

SHCJ STORIES



Mother Mary Joachim Forster SHCJ



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1896 - 1987

by

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SISTER MARY JOACHIM FORSTER SHCJ

EARLY LIFE

1896-1930

In the closing years of the nineteenth century and just one year before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, a couple in the northeast of England welcomed the birth of their sixth child and second daughter. They belonged to the extended Forster family, for two centuries mainly farmers in various parts of Northumberland and nearly always Catholic.

Born in Newcastle upon Tyne on May 28th 1896, the infant was christened, as were most of her brothers and sisters, on the day of birth, at their parish church, Saint Dominic's Priory, established since 1860 in New Bridge Street. She was named Dorothy Mary Alice, but to the family she was always "Dolly."

Charles Davison Forster, her father, born in 1850, married Ann Mary Thornton in 1887. Their nine children were born over the following seventeen years. The eldest, Ann, was born in 1888 and was followed by four sons, the first of whom died at birth, while the third, Willie, was to be killed in action during the First World War, aged only twenty-three. Thomas and John Joseph (Jack) survived their war service to become the only married members of their generation. Only

Thomas had children: a daughter, Margaret Mary, and a son, William Snowden, whose sons and grandsons carry on the Forster name. Dolly, next after Jack, was followed by her sister Mary and two more brothers, Charlie and Frank.

Born in 1904 Frank, the sixth of the nine children to reach his tenth decade, died only in 1999.

Besides being long and deeply rooted in Northumberland, the family was staunchly Catholic on both sides, with numerous priests and religious among its members including the Benedictine Bishop John Cuthbert Hedley of Newport and Menevia.

Dolly's maternal grandfather was born and bred at Felton in Northumberland. As a young man, he went to London, eventually entered the hop trade, and became quite successful. Though not himself a Catholic, all his sons were educated at Ushaw College, and his daughters with the SHCJ at St Leonards on Sea. Ann, born in 1864, who became Dolly's mother, was there in the 1870s, "in time to see Mother Cornelia", according to her daughter over a century later; "in fact, she met her in her (wheel)chair on one occasion and Mother Cornelia put her hand on her head. She always remembered that." Ann's great friend was her Prefect, M.M. St. Michael Waterhouse, who, she said, always expected her to turn up at Mayfield as a postulant.

Instead, Ann would eventually go there for her daughter Dolly's reception into the Noviceship.

After their marriage in London in 1887, Ann and her husband lived in Newcastle upon Tyne, where Charles founded his own law firm and their children were born. In 1909, on the death of his older brother, he inherited Burradon, near Thropton, north west of Newcastle, but did not take up residence there until he retired in 1926. On land occupied by Forsters since the eighteenth century, the present house, Burradon Hall, was built by Charles' father and uncle in the mid-nineteenth century.

It was to remain "home" to all the family, and from 1910, Christmas especially, meant Burradon. When Dolly's eldest brother, Tom, died in 1969, his widow continued to live there; her sisters "Dr. Annie" and Mary, and her younger brothers Charlie and Frank, retired there from their various professions; Mary, a keen gardener, for a time ran the home farm and managed the house; Tom's daughter was also to retire there, while his junior grandson returned with his young family to run the farm. Dolly, then Sr. Mary Joachim, rejoiced after Vatican II renewal in annual home visits and slipped easily back into family life there.

Burradon Hall has a small domestic chapel in the house, with reservation of the Blessed Sacrament since c.1942, and a weekly Mass still celebrated on Saturdays. Until 1942 the Forsters made their way on Sundays and Holydays to the chapel at nearby Biddlestone Hall. Today, only the chapel remains, on top of an old pele tower, still containing most of its fittings, destined for the Historic Chapels Trust for ecumenical and other uses.

Another Forster home, Carlcroft, further up the Coquet valley, was inherited by Charles from his mother, c.1900. He rebuilt it and sometimes let it, but after improving the game-shooting, took the whole family there for a month each summer. In 1911, Dolly's initials appear in the Carlcroft game-book as one of a party putting up butts; in 1913, as carrying a gun and shooting her first bird, and thereafter, regularly as "a gun." Like Burradon, Carlcroft had a domestic Chapel, with reservation of the Blessed Sacrament since 1900. It was given up in 1942.

Dolly's early education, partly as a boarder, was at the Sacred Heart Convent at Gosforth, Newcastle, eventually to evolve into Fenham Training College. Little is recorded of this time except her confirmation at the age of nine at St. Mary's Cathedral on April 3rd 1905, and an occasion, when

she was about twelve, during a fire at Fenham convent in 1908 when she was the last to be let down on knotted bedsheets by Madame Carroll from her dormitory window.

From 1909-1913, for Secondary education, Dolly went nearer home than her mother's alma mater, to the Holy Child Convent at Harrogate, whence her elder sister Annie had gone on to study medicine at Oxford. Decades later, on an archive tape, Joachim recalled the convent school at that time as "very small..., good in the subjects that we took, (but) quite innocent of science" as were many schools then.

She admitted to having concentrated on her studies, including French and German, "with an end in view," though the Latin she learned there "didn't amount to much." When applying later for admission to postgraduate Training College, she regretted it was not better. Possibly with hindsight which reflected her felt needs when first in Calabar, she also considered that she "could have done a great deal more on the artistic side...not that I'm all that artistic - or musical." The only record of her interaction with schoolmates at Harrogate derives from a letter she wrote from Calabar in 1932, acknowledging news of the death of an SHCJ former schoolmate "...in the same class the whole time ... She always...first in English and I... a shade less bad at Maths, neither of us...artistic..."

Sensible, conscientious and sturdily independent, Dolly proved a good student and duly achieved entrance to Armstrong College, the Newcastle branch of Durham University. She lived at the family home in Jesmond Road during this time, gaining second-class honours in English and History in the summer of 1917, just after her twenty-first birthday. Her niece relates that during the First World War, Dolly edited a family magazine to send out to the three eldest brothers in the trenches. In the light of the family closeness evident in her later years, her brother William's death in action in October 1916 must have been for all the family a cruel bereavement, increasing their anxiety for the safety and survival of the two brothers, Tom and Jack, still at the Front.

Besides her editing, Dolly had been known in the family for the writing of poems and songs from an early age. One poem, the only extant specimen, survives from the period just after her graduation: Christmas at Biddleston-1917. This evokes "the snow-strewn heights of Northumbria" through which the family made their cross-country way to Midnight Mass in the chapel on the edge of the Cheviots, with the open rolling hills beyond - far away from urban noise and electric light - where "He comes to his own and they know him well."

During a postgraduate year-out, "Miss Dolly" gave religious instruction to children then living in the Burradon hamlet - as one of them well remembered into the mid-1980s. She also did some voluntary teaching of adults.

How long Dolly had been drawn to religious life there is no indication, but her strong and lifelong attachment to her family and the equally strong homesickness she was to admit in Calabar to having experienced all her life, could not have made easy her decision to join the SHCJ. She had been away from home before, to boarding schools and to the university, but when she entered at Mayfield as a postulant in September 1918, she faced the prospect of never going home again. Small wonder that, as her younger sister, Mary, recalled in old age, there were nighttime tears in the privacy of their room, in the months before Dolly left for Mayfield. Even when the B.A. degree was conferred on her years later at Durham, the family party met her and M.M. Salome to enjoy the hospitality of Uncle Robert Thornton before the ceremony, at his presbytery, St.Godric's in Durham, not at Burradon. "Home" would have to wait until she retired from Africa in 1967.

Dorothy Forster became Sister Mary Joachim at her Clothing ceremony with six other new novices on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25th 1919. She

had arrived at Mayfield as a postulant on September 11th 1918, just two months before the Armistice ended the Great War. Aged twenty-two, she left behind her brothers and sisters from Dr. Annie who was thirty, to young Frank who was only fourteen. Tom and Jack were still in the army; Mary at twenty had already driven an ambulance during the war, and Charles, at eighteen, was ready for Cambridge. Eventually, they represented a range of professions, including medicine, civil engineering, and various branches of law.

