulschwestern”. Then she learned dressmaking, just like her four sisters. Later, in the convent, her “labora” consisted mostly of needlework: sacred vestments, sisters’ habits, priests’ cassocks, darning linen for the hospital; and her hobby—to make dollies and “Kasperle” [hand puppets] from the colorful bits and pieces for the children. While her fingers were busy, her heart went out to a suffering fellow sister and to all in the large family to which she belonged with heart and soul; in fact, her apostolate of love was worldwide.

Elisabeth entered at 21 and received the name Evarista on March 21, 1912, her clothing day. Likewise in the Motherhouse, she was allowed to pronounce her temporary vows on November 22, 1913. Soon Sister Evarista joined nurses’ training and was one of the first sisters to serve during World War I, at the war front in France. Already in December 1914 she devoted herself to the care of wounded soldiers in Mars-la-Tour (south of Metz) and in January 1915 was transferred to the epidemic hospital at Labry and later, Briey. She returned to the Motherhouse only in November 1918, after the War.

Again, another “first” awaited her when she was sent with six sisters—together with Father Franz Krings, CP—to the Balkan. After a difficult, fatiguing journey of 47 days, the group of missionaries reached Endje, Bulgaria, where they were joyfully welcomed by the German farmers. That was in May 1920. Sister Evarista was in charge of the sewing room and taught needlework in school. In the same year, December 8, she was permitted to pronounce her final vows.

Soon afterwards she was sent to Bardarski-Geran where, in 1922, she suffered a fracture of her foot on the rough road to church. Her foot never healed properly, so that she was

handicapped in walking for the rest of her life and suffered much, though never complained. But she had to return to Endje.

From 1926-1932 she was superior in Dragomirowo where, besides the duties of her office and work in the sewing room, she used to teach sewing and embroidery to the village girls on Sundays. Though she could not speak Bulgarian, she got along well and was loved by her pupils. In 1932 she returned to Endje (“village of the asses”) which was later changed to Zarevbrod (“king’s ford”). In 1944 she became subprioress, a post which she held until 1979.

When the Russian army occupied Bulgaria in 1944, most of the German sisters were able to return to Tutzing. Sr. Evarista and six sisters stayed behind and had to share with many other Germans the hard life in the internment camp in Selendol at the Greco-Bulgarian border. Just before Christmas 1945 the sisters could return to Zarevbrod. In 1948, when all the Germans had to leave the country, Sister Evarista and Sister Burkharda Betz chose to stay behind. In 1949, when the former convent and all buildings belonging to it were handed over to the government as a sanatorium for the mentally ill, the sisters worked there as employees. At first Sister Evarista took over the sewing and mending for the hospital. When she reached retirement age she was busy again in the convent sewing room, continuing her labor of love for her family and the few remaining churches.

Sister Evarista had an inventive mind and tried out all kinds of gadgets, such as a machine for making ice cream, a vacuum cleaner, and others. When the first vacuum cleaner could be bought in 1965, she insisted on having one purchased, which she called “Mausi” [“little mouse”]. Mausi is still serving faithfully. Sister Evarista was a quiet person who prayed much and was always ready to help. The sisters knew that they could turn to her trustingly, not only with their torn clothes but also when they felt the need to have a good cry or to give vent to grief and anger. She listened, consoled, encouraged. Her personal notes reflect her deep interest in the things and events of God on a worldwide scale.

With increasing age she could no longer be around the house and in chapel, but followed holy mass and the common prayer from her room, with doors open. Oblate Johanna shared her meals in the sewing room and the sisters gathered there for recreation, which she spiced with many a funny story, as when she told them, “Today I have been three times around Africa and Korea”, meaning, having walked around the table. What refreshing faith!

From September 1983 on, Sister Evarista could no longer leave her bed. She appreciated every help from her faithful nurse and would sometimes wonder, “I just asked the Blessed Mother to send somebody, and here you are!” On the other hand she thought, “The Good Lord must have sclerosis; it seems He has forgotten to fetch me.” It wasn’t easy, at 95 years of age. But she must have brought down many a blessing on the entire family through her loving surrender in active faith. Her missionary zeal could also come out in dreams: “Last night I baptized many children.”

It is touching that this great devotee to Mary could die on the Feast of the Assumption. It was early morning, August 15, 1985, with the sisters around her bed, watching and praying. The priest at the funeral compared Sister Evarista to a pillar that supported the community

through the long 65 years of her life in Bulgaria. We all thank Sister Evarista and know that we have in her a faithful intercessor.

