



IN MEMORY OF

SR. M. BENIGNE KERBER, CPS

Who went home to God on 12th April 2024

at Precious Blood Convent, Riruta

BACKGROUND

Sr. Benigne Kerber was born on 14th Nov, 1927, in Reitscheid Germany in the Diocese of Trier to the late Peter Kerber and the late Anna Schaad. They were seven in the family. She kept close relationship with her only living Sister, Elsie Kerber who is now 99 years of age. She was very much connected with her and they last spoke on Holy Saturday though sister Benigne was frail. She has nephews and nieces who have been very close to her and always wanted to know how she was keeping on.

HER CALL TO RELIGIOUS LIFE AND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Answering the call to follow the Lord, Sister Benigne made contact with the sisters of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood, who had impressed her because of their kindness. She entered the Congregation at Neuenbeken on 14.08.1951. She was received into the novitiate on 14 August 1952. She made her First Profession in Neuenbeken on 15.08.1953. Soon after her first profession, on 08.12.1953 Sr. Benigne was missioned to East African Province. She arrived in Zanzibar on 17.12.1953 where she taught in Primary School and Secondary School from 1953 to 1956. She pronounced her final vows on 15.08.1956 in Zanzibar.

After her final profession, Sister was transferred to Mbitini where she taught in primary and secondary school from August 1953 to 1962. From 1962 to 1970, Sr. Benigne taught in various stations – in Precious Blood Secondary school Kilungu, Precious Blood Secondary School Riruta, Kongei Secondary School and Moshi Primary School in Tanzania.

In 1971, Sister received a Diploma in Catechetical and Pastoral Formation from the Gaba Pastoral Institute in Uganda. She then prepared laypeople to become good catechists, able to pass on the Word of God to others. In this new ministry, she was posted first to Bura, Taita to work at St. Joseph Mukasa Catechist Training Centre where she worked for 6 years until 6th September 1977.

In September 1977, Sr. Benigne was sent to Mbitini, she was to teach in Mulala Secondary School but this was not God's plan, she recounts saying, "My work at St. Joseph Mukasa Catechetical Training Centre at Bura, Taita, which I liked so much, had come to an end abruptly I was to go to Mbitini first, to see what would be next, this was on 6th September 1977. The following days were

extremely painful and frustrating. I placed myself under the cross and there received the courage and trust to repeat ever so often the Lord's prayer, 'Thy will be done not mine'. I also fixed a little letter to the statue of Our Lady and one to the picture of St. Theresa, patron of the Mission, in which I asked for their help, either to go back to Bura or to give me something that would please God more".

After two weeks in Mbitini, it was decided that she should teach at Mulala Sec School as she had previously taught in the same school between 1956/57. She disliked the idea of teaching in school after having been in the Catechetical field for six years but she complied. To her surprise, her prayer to continue in the Catechetical field was answered when she was asked to establish a Catechetical Training Center in Mbitini.

In 1978 she established Bikira Maria Catechetical Centre which she named after Our Lady whom she loved most, and before its completion in 1980, Sister had already started to teach a three-month course at other various locations within the Diocese. Through the years, to promote and aid the spread of faith, Sr. Benigne wrote (Authored) books that were to be used for home catechesis and Sunday school. These books are widely used until today. She also introduced other programs/courses such as Sunday school, youth preparations and marriage courses.

In 2005 she came to Riruta having retired from active ministry. While in Riruta she helped in the sponsorship /care of the poor, Teaching catechism classes in St. John the Baptist Parish Riruta and also took part in the Candidates program where she taught salvation history. She had a heart for the less privileged and a true concern for bettering their conditions in life.

SPIRITUAL LIFE

For one to live the CPS mission, it requires much more than just human qualities, intellectual preparation, a professional approach, apostolic creativity and a passion for mission: all these things are necessary, but not enough to provide adequate motivations to keep alive one's experience of one's vocation. Sr Benigne was true to her spouse. She was a strong woman of faith. This was demonstrated through her reference to the Holy Eucharist and the sacraments. Adoration of the blessed sacrament, daily meditation on the scriptures, and devotion to the Precious Blood. She loved our Blessed Mother Mary. Her favourite quotes were John 2:5., "Do whatever He tells you." and Luke 1: 38. "May it be done to me according to your word" This is the Motto she gave to Bikira Maria Catechetical Center. Even in her frailty and old age, Sr. Benigne was present for every community prayer. She never gave in to her ill health and the impairment of her hearing and seeing. She spent a lot of time with Sr. Monica and prayed together for the congregation and the whole humanity. They had a fixed schedule for prayers across the day.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Sr. Benigne's life was well balanced. She knew what was expected of her as a religious sister. She endeavored to live her vows faithfully and reached out to many in full awareness of the call that

God had made to her. She was able to handle challenges in a constructive way. She accepted others in their limitations, in appreciation of self and others. She was open to other cultures and always willing to learn from them. She has touched the life of many especially in Mbitini where she supported economically disadvantaged children with education. She also provided many families with basic needs.