Dolly was about to embark on a life in education that would carry her farther afield, pioneering in West Africa, but for the present she was out of sight in the obscurity of the noviceship. Besides her immediate set, two other small groups received the habit in 1919: three sisters in February and two in June, twelve "first years" in all. One or two small snap-shots show some of them helping on the convent farm; in one, Joachim is clearly recognisable at some distance from the laughing group in the foreground, looking up as she completes her task. Only one of the dozen survived her but died in 1990, so no reminiscences remain from their noviceship days. Joachim herself mentioned in her archive interview that her mother was present at her Clothing and that her novice-mistress, Mother Mary Magdalen Ryan, later urged

her former novices “of the right age and with good health” to volunteer for the new Nigerian Mission. In the same interview, Joachim makes no further reference to the noviceship, mentioning only that she was sent to London as soon as she was professed, on March 30th 1921, to prepare for entry to the SHCJ Postgraduate Training College in the following September. In the aftermath of the war, she was one of only three students in that department in 1921-22.

From April 1921 until the summer of 1925, Joachim therefore lived at the Convent at Cavendish Square in the west end of London, near Oxford Circus. It was conveniently situated for transport by bus or “tube” to the teaching-practice schools, and known to generations of students, lay and religious alike, as “Cav.” Under Mother Mary Elizabeth Potts-Chatto, who was then Principal, she duly gained both the Cambridge Teachers Diploma and the Catholic Teachers Religious Certificate in the summer of 1922. In September she was attached to the staff of the College to lecture on the History of Education while also teaching in the small school on the same site. A boarder at that time, also from the north-east of England, remembers on being teased by classmates about finding French “awfully difficult with a northern accent,” that “Sister ‘Jerkin’...from the north too,” stuck up for her “and...said the northern accent was much better for Latin!”

From London, Joachim was sent to Preston in 1925 to teach at Winckley Square Convent. Here she proved to be very popular with her pupils, some of whom later became SHCJ. One of these sisters in 1997 recalled Joachim as a much loved fourth-form History teacher who won all hearts with “captivating humour and...occasional gentle sarcasm” and as a most lovable person full of fun, who “cared for each one and was always ready to make excuses for scatterbrain pupils...”

A second Former who had entered the Junior school in 1925, recalled c.1987 Joachim’s “tremendous impact on her pupils.” She was sad to hear of her recent death and because, in the many years since those days at Winckley Square, they had never met again.

During this time in Preston Joachim made her final vows at Mayfield on Easter Saturday, April 10th 1926, the Profession date no doubt chosen to coincide with the school’s Easter holiday so as to allow time for the usual eight day retreat in preparation. Looking back on this Preston period nearly fifty years later, Joachim recalled five “very happy years, teaching History and having a younger class as well, which I preferred....” Then came the news that the SHCJ were to have a Nigerian mission: among many others, she added, she

volunteered, and rather to her surprise, was accepted as one of the first three missionaries.

Her pupils recalled that time very clearly, "...all...fired with enthusiasm for the new mission" which softened the blow when she departed. For a long time they kept up individual and class correspondence, the PYLON provided news and pictures of their favourite nun and "just about every girl bought and dressed a 6-inch doll for Calabar...to make Christmas special." They also made "very simple dresses in the brightest colours we could find." Eventually, we hear of those dolls and dresses again, from the receiving end, during the missionaries' first Christmas in Calabar, southern Nigeria.

MISSION TO NIGERIA

1930-1931

Once the Chapter of 1930 had agreed on the Society's historic missionary enterprise, volunteers were asked to apply in writing. M. Teresa Xavier Fletcher, an American second-batch missionary of 1931, remembered all her life the ferment when the news reached Rosemont:

"Overnight, vocations to missionary life budded; librarians were besieged with requests about Africa; nun-volunteers literally chewed their pencils while their letters of application were written."

As in Rosemont, so doubtless in England. Those of "the right age and with good health" volunteered, some without strong attraction to missionary life, but out of good spirit. Joachim on her own admission was as surprised as anyone to be chosen as one of the first three missionaries. Amid the usual busy year-ending school activities, she involved her pupils in her preparations for the Mission. In late July or early August she joined M.M. Edith Rudwick, also of the then English Province and M.M. Laurentia Dalton of the American Province, for more formal preparation. By August 25th the Superior General, Rev. M.M. Amadeus Atchison and one of her Council, R.M.M. Genevieve France had already left Rome, via England, for Nigeria. The missionaries were following

a mini-course in tropical medicine and nursing with the Mill Hill nuns - Franciscans - at Holme Hall on Spalding Moor, near Bradford in Yorkshire.

Apart from the practical skills and incidental orientation they acquired there, the enduring memory of this course was of the “eternal” walks between the mid-day meal and afternoon tea each day, lamented by Laurentia! Bracing moorland was more to Joachim’s taste, her almost native element.

In the short time available, making “the Society’s habit translated into white” would also have kept them, or sympathetic clothing-sisters, busy. Brown sandals, or black shoes, white stockings, strong rain-coats or capes had also to be found, together with men’s umbrellas, rubber boots and a good supply of quinine, items which could not be procured in Nigeria at that time. The indispensable solar topees or pith-helmets, customarily worn by Europeans in the tropics, appear in most of the early photographs of the nuns in Nigeria, so they must have taken those, too.

Meanwhile, Amadeus and Genevieve embarked on *M.V. Adda* at Liverpool and sailed for Calabar on September 3rd 1930. The Nigerian Mission had projected for them a stay of one month, until the three pioneers arrived. The *Adda* docked at Calabar on September 20th and in fact the two Superiors

spent six months in the nascent mission-field, until Easter 1931. Their time was well spent in essential exploration, visiting, assessment and long and short-term planning for the work's development. Soon, Amadeus was describing a typical week of constant travelling that convinced her of "what the answer must be to the people's expectations not of...material advantages but of...things of the spirit." Some stations, in existence for twenty-two years, still saw a priest only four times a year.

Genevieve stressed that what had drawn the Society to Nigeria was "downright hard work, and plenty of it, crying out to be done. The people for the most part... longing for knowledge of the Truth...the harvest ready and waiting to be gathered." Already preparations were on foot for outstations, the people having waited so long and been so frequently disappointed, that it was "absolutely necessary that at least a beginning be made at once." The flourishing foundations for education laid in Calabar by Sister Magdalen Walker ISC, once a classmate of Amadeus at Mayfield, must be built on without delay, her methods developed and her projects expanded. Calabar and Anua would be bases for outreach to many stations to be visited at least weekly, so that children could learn ordinary school subjects, and women be instructed in Christian Doctrine, sewing, hygiene and infant care... " - the minimum that must be done at once."

This formidable programme awaited the new arrivals, who on October 1st 1930 embarked on *R.M.S. Appam* among the largest missionary group Bishop Shanahan had ever assembled for the voyage to Nigeria. In old age Joachim recalled with amusement their being seen off from Liverpool by “two weeping Reverend Mothers...one...because she thought she would never see the poor young things again and the other...because she wasn’t well enough to come with us...” Of course, she added, they only heard about the weeping years later.

Their shipboard companions comprised seven Irish diocesan priests, newly ordained foundation members of the St. Patrick’s Society to be based at Kiltegan, and six priests and a brother of the Irish CSSp Province. The southern Nigerian vicariate’s own provinces were due for re-allocation: the northern territories to the German CSSp Province; the Onitsha and Owerri provinces to the Irish CSSp Fathers and the Holy Rosary sisters; the Calabar and Ogoja provinces to the Kiltegan Fathers with whom the SHCJ would work.

Joachim, never aboard a ship before, found the eighteen “not really boring days” at sea, most interesting when the ship reached the islands en route and the passengers saw people, but “...by the end we were glad to get off!” The Bishop entertained his proteges with tales of missionary plans and

accomplishments, Joachim remarking ruefully, "Not having had any previous idea of becoming a missionary, they rather went over my head!"

Fr. Thomas McGettrick, later first Bishop of Ogoja, remembered Bp. Shanahan's sustained elation about this large group of missionaries. Whatever the benefits for the future of the Mission, the size of the group certainly had liturgical drawbacks in those days before Vatican II normalised concelebration: each of the priests and the Bishop celebrated a separate Mass each morning between six and seven o'clock, when the lounge at their disposal was furnished with temporary altars. The Sisters were sacristans....

The voyage was uneventful until Cape Verde and Dakar were sighted. They docked briefly at Freetown in Sierra Leone and visited the Mission, convent and small Cathedral. Their first visit to an African church was unforgettable: they felt that the Lord was blessing their venture for Him.