Sister Walburga Diepolder (1870-1905)

PRIORY OF NDANDA, TANZANIA

It seems outright foolishness that an only daughter could leave her dearly loved parents and the homestead to enter a missionary congregation, struggling in its beginnings and having to record already several sisters murdered in German East Africa. Others had died after but a few years there—all under 30 years of age. But that was Josepha's determined nature, a "strong woman" who would 16 years later, on that memorable Sunday, August 27, 1905 (her 35th birthday) be inspired by the prayer of the mass—

"Almighty and eternal God, in the abundance of your kindness you give us more than we deserve, more than we ask. Pour out on us your mercy; take away what troubles our conscience and grant us what we dare not ask"—to give her life to God, praying after Holy Communion, "Lord, if you accept a sacrifice, take me and spare the others"; and that, in the face of imminent danger, when the Maji Maji warriors were only a short distance from the mission station of Nyangao.

When Josepha Diepolder entered in 1889, she was recommended by the pastor of Grönenbach, near Augsburg, as "diligent" and of "modest behavior", "very attentive" and "not at all discouraged by the news coming from Colonial East Africa" (now Tanzania) about the Bushiri Uprising of 1888/89 and the consequent killing of missionaries.

Together with Sister Birgitta Kroff, Sister Walburga was sent to East Africa in June 1894. With great zeal she devoted herself to the sick, at first three years in Dar-es-Salaam, then four years in Lukuledi and Nyangao. Father Maurus Hartman, the Apostolic Pro-Prefect, said of her, "I have seldom met such a zealous, and at the same time, kind-hearted woman." Challenged by the daily hardships of life she would respond generously and calmly. Yet in 1898 Sister Walburga had to return to Europe to recover her health.

She was again sent to the missions. Her transfer to Nyangao was just a few months before the Maji Maji Uprising. This movement was directed against both the German Colonial force, as well as the Benedictine missionaries who were seen as collaborators with the German government, as Father Sebastian Napachihi writes in his doctoral dissertation. The mastermind was a certain Kinjikitile Ngwale. One morning in 1904, he is reported to have disappeared in a pool of water. He emerged 24 hours later unharmed and began to preach his prophetic salvific message entrusted to him, as he claimed, by God. He taught that all black people were one, and tribal differences were not to be taken as ground for separations. God had entrusted him with a message and a medicine, "Maji", meaning "water", to enable the "suffering African to drive the white man out of the country". This medicine would make the warriors immune to bullets.

There was no grudge against the missionaries as such, but the aim was to get rid of all foreigners, all “red” people, as the Africans named the whites. Almost all tribes in southern Tanzania took part. It is not clear how far Islamic elements were involved, but a letter of Sultan Songea bin Ruufu to a Muslim chief states that “We have received an order from God that the Europeans must leave the country.”

There was no open declaration of war but the people got impatient, and the fight began on June 28, 1905. But August 28, the Benedictine mission station of Nyangao was under attack by Maji Maji warriors. They looted all they could get and set fire to the buildings. Someone betrayed the hiding place of the missionaries who had left on Sunday, August 27, about 1500 o’clock. So far, excerpts from the book of Father Sebastian Napachihi.

We also know from Sister Bernardine Hefele then superior of the sisters at Nyangao, through her letter written after the flight and from her memoirs, put down much later in 1955, about these events: On August 15 instructions came from the Lindi governmental office: “Arm yourselves or flee.” Then the missionaries heard about the death of Bishop Cassian Spiess, Brother Gabriel and Andreas, and the Sisters Felicitas Hiltner and Cordula Ebert on August 14. Sister Bernardine writes: “We sisters (Sr. Bernardine, Helena, Avia and Walburga) together with the children slept in the two-story house of the brothers. We prepared for death, ready for anything.... Thus two days passed.... The restlessness among the population increased. When we received Our Lord that Sunday morning (for the last time in our little mission church) we all thought it might be our very last Holy Communion. We offered ourselves to God that He might dispose of us according to His holy will. Few people had dared to come for holy mass, whereas at other times our church was crowded.... We took our noon rest as usual...when Thomas, our faithful teacher, came running, telling us of the danger.... Father Superior (Leo Lang) said, ‘Quickly, take something to eat and some blankets. We must flee. The warriors are but half an hour away....’

“A last glance back to the place we treasured so much, and we were in the wild bush where we hoped to find shelter.... Faithful Christians supplied us with clothing, blankets, wine and other things and took us for the night into a hut near Nghawa. Next morning they led us to a hideout where we sat down with a heavy heart, praying.