To show her love for the people of Mulala, She played a great role in getting electricity from Kenya Power and Lighting and also Kilimanjaro water from Sultan Hamud pipeline to Mbitini where they were experiencing a great shortage of water and drought. Sr. Benigne worked in Mbitini for 28 years from 1977 to 2005. Throughout her life, she stressed the need for excellent formation of the future catechists who would go back to their parishes to teach by word and action through the example of their lives. She discerned every aspect of her life, and in prayer, tried to make the right choices in every situation even when it was difficult.

While writing chronicles of Bikira Maria Catechetical Centre after her retirement she wrote “For years when approaching the Centre, I marveled at its very existence, because it had not been in anybody’s plan originally. Its establishment and so many things that developed over the years, I experienced clearly interventions of Divine Providence, and I have no doubt that this was the reason which made it so dear to me”.

ACADEMIC

Sr. Benigne was gifted with intellectual knowledge and had the ability to reflect, to make judgments and to be discerning in the face of situations. She was very much conversant with the church issues and the world too. She took time to read and develop herself. While still strong she would be the one to inform about the church, the new encyclicals, pastoral letters among others. She kept abreast with all the congregational materials and took keen interest on any newsletters from the superiors. She was also very present to what was happening in the world.

Sr. Benigne will always be remembered with the many elaborate books she wrote on catechesis that are used in the faith formation in the local church of Kenya and other countries. She has trained catechists in Kenya and outside our borders. She was passionate about the development of the entire family. She wrote guide books for Sunday School, trained Sunday School teachers and mentored families. She was involved in running youth programs in schools and institutions. She would do in service courses for primary school teachers with CISRET across the Catholic Dioceses in Kenya. She was pro-life and had a program “USIUE” that called for respect for human life from conception to natural death. She also wrote other religious books.

Sr. Benigne has promoted many men and women to priesthood and religious life. She loved young people who joined our community and always was a great pain for her if one did not make to become a religious. She would assist in giving inputs to the younger members in formation.

COMMUNITY

Her 71 years of faithful service in East Africa is a clear indication of her commitment and love for her religious community and the community she generously served. She learned to live with others and of different cultures. She enjoyed every aspect of community living. She passionately attended

all community activities. She was known for her comical nature especially during common recreation. She was hospitable to all that even sometimes she was not able to tell when people took advantage of her kind nature. She was able to interact with all despite their social standing in the society. She respected her superiors and consulted where necessary. She was peaceful and this was granted to her even at death.

APOSTOLIC

Sr. Benigne's Apostolate and mission was for the service of the kingdom of God. She was true to our charism, she was a true witness to the redeeming love of Christ. She lived fully the four virtues of a missionary sister of the Precious Blood.

Sr. Benigne was a valiant Woman who surrendered joyfully to God's guidance relying solely on Him throughout her life and gave herself completely to the tasks entrusted to her, besides keeping a keen interest in all that was happening in our congregation and in the world at large. She was a community-minded person, always very welcoming to visitors, especially the poor who kept knocking at our doors. She bore her infirmities and weakening health bravely and without complaining.

She will be missed by many

She was a good teacher, a sister, a friend, a mentor and an understanding mother and grandmother to many. Being on fire with love for her Lord, she inspired all who came in contact with her. She was a woman of deep faith and wisdom. A true daughter of Abbot Francis and Mother Paula.

We thank God for Sr. Benigne for who she was to all of us, for what she did, and for the many, many lives she touched with her caring love. We thank her family members and all her benefactors who has supported our mission. We pray that God will give her eternal reward for a life well lived as a true Missionary Sister of the Precious Blood. May she now intercede for our needs and for all she loved and cared for.

'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; may it be done to me according to Your Word' (Lk. 1:38)