

**Obituary**  
**Sr. Willemien Derks**  
**\* 24-05-1930**  
**† 06-07-2022**



Sr. Willemien was born on 24th May 1930 in the small village of America, Horst, Netherlands, as one of the elder daughters in a family of 14 children. Her full name was Jacoba Petronella Maria, but she was called by the pet name Coos. When she was 18 years old, her mother said to her: "You will have to find a job; I like to use you at home with the little ones, but you learn the most under strange eyes". So, Coos started to work in the hospital in Horst, where also Sr. Olga was employed. She enjoyed helping in the hospital ward, did a lot of cleaning and at the same time attended the Agricultural Home School, which she completed in 1950. When the twins Trees and Truus were born, her mother really needed her and she started helping at home again. She had said before that she would like to become a missionary, but her father said: "Wait until you are 21, then you will have a better judgement about what you are going to do!" So she helped out at home until she entered the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood in Tienray on 19th March 1952. On 2nd May 1953 she received the religious dress and was given the name Willemien, which she later changed to "Willemien". She would have liked to become a nurse, but was too small of stature.

On 22nd August 1954 she made her first profession in Tienray, and worked there in the household until she left for the then Dutch New Guinea on September 24th 1955, just after she had received her certificate A for Religious Education. Her Perpetual Profession was a big celebration in Fak-Fak, Dutch New Guinea. Sr. Willemien worked in the kitchen and could prepare tasty meals from almost nothing. She also gave cooking lessons to young girls. After her first holiday at home, and seeing how big the little ones had grown, she went to Manokwari. Here in 1960 the Sisters had taken over a boarding school for children who were difficult to bring up. She tirelessly took care of the whole household, had a warm heart for the children, helped at the boarding school, washed and cooked for the priests, did the decorations in the church and the shopping; early every morning she went to the market to buy vegetables, fish and fruit for the boarding school, the priests and the sisters, in the beginning by bicycle, later by car. This had been left behind by an Augustinian priest and in three weeks time Willemien learned to drive!

For a while she also prepared Chinese girls for their baptism. In the beginning the sisters did not yet have a house of their own, they simply lived in the girls' dormitory.

In 1963 she experienced the transition of the country from the Dutch to the Indonesian administration.

In 1966, she was transferred to Ayawasi, far inland. The first years Sr. Willemien worked a lot in the small hospital, until a second nurse came in 1969. It was an adventurous time: there was almost nothing, everything was very simple and in the first year, she was there, only twice a Cessna plane landed. The time was restless; all the pupils from the village came to live with the sisters, to the annoyance of the soldiers.

Sr. Willemien became a jack-of-all-trades again. When she did not have to help in the hospital anymore, she started to give sewing lessons; later the girls started to teach each other, which Sr. Willemien loved. Around 1985 she found time for a new hobby: weaving, in the traditional way of Indonesia. At first, she did the weaving for herself as a hobby, but very soon, girls came to ask to learn it. The first four girls then helped with the weaving lessons she gave three times a week to the women and girls of the Kampong. Then she was asked to come and teach it at school.

At Christmas 1991, the sisters said goodbye in Ayawasi, knowing that their work would be continued by indigenous sisters. For Sr. Willemien this was a great comfort in a difficult farewell. Once back in Tienray in the Netherlands in 1992, she was soon asked to come to Rome, where she helped in the housekeeping for both the CMM-Fathers and the Sisters of our own Generalate and the Guest Department, where she was a warm-hearted hostess, sincere and open. Despite the language difficulties, partly caused by her poor hearing, she always knew what was needed. She loved going to the Eucharistic celebrations in the Frisian Church in Rome and to the often-special celebrations in St. Peter's cathedral. When she turned 80, she received a surprise visit from quite a few brothers and sisters, which she enjoyed immensely.

In November 2015, when our Sisters of the Generalate moved to another house and the 'CPS Community' that did the housekeeping was dissolved, Sr. Willemien left for the Convent Heilig Blut in Aarle-Rixtel in the Netherlands where she worked in the refectory. Even when in 2021 her health deteriorated, she continued to be attentive to the small services, such as a small flower for a sick fellow sister. She missed Rome, but was consoled by the fact that her family was so close by. She enjoyed the family days, birthdays, visits from Horst. Our worldwide sister also had friends worldwide, and many visitors in the convent's guest section asked about her, coming from Canada, England, Indonesia or Rome.

In 2021, her health declined. After a heart attack, she did not fully recover, but was in the community as much as she could, although her energy diminished. She could be so tired, but continued to enjoy small things intensely. Blood transfusions were necessary. They helped her less and less. On Sunday, 27 June, she was in the refectory for the last time at coffee time, after that she was bedridden. Very consciously, happy about visits and mail that was read to her, she went back to her Creator in the late evening of 6 July 2022.

**- R.I.P. -**