“At 8 o’clock we heard a gunshot, signaling the attack on the Nyangao mission. Then there was deep silence. Several messengers arrived. At last a man came, assuring us that all they wanted was our property, not our lives. Again the oppressive silence. Only the wind played in the trees. Then about midday, a horde of wildly yelling warriors dashed out of the bush, just 15-20 meters away. We had been betrayed! We believed ourselves lost. We knelt down and, praying, awaited the deathblow or bullet. During the ensuing gunfight Father Leo was hit in the arm. With a loud voice he gave us three times his blessing and the general absolution. Brother Gabriel kept shooting till he, too, was wounded. It seems the attackers were frightened by the blessings and withdrew in one direction. We fled in the other. It was then that Sister Walburga stayed behind. She had been at the rear with the children and we thought she will follow soon.” So far Sister Bernardine.

It was August 28. Father Sebastian adds that Sister Walburga stayed behind, due to injuries. The victims of the fight included four warriors, all relatives of a certain warrior. "On the side of the missionaries, two girls were killed, as well as Sister Walburga Diepolder, who was killed the next day by" that certain warrior, "probably to avenge himself of the loss of his four relatives."

We can only imagine what Sister Walburga must have endured due to injury, fright, thirst and the final confrontation with her killer.

For the fleeing missionaries it was the greatest pain to have lost her, not being able to return, because they were pursued for a very long stretch. Later, only her bloodied Holy Rule book and cincture could be found.

50 years later, the parish community of Nyangao made a pilgrimage to the place near Nghawa where Sister Walburga had found her death on the 29th of August 1905. People strongly believe that while the station of Nyangao was burned down, they had seen a cross above the smoke.

During the early Christian era, Roman authorities considered the people who follow "The Way" as unwanted foreigners because they did not offer sacrifices to the gods and the "divine Caesar". Full of courage, Christians would support and help each other, risking everything. There are many parallels in Church history. Also in Africa many Christians were forced into the Maji Maji Movement, but some showed a "most courageous behavior", as Father Sebastian writes, in protecting a missionary and were ready to suffer rather than betray his whereabouts. Many Africans paid or risked their lives in trying to save missionaries. (Also according to a letter of Father Leo Lang)

Only faith can give that courage. We thank the many unknown heroes and especially our Sister Walburga who, like Sister Martha Wansing, Sister Felicitas and Sister Cordula, gave her life in active faith.

Sr. Bernardine Hefele wrote about the rebellion:

23.10.1954 - Today I started to write down what I can still remember.

14.08.1895

On the day before the Assumption of Mary, after a safari of 9 days, the sisters arrived in Lukuledi. They were Mother Birgitta, Sr. Klara, Sr. Afra and S. Bernardine. Rev. Fr. Basilius Ferstl picked us up in Lindi, it took us 9 days on foot to Lindi, over Nyangao; the last night we slept in Hitilimo Shigugu and reached Lukuledi the following day.

The population had a big joy and came already diligently to the church service on Sundays. After the church service was catechesis, the men in the church, the women with the sisters, where the teacher, Gabriel, was the translator since the people didn't still speak any Swahili!

Immediately, we sisters looked after the girls. Every afternoon Mother Birgitta went to the cottages of the natives to look for the girls. Soon, we had approximately 15 together. Weekly,

Sr. Bernardine spent a day outside to look for sick persons and to invite the people to come to the Sunday divine service.

October 1895

For some days, we lived with a big worry since the message came, that the warlike Wangoni would come. Fearing a raid, we slept in our clothes at night, and our people all fled into the mountain caves of Massari.

However, our dear God guarded us; the other day the Wangoni passed by, at 3 hours' distance behind the mission.

Our reverend Founder sent a letter, in which in which he wrote: "Hold on faithfully to the Divine Office, whether in German or Latin." Since we had only German books, we prayed in German; since that time, we, the Sisters in the interior of Africa, have prayed the Divine Office; later in Latin.

In this month, the dear God still demanded a big sacrifice - Mother Birgitta was called home; she had been elected unanimously the First Superior in St. Ottilien. So, the good mother left us already after a few days. Again she had to walk back to the coast; Sr. Klara replaced her. Our work in Lukuledi was also blessed by sufferings; one after the other got black-water-fever, two brothers had died of this fever, Br. Joseph died of bilious fever. The writer was the one who suffered most from this fever, so that, after 2 ½ year, she had to go to Dar-es-salaam for recuperation.