By now, all were feeling the tropical heat and taking quinine each day, "rather to get accustomed to it than to ward off fever..." The younger priests enjoyed the use of the ship's swimming pool; the nuns strolled or sat on deck. Significantly for them as SHCJ, Nigeria was sighted on October 15th, the feast of St. Teresa,

when the boat called at Lagos. After one more short stop at Port Harcourt, the *Appam* approached the Cross River and Calabar.

Soon, from the deck Joachim and her companions saw for the first time the commercial buildings along the foreshore: large sheds with jetties bearing hand-operated derricks to raise cargoes from canoes; the steep green hills with palms and groups of mushroom-shaped trees; a few large bungalows with wide canopied roofs, shade trees and gardens, the homes of European Government officials; Old Calabar, comprising, between two hills, Duke Town, and, shimmering in heat haze a little further upriver, its twin, Creek Town; the waterfront, a long market and rising behind it, tier upon tier of burnt-Siena mud-thatch and corrugated iron dwellings; a few large two-storey buildings with coloured glass panes in Gothic-shaped windows, the homes of chiefs and merchants. In the middle of the town a steepled church of corrugated iron completed the panorama.

When the *Appam* docked just before 11 o'clock, two priests drove Amadeus and Genevieve to the boat. Genevieve records the delight on both sides, before the nuns walked up to the convent "...five sisters together, causing quite a sensation! The children...flocking out with their usual pretty welcome...full of joy at seeing three more sisters."

In the early evening, after solemn Benediction, the Bishop and all the ten priests joined the nuns on the convent verandah until his Lordship freed the young men to "go and kick a ball about...after the confinement of the boat." The Bishop stayed until it grew dark, "talking of the work to be done and reminiscing generally." The three newly arrived sisters much appreciated his extraordinary kindness to them throughout the voyage, but fortunately, the dark came early in Africa, and with it the opportunity to unpack a little before a night's rest in a bed that did not rock with the ship's motion. Not for long, however.

The next day, Sunday, after four Masses in church and convent, from 6 a.m., life quietened down sufficiently for the nuns to spend much of the day writing letters to go to England by the returning mailboat. After Solemn Benediction again at 5 p.m., the Bishop came to say good-bye before sailing that night on the *Appam* to Port Harcourt for Onitsha. With his typical courtesy, he had escorted the sisters to their destination. Now he left them with advice akin to their own Holy Child Spirit:

"Don't shut yourselves up in your convents, go out into the Bush, make contact with the women in the villages...your main work is to form leaders. Believe me, they will respond grandly if you trust them. Have faith in the power of God's grace in yourselves as well as in them..."

On Monday, life was still not quite normal: the Bishop had left several of the new priests to acclimatize in their new vineyard alongside more experienced missionaries, before their formal appointments. So Masses began at 5.30; there were three that morning.

Joachim described St. Joseph's, the convent in which she and her two companions now found themselves. Edith and Laurentia would soon be based at Anua but she would spend three years in Calabar, two at St. Joseph's, before the move to the new convent was completed. The old convent, in a small compound opposite the Church and the Fathers' house, was a long L-shaped, two-storey building: one arm, the Primary School with dormitories above, the other occupied on the ground floor by the Infant School. The convent comprised four cells and a little oratory on the first floor, the parlour being a curtained-off portion of the front verandah while the back verandah "served the purpose of monastic cloister..." The kitchen, laundry, childrens' and teachers' refectories and bathrooms were in separate buildings." In front of the convent an open green lawn with a central convent compound was under construction.

Joachim also traced the new convent's development from "...a plot of bush of sixteen acres, within a year of our coming still a wilderness." It had been leased about 1900 and carefully planted with rubber, coffee,

orange and other valuable trees, its boundaries marked by stately mahoganies. When transferred to Sr. Magdalen, however, it was "so overgrown that her first step was to borrow a hundred prisoners to divide it into quarters by two transverse roads," thus disinterring the orange avenue. Next, the garden workers discovered the coffee plantation and with great difficulty freed the rubber trees, visible above the bush, from dense undergrowth and strangling lianas. This, Joachim writes, "...had been done when we arrived, palm avenues...yam and corn farms planted, and the first open school building was awaiting its zinc roof." She considered the whole compound "beautifully planned...centred round the place prepared for...the great bronze crucifix...memorial to Magdalen Walker, Sr. Magdalen's sister." The land was divided by paths into four more or less equal rectangular plots, one quarter for the day schools...the second, for boarders' cottages - "part of the new scheme to abandon the barracks system and to house the girls instead in buildings which resembled homes." The third quarter was intended for a future native novitiate, the fourth for the chapel and new convent.

The nuns saw the new convent on the evening of the day they landed, the grey walls of the cottages rising above the ground. One of the first tasks with which they helped was the marking out of the site of the second school building.

On their first Monday morning, however, the nuns presented to Amadeus all the gifts given to them for the Mission, as for a Superior's feast: "...a goodly show...altar cloths, humeral veils, books, hundreds of pictures, Christmas coloured-cribs for little children, rosaries, medals, crucifixes, medicines, bandages...coloured beads, toys, all most useful..." Some dresses were of immediate use: Sister had just had two orphans recommended to her care. Amadeus was delighted to be able to give all these things to Sr. Magdalen.

On October 25th the nuns had "the little shrine of the Holy Child in the Chapel and devotions after night prayers..." On the 29th, the community began reading at dinner Aggrey of Africa, "...which gives a good idea of African conditions and problems..."

That Joachim would have found this kind of reading of special interest is suggested by articles she was soon to write for the PYLON. These the TABLET in 1935 would praise as well-written "anthropological papers."

From the first, she was keen to discover and appreciate as much as possible about her new surroundings and to learn anything that could enhance her usefulness for the work of the Mission. She noted both the "appalling amount of

unemployment" in Nigeria as elsewhere in the world at that time, and the generosity of the people who, mostly quite poor, constantly presented "dashes," especially of foodstuffs, to the nuns: fruits, yams, hens.

By November 7th, within three weeks of their arrival, Joachim, Laurentia and Edith were "...settling down and getting into work by degrees..." the latter in charge of the housekeeping and teaching cookery and hygiene, the others giving classes to the teachers; all three "learning...Montessori and getting experience of catechising, building and agriculture..." wrote Genevieve. They were also learning the Efik language, Laurentia most successfully: "...she didn't mind practising on the people". Two weeks later, there was "a quite definite forward step in the work," with their first public function: the solemn blessing by Bishop Heerey of the new Calvary in the garden of the new convent, after Benediction and "a procession from the Church, the congregation singing hymns all the way, the road lined with spectators..."

In early December the little community was smaller still: the two Superiors travelled to Onitsha and Joachim and Edith stayed briefly at Anua, a quiet refreshing place after the heat and humidity of Calabar. Joachim wrote of "Christmas in Calabar" that it really began with the arrival of the *Appam* on

Dec.13th, just as she and Edith reached the beach to meet the Superiors returning from the ordination of the first indigenous priest of the diocese. The next day, mid-Advent Sunday, the mail arrived and, Joachim wrote, “you may be sure we did not keep it ’til Christmas.” She describes the mounting excitement as she read advance notices from her Preston pupils of the contents of tea chests not released from Customs until several days later, when the contents were “arranged in [shcj] ‘houses’ and a grand display they made...”

Liturgical preparations for that first Christmas are not recorded, apart from the school’s serving as a temporary Chapel. Bp. Heerey celebrated his three Christmas Masses from midnight, before which the nuns had said Matins and Lauds in their oratory and joined the children in the Chapel to sing ‘At hour of silent midnight’. In the morning the priests celebrated further Masses from 5.30 till 8.30, and these were followed by Pontifical Benediction.

Joachim’s article describes the non-liturgical festivities of that first Christmas in Calabar, unusual for the presence of most of the children. Only the little ones and one or two others went home for the holidays, and a few more for Christmas Day. Those who remained received Christmas presents. Sr. Magdalen “provided dolls for the smallest left at

school and other things for the bigger ones,” but was surprised that the latter received their gifts very quietly, doing their best to hide their disappointment. “All, including the teachers and those...to be married in a few months, had hoped to possess a ‘doll-baby’.”

On Boxing Day, ‘prizes’ were prepared for all the children, who “received the desire of their hearts: some, dolls; some, furry animals.” The youngest child, May, “came up very frequently.” Joachim’s former pupils would have been delighted to hear that “the lovely dresses from Preston, large and small, have found very proud and happy owners...If you could have heard the applause!”

