



Obituary
Sr. M. Philothea Willmes,
† 16.7.2021
at the Mission House Neuenbeken

Sr. Philothea wrote her memoirs in 2016, thus we are able to give a "first-hand" account of what she experienced in life and also how she experienced things. We get an impression of what missionary work was like 70 years ago.

Sr. Philothea was born a twin on 12.12.1929 in the small town of Huxel in the part of Germany called Sauerland. She was baptised on 15. 12. at Holt-hausen in the Diocese of Paderborn and received the name Franziska, her sister being named Theresia. At an early age the two children helped their mother on the small home farm, while their father worked in the slate mines. Beside all the joy they experienced in their family there was also suffering: three younger siblings died at an early age. the oldest brother remained missing in action during World War II, and another brother died in a fatal accident at the age of 28.

Franziska's decision to attend the mission school at Neuenbeken did "not come as a big surprise" to the family as there had been religious vocations earlier on the mother's as well as on the father's side, our Sr Klara König, a missionary in the Congo for over 30 years, being a maternal aunt.

Franziska took her Oxford exams in 1952 and then entered the postulancy. At the beginning of her novitiate, on 14 August 1953. she was very happy to be given the name Philothea ("woman who loves God"), because she was acquainted with St. Francis de Sales's "Philothea" from monthly get-togethers at the house of the assistant parish priest at home. She celebrated her first profession on 15.8.1954 while two days later her twin sister got married. "By God's Providence," she writes, "we both set out on new paths in life at the same time." Sr Philothea would very much have liked to "take off immediately into God's wide world", but she was determined to be available anywhere, also as a teacher at the mission school. Her time came a year later, 1955, when on the second Pentecost Day she and Sr Igna Bonacker received with much joy their missionary assignments for East Africa and were solemnly sent forth on 14. 8.. At the end of the month, they went to the Motherhouse, from there to travel by train on 3 December in the company of altogether 7 sisters to Marseille, where they boarded a ship to take then across the Mediterranean and down the Suez Canal to Tanga on the Indian Ocean. From there the journey to their destination took them another full week – "in the rainy season!" Finally, on Christmas Eve, 1955, they arrived at Kilema in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro and attended the Christmas Midnight Mass as their first Holy Mass on African soil, one of God's dispositions Sr. Philothea would never forget.

On 15 August 1957, she took perpetual vows at Kifungilo in the Usambara Mountains in Tanzania. After teaching there for two years she was transferred to Kilungu in the Kamba Mountains in Kenya. There, she writes, she observed "with great joy the interest some pupils took in religious life", so that even after 60 years she remembered their names. Unfortunately, at that time there was no permission yet to admit local girls to international religious communities. (Kilungu School is still administered by our sisters today, 2021). Still teaching, Sr. Philothea was asked to study for a BA by extension with the university of Pretoria in South Africa. At the end of 1962, she was transferred to Lioki, also in Ukambani, to convert the phased-out middle school there into a secondary school.

After teaching at Lioki for barely one year she was transferred to Pemba, a small island north of Zanzibar, to take charge of a state-run, international and intercultural primary school, a challenge she

welcomed heartily. Again, a little over a year later she must pack again, this time to phase out Bura Junior in Kenya, to become a Secondary School. "That was immediately after the revolution had broken out on Pemba/ Zanzibar," she writes, "an unforgettable time, but a very blessed one in spite of all hardships."

In 1965, Sr Philothea was able to take her first home leave. Returning to Kenya she continued teaching at Bura. but only for a short period. She was elected delegate to the 1967 Reform Chapter of our Congregation at Wernberg and for that reason flew back to Europe as early as the end of 1966. Her assignment in East Africa being thus completed, she taught at the Mission School in Neuenbeken until it was closed down in 1971.

From 1971 to 1976, Sr. Philothea served as local Superior of the Neuenbeken Mission House, then for two years at the Saint Joseph's Hospital in Paderborn, and from February 1978 as Provincial Superior of the German Province. As she had already been a member of the Provincial Council since 1966, she was familiar with the 10 houses belonging to the province at that time before, in 1983, the two houses in Denmark, Birkerød and Rønne were added to it. In 1985, during her time of office as Provincial Superior, Neuenbeken celebrated the 100th anniversary of our Congregation for an entire year, concluding it with a starlight pilgrimage to Maria Wald Abbey in the Eifel, where Abbot Franz had begun his religious life as a Trappist in 1863. Sisters from Germany, the Netherlands and Austria took part. The slide series "Be a sign of brotherly love among men" was compiled and so were some songs about our CPS spirituality as well as "Cantate", a book of hymn still in use for our liturgical services.

At the 1985 General Chapter, Sr Philothea was elected to the General Council. Her first term of office included several major trips abroad: in 1986, in the company of Sr Manuela Randerath, Superior General. to Mozambique, where civil war had been raging for many years; in 1989, with Sr Carmen Maria, to Korea to support the first three Korean CPS Sisters, and in 1990, to Canada, the USA and Portugal. In 1987/88, Sr. Philothea administered the Zimbabwean Province on an interim basis, a challenge considering the ongoing civil war and the situation in the province as such. "However," she writes, "it was also a time of fruitful experiences. In 1998 - after returning from Rome – Sr. Philothea was Superior for one year at the Motherhouse and in 2000, she once more assumed that office at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Paderborn, Finally, on the First Sunday of Advent in 2007 she returned to Neuenbeken where she had begun her religious life in 1950 as a pupil of the mission school. "Neuenbeken," she writes, "remained one of the most important places in my life". For several years she took care of both the general and spiritual library, she helped editing the MMM magazine besides writing contributions of her own, and until, in December 2016, she retired from active service she took a lively part in the meetings of the Precious Blood Mission Circle of the province,

"For more than 60 years," Sr. Philothea writes, "I was a missionary in Christ's mission field in various parts of the world." We are grateful for her tireless service to our Congregation and join in the words with which she concludes her memoirs:

"Looking with gratitude to the past -
Living passionately in the present -
Building the future in hope!
Deo gratias!"

May God reward Sr. Philothea abundantly for what she has done for His glory in His kingdom, and may she now rest in His peace.

R.I. P.