During this time, the sisters moved to Nyangao. Also Sr. Klara and Sr. Afra were often very sick and had to return to Europe for recuperation. They were replaced by Srs. Hiltrudis and Viola; these found the scarcity of water in Lukuledi too heavy to bear and wished to stay rather in Nyangao; at the beautiful Nyangao river there was enough water, but there were also other sufferings in abundance.

Since I was not there when they moved, I don't know exactly the date! It was in the rainy season, during Lent, shortly before Easter. It was a Bernanes Father, Rev. Fr. Innozenz, superior of Nyangao, who fetched the sisters from Lukuledi. The sisters had also here many illnesses and other sufferings. Sr. Viola had an accident through a gun shot, the bullet went into the side through the right arm. After she had been treated here by a doctor, Rev. Br. Wilhelm, and the sisters, she was brought to Dar-es-salaam. Rev. Sister Superior Hiltrudis brought the sick sister to Lindi.

Sr. Hiltrudis then asked that I may return again, so I arrived this time in Nyangao; there was a wretched Milrani house and an even more wretched kitchen. Very soon, Sr. Superior was down with black-water-fever, soon again also I got it. Our new stone house, in which we live still today, was built quickly. Sr. Hiltrudis and Sr. Walburga got the permission for a trip to Europe from which the first one did not return anymore; she was sent to Brazil. Those who remained still here were Srs. Bernardine, Scholastika and Columba; Sr. Walburga returned some months before the rebellion. Sr. Columba and Sr. Scholastika also went home and in their place came Sr. Helena and Sr. Avia. Thus, we lived peacefully together until the beginning of the Arab rebellion in August!

The Arab rebellion in August 1905

In the night from August 17 to 18, an express messenger came and reported the sad message: Rev.. Bishop Cassian, Br. Andreas, Br. Gabriel, and two sisters, Sr. Cordula and Felicitas had been murdered. on August 14, on a trip from Kilowa to Ungoni, near Liwale The assassination place is Mukukuyumbo. In 1938 Rev. Bishop Joachim erected there a beautiful cross (a stone cross). After having received this sad message, we had to worry about our own fate, too. This also came too soon. On August 26, our workers became restless, one could feel that nothing was sure anymore. On Sunday, the 27th, only a few people came to church service; it became uncanny, we waited and prayed.

Then, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, came a teacher with the express message: the rebels were at a ½ h. distance before the mission. Rev. P. Leo and Br. Cyprian came and reported: "We must flee, the station will be burned down. " Br. Leo consumed the consecrated hosts, and we packed something to eat and some poor belongings into a suitcase and went away into the area of Ngawa where we spent the night in chairs before a Negro cottage. At dawn, we went into the thicket to a hiding place. Also some children come with us, and still some boys, one of whom probably became the traitor. At 8 o'clock in the morning, 28.8., we still heard the signal shot for the destruction of the mission. Then, all became quiet around us. We were alone with our children, an uncanny silence! – There, around ½ 12 o'clock, approximately 50 steps distant from us, came a gang of approximately 40 to 50 men with a strong roar, - here arose a duel, the gang of the wild men shot and also brother Cyprian shot with an European gun, (later he said that he had done it only because of the sisters). Rev. Fr. Leo was shot in the arm; then he said: "We are lost, I will give you the general absolution ". As he lifted his hand for the blessing, the rebels stopped short and retreated, so that there was a pause again. We utilized this also to leave the place. In scare, we hurried away and lost each other and met again only after some time, but Sister Walburga didn't come and we thought, she had lost us and surely would join us again; nobody knew that she got a shot in the hip when we were running away, she didn't give any indication either. We others hurried on, the rebels were behind us, then we used the nearest thicket of reed and hid again.

We all lay on the ground. Rev. Fr. Leo bled from his arm, he became mortally afraid and did a public confession. - In this moist place, we lay until it became dark in the evening, then we went out and came to the Lukuledi-River; there we stayed again in a hiding place, until the next evening. Here we tore our scapular and bandaged the arm of Rev. Fr. Leo.

In the evening, Br. Cyprian looked for people and found the house of a Christian, Eniko. These good people gave us something to eat, after 1 ½ days. There was an Askari in civilian, who volunteered to bring us to Lindi. Dear Sr. Walburga had not followed us, so we were greatly worried about her! In the night, the Askari brought us to a mountain; from there, a Jumbe sent his people to look for the Sister. They returned, telling that she was not found. On the same day, it was on August 29, she had been murdered by the rebels and had been buried. These people returned also in order to bury their dead who had been murdered in the duel, some of our children were also shot, only the half-orphan Mathilde ran with us. Later, a Christian told me, that he had been with the Sister, bringing her some water to drink.