Though the nuns would have found it unusual to have the children on the compound throughout the five-weeks’ holiday before the academic year began in January, they would have been able to celebrate the twelve days of Christmas in at least approximately traditional fashion. Certainly, on the evening of January 2nd, the Triduum began as usual, in preparation for renewal of Vows on the Epiphany. Unusually, it was made in private, the only input a “conference” each afternoon on the Rule, given by Amadeus. On the morning of the Feast, with, by then, only one priest at the Mission, the nuns could not have Mass at the Convent, so went over to 5.30 Mass, and returned immediately afterwards with Fr.

Costello, for their Renewal of Vows. Amadeus read the Vows and all received Holy Communion. At the end of their thanksgiving the 'Suscipe' was sung. "It was all very devotional," wrote Genevieve. "...Back to the Church at once for the 7a.m. Mass. Benediction in the Church in the evening..."

After the Epiphany, but before the beginning of term, Amadeus went up to Anua, taking Laurentia with her, to be in charge of the work there. On the 15th, a little more history was made when Amadeus "received four native girls as Aspirants to Religious Life." This was a preparatory stage, "pending permission from Rome for the establishment of a native order of Sisters...to be called the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus." They wore a simple grey dress, black girdle, and postulant's cap and hood. Genevieve added that Kathleen, Lucy, Agnes and Christina had been "preparing quietly for years under Sr. Magdalen's care. She gave them a five-day retreat as a preparation for this step..."

Fr. John Anyogu, the first indigenous priest of the Southern Nigerian Vicariate, while visiting Calabar, attended this ceremony. He exclaimed to Amadeus, who with Genevieve had attended his ordination at Onitsha in December, "O Reverend Mother, I see the dawn breaking for my country!" Fr. John celebrated Mass in the church on the 18th, the first native priest

the people had seen. A non-Efik-speaking Igbo, he preached "afterwards in excellent English a very simple, serious sermon...straight to the people's hearts." Genevieve noted later: "That sermon was an excellent argument for a native clergy: he showed he understood them and could penetrate their minds in a way...a white man could hardly hope to do." Fr. John visited the nuns later in the day.

The next day the school reopened for classes; the boarders were on the compound all the time, but "very little trouble as they are used to looking after themselves." Joachim was now in charge of the school, Sr. Magdalen being away. Overseeing building work at Anua and other stations, she was going to be away a good deal in the coming months.

On that opening morning of the new school year, there was a special Mass for the children of the two schools. The final exams being always held in December, all the promotions now took place. School opened with under 300 children, but with new admissions over several days there were soon 326: Infants 150; Juniors 60; Primary 116. The Juniors were a special class "known usually as the Bush school as they are latecomers and therefore backward..." - but not stupid: one of the teachers had begun in the Bush school, completed the whole course in three years and passed her exams at the end.

School actually began with the calling of the Register, a task complicated by unfamiliar names. The children, however, really loved school and in no time were all hard at work despite having outgrown the accommodation.

Apparently there were parents even at that early stage who considered that their children were not learning enough. When Sister Magdalen first introduced the Montessori method, many children were withdrawn simply because they were not using slates and primers. One day a man came to see the Sister in charge. Joachim went down to him. "I pay no fees if my child not know ABC." Gentle enquiries on her part, with an explanation that ABC was no longer the first thing that children learnt - in fact they knew quite a lot before they ever heard of ABC - disposed the parent to accept her invitation to see his daughter at work. Joachim then led him to the open-air classroom where "...small mites were busily working away at various occupations, obviously very happy and very interested." She said later that it was good to see the change that came over his face, as he went away quite satisfied, but "whether the fees would materialise or no was another matter!"

Among lantern-slides shown later in Rome by Amadeus to illustrate a lecture on The Holy Child Mission in Nigeria were several featuring Joachim.

Evidently, from the commentary, one “must have been taken before 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m., otherwise Sister would have had to wear her sun-helmet.” Amadeus also remarked that the climate was “very hot and damp and trying. Even in the season of the great rains it doesn’t cool the atmosphere very much...” The post-Christmas period can be very hot indeed. The new missionaries had arrived at the end of the rainy season. Sr. Magdalen was to remark that their first year was unusually cool, but Joachim would suffer much from the humidity, as she occasionally admitted.

Another slide shows Joachim with her class all working on the Montessori Method [which] “proceeds from objects and gives them ideas.... By the help of the native teacher trained by the nuns, Mother is able to carry on the school.”

The department for girls preparing for Christian marriage, and the catechising of 300-400 women were soon in operation. The nuns also visited women in the prison and instructed the wives of soldiers at the local barracks.

Otherwise undocumented details of the circumstances of Joachim’s daily community life derive from answers sent by Genevieve to random questions mainly from M. Marie Osmonde de Maille, then in the Rome community, in a letter written soon after school

opened. Thus we learn that the interior walls were of painted wood, the verandas grey, the rooms green and the chapel cream. Temperatures varied between 80 and 98 degrees, "You would think it was 108 really, but I suppose the thermometer speaks true!" Early evening light was provided by bushlamps, with "candles to go to bed and rise by." In the garden were "many flowers...Pride of Barbados, moonflowers, a very pretty pink creeper and Flame of the Forest...in flower now."

Edith, in charge of the cooking "looks after us very well." Fruits available include pineapple, bananas and pawpaw all the year round, "so we are quite well off"; oranges can still be bought, but "our own trees gave out early in December. Limes also are available in the market," and the juice squeezed into a glass of water makes a very refreshing drink. "Green vegetables are also available: spinach, okra, and pawpaw again: (a vegetable when green, a fruit when ripe)".

"Quite a good walk" can be taken in the evenings, from six to seven o'clock, with a choice of several "very nice" ones. Calabar is judged "singularly free from insect pests" with "a few, but nothing compared to Onitsha... Anua has a few more, but not very bad ones..." Wisely, a disclaimer follows: "at least, we have not found them so, so far, D.G."

One early evening in mid-February the new compound reached a further stage in its development: the laying of the Foundation Stone of the new Chapel. Amadeus returned from Anua on the 16th with Bp. Shanahan who was to perform the ceremony. This began at 5 p.m.

As arrangements had to be made at the last minute, no public announcements were made "... but word went round somehow...and...a great crowd of people...in many semicircles...very quiet and orderly," gathered. Bp. Shanahan was accompanied by four priests. A statue of the Holy Child stood in a niche just above the place for the Foundation Stone. The box enclosed in the stone contained medals of the reigning Pope, Pius XI, Ss. Peter and Therese...a Miraculous medal; a picture of Cornelia Connelly with a copy of the Little Office of the Holy Child and flowers from her grave, and a Nigerian shilling. When the ceremony ended with the singing of the 'Veni Creator' and the blessing, the bishop preached a "very good and most appropriate" sermon, on the significance of the Feast, the Flight into Egypt. Then, just before the Bishop left, Amadeus asked him to take from the Holy Child's hand the little package he was holding. The bishop, "very quick to realise what it was...turned to the people and remarked that God...had already sent him part of his reward!"

On opening the envelope, he found a little poem written by Joachim saying that “the Holy Child sent him this gift in gratitude for the service he had just rendered, in giving Him a home on African soil, and that the gift was part of the offering made to Him by the Magi just before He came to Africa the first time.” The next day, the Bishop called in again to thank the community for the offering, and “especially for the poem which had greatly delighted him, and which he would keep.” Thus ended “an important day in the annals of the Holy Child Mission in Nigeria.”

The inauguration period of the Mission was now almost ended. With the school and other works now undertaken by the ‘Trio’ alongside Sr. Magdalen, the date for the departure to Rome of Amadeus and Genevieve was approaching. A new stage would follow: Sr. Magdalen, at that time intending to transfer to the SHCJ, would be their superior, under Amadeus. Their adaptation and inculturation would continue in somewhat exceptional circumstances and not without problems.

Strangely, there is no reference to Lent or Holy Week. It must have been a busy time, with many plans and arrangements to finalise, or schedule for implementation.

The 'Trio' had their hands more than full; their many surviving letters, regularly conveying personal impressions and reactions to Amadeus, belong to the time when she was back in Rome.

Easter Sunday was the day she and Genevieve embarked at Calabar. The journal describes the "very happy day. The nuns...admirable: there was no hint that it was R.M. General's last day." High Mass was at 8.30 in the Boys' School to accommodate the crowds. Fr. O'Kelly, the Mill Hill Father who sang it, would also be sailing on the *Appam*. The final comment is eloquent: "A very busy day...no one had much time to think, D.G." Feelings were mixed. It would be a year before Joachim expressed how she felt that day. On Easter Sunday 1932 she wrote to Amadeus:

"I am glad it is not Easter Sunday 1931. I would not like that day over again, and I don't think anything could be quite as bad. I feel very differently towards Africa to what I felt then. I am perfectly happy here now. Even the heat hardly bothers me now...the only trouble is that the days - and nights - are too short..."

Meanwhile, various visitors called in during the day to say goodbye. Finally, according to the journal,

"We had supper as usual followed by night prayers in the Chapel, and then we left. R.M. General gave us all her blessing on the verandah, and the nuns

came with us to the garden gate. The children had all gone to bed, having said their goodbyes earlier. The nuns waited at the gate until we turned the corner by the Bush Market...we could distinguish them by the light of the bush-lamp...and then they went back - to the Chapel and to bed. Fr. Ronayne came with us to the boat and saw that everything was in order on board. The other priests...[who] came down later...left us about 10 p.m... Rev. Mother sent a last farewell to the nuns by Fr. Ronayne... The boat began to move just as we rose in the morning..."

It was Easter Monday, April 6th 1931: the end of the beginning.

CALABAR

1931-1933

“It seems much longer than forty days since we said Goodbye to you - the days slip past inordinately quickly,” begins Joachim’s first extant letter to Amadeus, written in mid-May, 1931. Since Amadeus and Genevieve had sailed from Calabar, life had continued busily along the lines already established. Expansion would soon begin and the busy-ness would increase.

Joachim continued to live in Calabar with Magdalen. In charge of the whole group, “Sister” was often away, visiting Edith and Laurentia at Anua, and supervising the school and building work in both areas. Details emerge in answers to letters posted by Amadeus from Lagos and Sierra Leone: Magdalen mentions in a postscript of May 22nd that Joachim had just enjoyed a visit to Anua, “looks very well...and is very pleased to be home again.” Months later Joachim told Amadeus that “After my three weeks in Anua, I really felt that I had come home to Calabar.” The sense of homecoming marked a stage in her acclimatisation.

In Joachim’s absence, Magdalen provided an article probably for publicity purposes, for the newsletter that preceded the PYLON. Future installments, she

confidently asserts, "Mother Mary Joachim will do much better." Joachim is happy and "loves the school and the children." By now Joachim was responsible for the Infants' school; two aspirant-Handmaids were in charge of the Junior and Bush Schools. A third would soon start a school at Ikot Ene east of Calabar, whence it would be supervised. Magdalen was keen for Joachim to help with this, to familiarise her with the situation for which the teachers were training in Calabar.

Joachim's days were very full, in the mornings teaching Infants, "picking up a certain amount of...adapted Montessori that Sr. Magdalen was running;" in the afternoons, after a short siesta, teaching the as yet unqualified teachers. She also helped to supervise the other departments and was in charge whenever Magdalen was away. In addition, she visited the women's prison on Sundays until an aspirant and a teacher shared the work; with Magdalen she visited old women; she took on the convent sacristy. Always ready to learn, Joachim attended classes with the students, learning "quite as much if not more" than they, because Magdalen was such a good teacher. Typical humour surfaces regarding particularly useful singing lessons: tonic solfa was new to her but "certainly necessary where the only musical instrument is also a lizard-egg museum."

Eventually there followed several weekly evening classes for women preparing for marriage and monthly group-instruction for young Christian mothers. By the end of May the aspirants were temporarily living in community with Joachim and Magdalen to enable them to help with training teachers for domestic responsibilities in the new cottage system. This would begin for the boarders as soon as the new compound was ready for occupation.

The colonial situation added extra work. The annual Empire Day celebrations entailed attention to "copious notices from the education department and much drilling beforehand." When the Ascension Day rehearsal was torrentially rained off, Joachim improvised all-day activities for two hundred children. Of the visit by the British Resident and his wife, by 5 p.m. not halfway through their programme, she notes ironically, "They looked bored and expressed great interest... Poor things..."

Magdalen's regular letters to Amadeus usually included reports on the well being of each of the "Trio." She frequently expresses appreciation of her companion in community, as at the end of May: Joachim is "a treasure, so sensible, so wise in her views, yet so cheery always." At that time, Joachim

seemed “really happy and...wonderfully well. She might have been here all her life, she is so settled down...”

Evidently Joachim had not confided completely in Magdalen. Her letters bring earlier confidences up to date for Amadeus. Thus, the day after Magdalen wrote the words just quoted, Joachim wrote “Spiritually, I don’t...understand what is going on.” At times she felt “able to see my way quite clearly,” but when the darkness returns, “can’t even remember the lucid intervals and have just sense enough left to hang on”. She thanks Amadeus for “writing again that you trust me. It has helped me to keep steady when things were very dark.” Joachim adds “I am happy...getting used to the work and I like it...” now that “...the awful feeling that the roof had come off and the walls had fallen down has gone, or rather changed into a sort of gladness that they are gone, or that I need not depend on them any more.” Three months later she was able to tell Amadeus that she was “ever so happy now” though at first afraid of waking up “in the tunnel again.” Now, even if she did, she wouldn’t forget “what it’s like outside, which makes such a huge difference...”

In addition to the countless daily duties, Joachim, aware from the outset of how much there was to learn, conscientiously tried to learn Efik, the local

language, achieving modest competence and asking prayers for “the gift of tongues and many other talents.” Before long she was translating fairy tales into Efik for the children, and giving the teachers the satisfaction of correcting her efforts.

In those days when SHCJ convents might have a “twinningery” attached, Joachim resolved to learn baby craft too, and wrote of demonstrating how to mix a baby’s bottle, with only a “tin of milk...a kettle of hot water and a quinine bottle.” Of the prospect of a fortnight’s visit with Laurentia to Anua, where the infants were Edith’s “palaver,” she expects no peace because “yells rend the heavens.” Nor was there much spare time for anyone competent to wield a feeding bottle. Joachim ruefully confessed that though “tame by comparison with snatching babies from the jaws of death,” schoolwork was more in her line!

Besides the tonic solfa, and adapted Montessori methods, Joachim also set herself to relearn “things I should have remembered from my youth,” in order to tackle the Primary school on ending her stint with the Infants. She also engaged with Laurentia in enhancing the garden and compound of the new convent, learning by doing, and delighting in the resulting plants flourishing outside or adorning the chapel. Some day, she hoped, there would be a

bronze pieta for the compound, which the children and old women would particularly like.

When the former mission cook was engaged to teach the children, Joachim went along to learn too. His “thorough course in plain cooking” so boosted her confidence that she would “never again be afraid to face cooking a plain dinner for the community. She had also learned how to utilize fully both indigenous foodstuffs and improvised utensils. Success bred further enthusiasm: Joachim went on to learn laundering and “scientific plain sewing,” and aspired to the fancy stitches that Magdalen had taught the children. Having taught Laurentia to ride a bicycle, however, Joachim elected not to drive a car. Nor were her efforts to learn typing more than partly successful. When the machine was being repaired, “bad pens, hot weather, speed, one small kitten and bad workmanship,” explained one untidy letter, but even such a letter in the mail seemed “worth two in Calabar after the mails have gone.” Amadeus evidently agreed, requesting a steady supply of material for the Roman newsletter.

Amid the pressure of diverse duties Joachim’s practical common sense stood her in good stead. Commenting to Amadeus on an article from Magdalen, Joachim calls it “very good as an outline of policy” and permanently useful for that reason.

“Also it will show...that the work is just beginning and needs very practical help...personal details go home to the public.” While unable to compete with those who “crawl past leopards to rescue triplets, and begin the day by sweeping rats and snakes out of the church,” she promises to “try to record truths as strange as, if not stranger than fiction.”

Busy daily life was underpinned by normal religious observance. Frequently in passing Joachim mentions details: Mass or lack of it, First Sunday recollection days and such traditional practices as Pentecost Gifts and Fruits. In July 1932, she drily records that there was no Exposition for the monthly retreat because it was wet. Instead there was a public Holy Hour, from 5-6 pm. Translated sentence by sentence by a parishioner, the prayers punctuated by decades of the Rosary in Efik. She hoped it would be fine the next time!