29.08.1905

The Askari wanted to bring us in this night to Lindi; he went still to get some confidants, so in the evening, we continued barefoot. We had to take off our shoes in order not to leave any tracks, because the rebels were still in search of us. The Askari ordered: some to go ahead, others behind us; through a sign, imitation whistle of a bird, they gave a mutual sign that there was no danger. At night, about 2 o'clock, we arrived in Mtua. We were dead tired and lay down on the ground, to rest little. In this house, again they gave us something to eat, and then, we had to continue; at about 7 o'clock in the morning we came to Ruaha, where an Arab gave us Davus (coconut water) to drink; then we continued until Mkumahampa, there we were received by an Indian who gave us rice and fish: we rested a little, then, at about ½ 12 o'clock, Fr. Leo said: "We must go, we are being pursued." Until then, the rebels pursued us. Between 12 and 3 o'clock, we climbed over the Lindi-mountain (Pilipedi) with greatest effort. At about 3 o'clock we reached Lindi, and Rev. Br. Damian received us with love.

Addendum: On the 27th, the first escape day, while I walked a short time together with dear Sister Walburga, it was a Sunday, she told me: "This morning during holy Mass the oration was: Omnipotent God, in the excess of your love you grant the suppliants more than they merit and wish, etc, and give us even what we do not dare to ask,..." then I prayed: "Lord, if you want a victim, take me ". And it pleased the Lord to accept her sacrifice! Every year on the 11th Sunday after Pentecost I remember these dear words of dear Sister Walburga! The pain of her loss was bigger than all the efforts and sufferings that we had on that occasion during the whole flight. -

When we arrived in Lindi, a warship lay in the harbor. Immediately, the men went – I can't remember who - to report the Sister lost. The next morning, a sergeant with 20 Askari set out to look for the Sister, but unfortunately they did not find her anymore, only some small belongings of hers, a little book of the Rule and a veil.

One day after us Rev. Fr. Thomas (subsequent bishop) and his people came over the Makande plateau to Lindi; the English sisters of Massari had joined them. Rev. Fr. Thomas and Rev. Fr. Leo greeted each other at the gate: "The Lord has given it and the Lord has taken it away, the Lord's name be praised!" Fr. Leo had a shot in the arm; at the end, Br. Cyprian still got a shot in the right hand, so we were brought in a small boat to Dar-es-salaam some days later. The little half-orphan Mathilde was with us and went along to Dar-es-Salaam!

On September 15, dear Sr. Avia died in Dar-es-salaam by black-water-fever, in consequence of the exhausting escape. Dear Sister Helena was so stressed at the nerves that she never more recovered well, not even in Europe. In 1908 she returned with me, when we started the sisters' station in Ndanda. She also died of black-water-fevers in 1909!

I reported truthfully what I still remembered and wrote it down, whoever is interested in it, might read it, however I beg to spare me speaking about it.

August 21, 1955

Sr. M. Bernardine Hefele O.S.B.

29.08.1955

The 50th anniversary of the death of dear Sr. Walburga was beautifully and worthily celebrated. Early in the morning, after holy Mass in the Parish church, the community, children and adults, moved to Ngawa praying the rosary. Rev. Fr. Andreas had ordered the way and place be cleaned. Fr. Benno was so kind to drive the weaker persons and Sr. Bernardine by car. Up on the mountain, Rev. Fr. Benno gave a beautiful address. Among other things, he said that on the day of the destruction, as the mission was burning, a cross was seen over the smoke; the people had told this (Yes, the cross was victorious!)

After the address, some songs were sung and we prayed the litany of Our Lady. And then we went home again praying.

(Comment): Yes, this station is and remains a Station of the Cross, a stony field. During the interruption of 24 years, while the Christians were cared for by Mamuyra, Islam made big advances and pulled also some people over to its side. May dear Sister Walburga, continue to intercede for us from above, so that the good Lord may bless the work of the missionaries and Sisters! –

May she also ask that the many changes of personnel may stop, so that the work can go on in peace!

Rev. Sr. M. Bernardine died on June 17, 1957 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning. Early that morning, she still attended Holy Mass and received Holy Communion. After her usually long thanksgiving she went for breakfast with the community. Then, she lay down to die, after having still received the holy anointing for the sick.

R.i.P.