Despite Joachim's initial diffidence, which she never entirely lost, her growth in confidence was steadily logged by Magdalen. In September 1931, she tells Amadeus that Joachim is happy and developing much more confidence in herself, “realising that God does give us grace out here to do things we never did before. Though Joachim was the only one of the three without great personal desire for the missions, she seems to have the

greatest consolation here now,” and is “most adaptable in character... a rock of common sense.”

Soon Magdalen tells Amadeus that Joachim “develops daily...now only laughs when I ask her to do things she never did before and teach things she never learned...” Deeming responsibility good for Joachim, she gave her as much as possible. Despite this, Magdalen thought Joachim “very happy and at peace” in mind and soul. Of the two sisters due in Nigeria early in 1932, Magdalen wrote: “if they are like M.M.J. all would be easy.”

Joachim’s capacity for outward calm despite inner turmoil was not always to her own advantage. Once when Magdalen was seriously ill in hospital, the Bishop misinterpreted Joachim’s calmness as belying the seriousness of the illness and resented a request for no visitors. It could not be helped, but Joachim revealingly confessed that she had been so “terribly frightened” about Magdalen that she had probably looked too cheerful, feeling “so white inside that I had to do something to hide it.” Magdalen relapsed the same night.

By the time Teresa Xavier and Vianney arrived, Joachim and Laurentia enjoyed veteran status, delighting in showing the new ones around. Soon, in hospital again, Magdalen was writing that Joachim

had "gained wonderfully in assurance in dealing with people and situations." This assurance was severely tested in January 1933: Vianney accidentally drove the car onto the pontoon ferry and over the side into the high tide. Vianney and most of the children with her were rescued, but tragically one small girl drowned. Joachim coped alone when the survivors arrived back in Calabar, until Laurentia arrived from Oron with Magdalen who described that interval as "a pretty bad hour." Vianney, badly shaken and thinking of nothing but the child, was sedated by the doctor, but Magdalen delayed her hospitalisation until she was calmer. Meanwhile Joachim and Laurentia were under considerable strain, trying to save Vianney from the aftermath: one or other "had to be with her all the time for days." Not surprisingly, Magdalen wanted both to have a good rest, their being already overworked. Another result of the accident was that Magdalen insisted that the nuns were not expected to drive in face of any natural reluctance to do so. It was then that Joachim declared her own disinclination.

The accident made considerable inroads into available funds for extra traveling, and with reference to this and the providential arrival of a grant, the plight of the local people is depicted. The "terrible want" among them resulted from the slump which devastated American and European

economies, bringing widespread hardship to whole populations around the world. Magdalen and Joachim mention general and particular instances of this: the old "being cast out of compounds in a way never seen before," while, despite the reduction or remission of fees, the school was reduced to less than half of what it had been three years earlier. One fatherless family became Joachim's special concern: an old granny, ailing daughter and two grandchildren, evicted from their rented home of fifteen years. They were taken into the compound at once, with "a few pots, two mats and a small lamp, but no kerosene, furniture, food or water." Joachim's careful enquiry elicited their needs: "one always has to ask. They never do." The boarders were made responsible for taking their own wood and water every day. "So," said Joachim, "our 'almshouses' are inaugurated." The nuns had for some time been planning to acquire a suitable site nearby for dwellings for elderly women, to simplify "the work of attending to their temporal and spiritual needs," with the help of the younger Christian women.

Joachim shared with Magdalen a practical approach to such problems. In constant contact in community, they inevitably discussed everything and found a great measure of agreement, even about relegating 'ordinary schooling' to secondary consideration after

marriage-training in remoter areas where young men clamoured for Christian wives before girls' education had been established. Joachim told Amadeus that even in Calabar, education needed to be "more practical, less bookish." The cottage-system was a case in point: it would "train the teachers in the elements of family life, and they can teach the girls in the bush." She felt strongly that the qualifications needed by SHCJ in the Mission were, apart from the adaptability Amadeus herself had specified, "common sense and plain domestic training." She wished she had had a job as a plain cook or washerwoman before coming out. Holding that [professional] knowledge of germs and vitamins was not "half as necessary as being able to turn to and do things in a simple effectual way that an unscientific audience can follow and imitate." To these desirable attributes Joachim once added "Holy Orders, which would solve so many difficulties, except financial ones!" Magdalen reinforced her views, asking for "people generally all-round useful...who can cook, wash, keep house and superintend all these things." For schools, sisters who could "organise a school and teach the teachers to teach, not classmistresses," were wanted. Those from elementary schools would be best.

Osmonde would notice that the Montessori taught at Calabar differed somewhat from the qualified Montessori teaching she had observed in Rome and

at "Cav" in London: Magdalen had learned and passed on to Joachim what she had learned only from books. Even earlier, Magdalen had observed that Joachim, realising better than her companions "how near the beginning of things we are," seemed "far less exacting with the teachers and the Handmaids...not so much carried away by the occasional successes apt to be too much counted on at first."

Inevitably, living with Magdalen and working closely with the aspirant Handmaids, both confidante and sounding board for Magdalen's ideas about their formation, Joachim developed ideas of her own on this subject. In comparison with what she had gleaned at Holme Hall about professed indigenous sisters in East Africa, Joachim deemed the Nigerian aspirants "at least as advanced...their knowledge and general development much superior." They were "more mature...practical...steady and reliable, their loyalty and good will beyond question." She saw them as "ripe for the next stage...neither plain teachers nor definitely religious, a little weary halfway between the two...now wanting something more definite."

Reflecting on the means of their spiritual training during the Novitiate, Joachim recommends "...something very finite and concrete...a kind of

spiritual Montessori...they want to be shown how to do things, not merely told what should be done." She thought "...they have to do the things before they are able to understand them," and invokes her own experience: "...I find it easier to 'esteem others interiorly as my superior' after I have kissed their feet." In more mundane matters, she could "...best grasp the principle of a thing after I have seen it well done and imitated what I have seen." Regarding the type of Novitiate buildings the Bishop might expect, Joachim reflects that the Handmaids, likely to live and work "in communities of two or three or even ones...in the bush," might derive from too conventional training "the wrong sort of notions." She felt strongly that they should be trained "in close relation to their life as religious," to give them "a strong feeling of personal responsibility for themselves, their work and their religious spirit." [It is in this letter that Joachim mentions her own disorientation when first deprived of conventional structures.] Joachim's views parallel Magdalen's strongly held opinion that the European's task in Nigeria was "to enable Nigerians to do their own work and to be responsible and independent." (Magdalen invoked even the climate to justify her claim that "God never meant Nigeria for Europeans"!)

A Holy Ghost Father, visiting from East Africa, who saw an Aspirant managing a school and the women single-handedly, told the Anua nuns that it was the

“finest sight” he had seen in Africa, “the real thing! building up for the future...” Magdalen suggested to Amadeus, in consultation with the SHCJ, that the Handmaids should work their own areas rather than be scattered among European-run stations, so as to be on the way from the outset to eventual autonomy, even if it took “fifty or a hundred years.” In fact it took only twenty-five.

Joachim left Calabar before the Aspirants’ Novitiate began, but she was to interact with them later elsewhere and corresponded with at least one of the Handmaids into old age. She would also be involved later with the beginnings of the Ghanaian Sisters of the Infant Jesus.

For the present, not only the work was demanding but also difficulties inherent in a totally new situation, which we now recognise as constituting “culture shock.” After the sudden transition from England to Nigeria, effected for Joachim so rapidly once the summer term at Preston had run its usual busy course, some reaction was inevitable. It was not merely a matter of becoming suddenly a foreigner, part of a small colonial minority in a populous tropical land. Almost everything previously taken for granted was different: languages, climate, food, domestic arrangements, enervating heat and humidity and the all-year early

twilight heralding long dark nights. Joachim took much of this in her stride from the outset, but her constant efforts to adapt under pressure of work, might well have prevented her from recognising and dealing with the underlying stress of her situation.

Magdalen, with eight years' experience of Calabar, and observation of fellow-expatriates of all kinds, realized that they tended to be affected adversely - and diversely - by 'the Tropics.' The result could be a loss of proportion: "no-one is quite their normal self out here...and it takes them a long time to realise what is happening." Joachim, like the others, had left family, friends and familiar SHCJ convents. Having lived in three large, structured communities, the last with "the reputation of doing everything *en bloc*," Joachim found herself in a community of two, her companion from a different congregation, with a different spirit, tradition and training. So also, Edith and Laurentia, from different Provinces, had their own adjustments to make. The steadily mounting pressure of work for each one - and the prevailing tendency to discount feelings?- afforded little opportunity to "understand what is going on."

It is remarkable, then, that Joachim's emergence from "the awful feeling" of spiritual earthquake was into "asort of gladness that [the walls and roof] are gone and that I need not depend on them any more."

At the time, Joachim already thought herself “very ordinary and unadventurous” but, till then, had “no idea what a creature of routine” she was. By 1940 she was “not wishing to repeat mistakes I made in my first tour by being too rigid.” In the 1970s, she saw the early experience of being cut off by slow communications from SHCJ authority, which had encouraged the pioneers “to stand on [their] own feet for so long,” as positive preparation even for developments in religious life after Vatican II.

Tension between the efforts required to adapt to very different circumstances, and to retain what each valued as important to religious life as SHCJ, became a source of pain to all four on the mission. Different emphases, over-conscientiousness and misunderstandings due in part to inadequate communication, accompanied great generosity, unselfishness, hard work and good will. All suffered from the defects of their virtues but the Mission took root: Magdalen wrote “the Kingdom of the Holy Child extends as I would not have hoped in a year...and though there has been suffering, there has certainly been the hundredfold...”

Some of the suffering involved the uncertainty and unpredictability prevalent in most areas of life, and responsible for many delays and difficulties. Letters by the fortnightly, then monthly, mailboats, took so

long in transit that the nuns felt much of what they had written was "lies" by the time it reached Amadeus. Necessary building work depended equally on labour, finance and materials: rarely were all available together. Even equipment which did arrive was often damaged en route: "the well is finished - the pump arrived in fragments and will take at least eight weeks to replace." Government grants were cut, or late, or both. Providentially, SHCJ donations arrived from Rome, or from the home Provinces. Joachim thanks Amadeus for one which prevented "...recourse to mouth organs." The new Austin 7 car, financed by Layton Hill, and essential for development around Ikot Ekpene, cost £165, including delivery to Calabar, but petrol cost the equivalent of a resident teacher's salary...

The uncertainty affected all involved in the mission: Handmaids became discouraged by delays in starting their noviceship; the Medical team for the first Catholic hospital in the diocese, at Anua, grew tired of awaiting the completion of their accommodation. Officials varied disappointingly in efficiency. The clergy, lacking local Superiors or Provincials, centred on towns other than those with schools and seemed unable to understand the nuns' and teachers' desire for regular Mass. The rainy season played havoc with preparations for outdoor celebrations for Corpus Christi, causing much last-minute haste.

On the whole, Joachim seems to have maintained reasonable equanimity. Of the delayed move to the new compound she wrote to the Oxford Superior: "We hope if we live long enough, to get into the new convent sometime. It is imprudent to be more specific...not pessimism but patience." There was plenty of work to get on with till the move was possible, but she was clear that "even the immediate future is absolutely unsettled here all the time." Magdalen succinctly put it: "Long delays, nothing done, then things go with a rush..." Joachim makes light of it all: "My views change like the weather...the forecast...always unsettled." Though "full of hope and confidence...we never know what will happen next." Magdalen regards problems as "just part of life in the Battle Line," but also indicates the near desperation occasioned by constant frustrations: "A lot of the time one feels up against a blank wall waiting for it to open somewhere, anywhere... It takes new ones a little time to understand and accept...one of the things you cannot prepare them for." The second batch of SHCJ were then six months "out."

The most serious variable was health. Magdalen, despite or because of her long unrelieved stint in Calabar, suffered worsening attacks of dysentery, increasingly needing hospitalisation. Laurentia had dental problems besides going down with fever.

Joachim was at first "as fit as ever I was in my life," (May 1931), and a year later, "quite used to the heat now," except sometimes in the afternoons, when "the annoyance is not the feeling so much as getting a clean habit all wet." Caps and stockings wore out quickly, rotted by the constant damp and scrubbing; requests for thinner material, and to go without stockings, which could always be worn "if a white female came to tea...or on other state occasions..." were unavailing. She hoped the 'medics' would be able to modify their hot looking uniforms.

Joachim rarely mentions health matters, but in the first year Magdalen told Amadeus that once the hot season sets in, Joachim needed a lot of sleep "...which is a real suffering." Within a fortnight she added, "It is getting fearfully hot, 100 in the shade...MMJ feels it a lot..." and soon afterwards: "It is terribly hot. MMJ and MML...both feeling it. They are...well but look a bit washed out, especially MMJ who really suffers from fatigue." Not surprisingly, feeling themselves to be days behind in their work they were always making plans for when they had some time. To make time they even resolved to cut down their correspondence in 1932.

By New Year Magdalen found Joachim "not as strong as I would like to see her," and noted that the climate was "certainly telling more on her than on

the others..." Various remedies, a nightly glass of wine, 'Colosol Ferromalt,' and salt baths seemed beneficial for a time. However Joachim's health followed a downward zigzag during 1932-33, from tiring easily and lacking energy to increasing fatigue and pallor, compounded by recurring dental problems after a protracted and painful extraction. When Laurentia also suffered severe toothache, Magdalen's plans to send both by boat to a dentist in Lagos were foiled first by lack of convent accommodation in the retreat period and later by his absence on trek.

In February 1932 SHCJ reinforcements had arrived - Teresa Xavier Fletcher from the U.S., and M.M. Vianney Raverty from the U.K. By July both were at Anua with Edith, working in "bush" and dispensary respectively, Vianney after unwelcome delay at Calabar, and disappointed that she was not working under a doctor. Laurentia by then had been almost a year at Calabar, first helping Joachim in the school and with the teachers in training, then in charge of the developing station at Ikot Ene. There she specially rejoiced in outreach to the surrounding settlements, supervising dispensary and catechetical work. Proving to be a good preacher, she met large groups of people who trekked for miles to her classes. She rode a bicycle, then learned to drive the new car and in turn taught Vianney and Teresa

Xavier. Joachim fortunately had little need to drive, her work concentrated on the Calabar compound. In view of her problem with sleepiness, it was just as well.

Magdalen was much concerned about the welfare of all five, but encountered disagreement, if not criticism, in her efforts to supplement their diet. At one point she wrote that despite reduced funds she had been spending more on food, but did not think it extravagant if it helped the nuns to keep up their strength. Variety being difficult to provide she was insisting on as much butter, milk, eggs and variety in the cooking as possible, and sending canned items to Anua and Ikot Ekpene to compensate for the lack of fish and meat. She adds that "three know it is really wise and necessary and make no difficulties."

Edith and Vianney did - though, Magdalen adds, "more ready to spend on other things than I would be." Who cooked at Calabar, after Edith's transfer to Anua, does not transpire: no cook or steward is mentioned.

SHCJ and Sr. Magdalen and Community Problems

It is evident from the letters of both Joachim and Magdalen that their good relationship was based on mutual trust and respect. Towards the end of her

life, Joachim, interviewed by the archivist, confirmed that she got on very well with Magdalen and liked her very much. Her occasional "rather dictatorial" ways Joachim attributed to her having been alone and in charge for so long, and to the "tremendous strength of purpose" she had needed to reach Calabar in the first place. Joachim found her easier to live with than if she had been older or had had more personal ideas on missionary work.

Joachim's sense of homecoming to Calabar after visiting Anua in May 1931 contributed to the good relationship. Responding to Amadeus' direct enquiry, Joachim assures her that she is "quite at home" with Magdalen having said nothing to that effect before, "not because I had been bottling things up but because there was nothing to say." She declares herself "perfectly happy with her," though "shy of her for months at first." Since Amadeus had left Magadalen in charge, however, Joachim felt she should make overtures, which proved to be "not very hard": she simply told Magdalen about her homecoming feeling. Magdalen "seemed quite pleased and after that things were quite easy."

In this letter Joachim first mentions also her growing awareness of difficulties in the relationship of the other SHCJ with Magdalen. The fact that Magdalen was not made Superior seemed to be a problem.

Joachim regarded her as holding a position equivalent to an SHCJ Assistant in the absence of the Superior. As Amadeus was so far away, and Magdalen “knew so much more about the work than anyone else,” Joachim understood that she would act as Superior “as far as...external work was concerned.” Acting on this assumption was easier for her, living with Magdalen at Calabar, than for the two sisters at Anua, for whom it was harder to refer to Magdalen. They had to act more on their own initiative, while knowing her less well.

Joachim was now becoming uneasy about the understanding and implementing of Amadeus’ intentions. Magdalen’s diffidence in issuing orders, caused her to express her wishes as suggestions. Joachim’s prompt responses to these were not always popular with the others, who felt free to disregard them on occasion. When the next sisters came, Joachim suggests, Amadeus might clarify the position for the whole group with “a recapitulation of what you said to us when you left Sister in charge, to be read by all five of us....”

It must be stressed that all three, then all five, sisters wrote equally openly, frankly and trustfully to Amadeus, with no trace of uncharitable intent. Thus, Joachim on this occasion writing “frankly and fearlessly as your child,” ask Amadeus to “tell me if

there is anything unfair or unwise in what I have written, or the manner of it. But we do want peace...that the work shall not suffer."

Some months later, Joachim writes that "things go well here now...the new ones certainly seem to understand Sister's position." Earlier, Joachim had casually mentioned that an older sister among future new missionaries might be beneficial if no Superior were forthcoming. Magdalen, quite early, suggests an SHCJ Superior, commenting that Edith does splendid work and is most capable, but functions best when not in charge of a station. Laurentia, the youngest, and perhaps over-sensitive, was unhappy that Edith tended to take over responsibility for everything at Anua, simply to spare her. Joachim tended to be over-protective and less than tolerant of criticism of Magdalen.

Teresa Xavier apparently had trouble at first with difficult children, then with Edith's increasingly critical attitude. Vianney was very frustrated by the unavoidable delay in the setting up of her dispensary, her nervousness exacerbated by the pontoon accident. Given also the various health and climate problems it is not surprising that Joachim rejoices at the prospect of Osmonde's coming, "with the sort of buoyancy we need." (Even so, Magdalen warned Osmonde in advance

not to make up her mind about anything before she came out: "keep it open...if you have much spiritual joy, be prepared to lose it...") By then, the possibility was being discussed of Magdalen's departure to enter the Society. Joachim thought it should not be for another year at least, as in fact it proved to be. After saying so to Amadeus, she adds that an older nun to hold the place of Superior, "even if...not very active, would be a centre of unity and authority...and a great spiritual help to us." Sister Magdalen "...would have rejoiced long ago in the appointment of a Superior."

Magdalen confiding to Amadeus her diffidence as Superior, received helpful advice. She first mentions problems among the SHCJ in May 1931: Joachim, visiting, had felt that Laurentia was "not quite happy" at Anua. In August, Magdalen reports that Fr. Ronayne "seemed to fear some influence at work, dangerous to unity between ours at Anua and Calabar." Joachim had said something similar. Magdalen hoped that a general meeting "to discuss business...anything that can help the better working of schools...or make things easier or happier in any way" would solve the problem. However, though "the general tone at recreation and other times" was "very happy, affectionate and gay," there was little response. Only Joachim contributed a thought or two. Magdalen was disappointed in her unavailing

assurances that she would not be hurt or offended if told that anything she did seemed “mistaken or unsatisfactory.” She felt that she still did not know them well enough: “After all, I am neither fish nor flesh,...they cannot help feeling it.”

By October, Magdalen had told Joachim and Edith that she felt the appointment of “a real Superior” by Amadeus to be “absolutely necessary.” In November, she told Amadeus, someone “more tactful and better qualified” was needed. She hoped her replacement might come with the two sisters expected in the New Year, 1932, “unless you think...either of them would do...Mother Mary Joachim has the ability, but I fear it would crush her.”

Christmas, their second in Nigeria, Magdalen describes as “really happy...Midnight Mass just ourselves and the children...all our Christmas Hymns...a great novena and an octave of devotions....” Magdalen gave each of the SHCJ a special gift geared to her work. Joachim’s was a complete set of all things used in the Mass and Benediction, for the Montessori class, sent from Ireland by Magdalen’s faithful friend Mother Arsenius ISC and hidden carefully away until Christmas. Magdalen had thoughtfully given them gifts also on the feast of St. Teresa in October: beautifully embroidered tablecloths for them to send

home at Christmas. Joachim and Edith sent theirs to their mothers; Laurentia, orphaned at an early age, sent hers to a former superior at St. Walburga's in New York.

February brought Teresa Xavier and Vianney, "so happy and enthusiastic," who seemed to settle very quickly but with no accompanying Superior. In March, Magdalen, in great pain with her eyes, was unable to read for ten days. In July, Vianney was ill for days after getting wet and not changing into dry clothing, while Magdalen suspended building work at two stations owing to a walk-out threatened by the St. Patrick's priests if their Superior, Fr. Whitney, visiting from Ireland, were to remove one of them! Not long after this, in August, Magdalen was delightedly expecting Osmonde's coming: "From all you have said," she tells Amadeus, "I am so very glad and relieved...none of the others could bear the burden of responsibility if I were gone."

A month more, and she confides to Amadeus that Teresa Xavier had "been through the fire" at Anua with Edith: "Perhaps we were mistaken, but M.M. Joachim and I thought it better not to hint at any possible difficulties to her." October found Vianney "by two mails now disappointed by the non-arrival of the stuff for injections." At the end

of March, Osmonde arrived with the medical team for the Anua hospital and with a fresh eye on an increasingly painful situation.

As early as April 1932, among her regular reports, Magdalen had mentioned more unhappiness surfacing among the nuns. Vianney had become very upset but would say only, when Magdalen pressed her, that "Joachim hums." Magdalen tried to make light of this, until Vianney added that "all the nuns were annoyed by it..., as a slight...she had begun at Holme Hall." Since Vianney had not been at Holme Hall and Laurentia had not told her this, Magdalen realised that Edith was again airing old grievances. She had done so to Magdalen herself at one time, and been firmly discouraged.

Magdalen now feared that Edith had prejudiced Vianney and Teresa Xavier against Joachim, and possibly Osmondeee also. Magdalene concedes that "MMJ is trying at times...we all are..." but stresses that Vianney overlooked the extra strain on Joachim and Laurentia after her accident. Also, the climate "brought out little mannerisms that are irritating, but it is ridiculous to make much of these." Joachim is very white and thin, but "[Dr] Luba says there is nothing the matter with her though undoubtedly she would be better for six months at home - so would MML - but this is not possible."

Teresa Xavier having seemed "so cheery, so balanced," that Magdalen had thought her able to hold her own, was very upset by Edith's critical attitude. As long before as the previous August, however, even she had begged Magdalen "for God's sake to tell her not to be always criticising, and when orders are given, to leave well alone!" Magdalen found Edith hard to reach: to speak to her did "far more harm than good." Even a letter from Amadeus had only convinced Edith that Magdalen had unjustly accused her. Magdalen sadly noted "a strange bitterness" in Edith, who "cannot conceive...that she is in the wrong in anything." This led Magdalen to conclude that if things did not mend "the work would be better without her... we must pray and have patience for a time..."

Against such a background the others perceived Joachim's protectiveness towards Magdalen as implicitly disapproving of themselves. One felt from Joachim's "own expression of the fact," she was firmly, if mistakenly, convinced of their prejudice against Magdalen from the beginning. Besides becoming aware, in the early days in Nigeria, of misunderstanding of Magdalen's position, Joachim had possibly also recognized, even at Holme Hall, incipient criticism. Deliberate humming while others were speaking was so contrary to Joachim's ingrained courtesy, that it might well have been an involuntary

reaction to critical conversation. Wishing to repudiate any part in it, was she trying not to hear it? Unable to prevent it, did she distance herself in manner from those she perceived as critical? Conversely, she herself was perceived as automatically defensive of Magdalen, to the point of interpreting even legitimate disagreement with her as disloyalty. The atmosphere became very strained.

It was also felt that Joachim was partly responsible for the others' inability to talk to Magdalen satisfactorily, though "very loyal and doing their best to carry out her wishes." They felt that Joachim did not sufficiently represent to Magdalen that "what upset her was not done wilfully but through misunderstanding." Because Joachim was evidently at ease with Magdalen and saw more of her, she seemed best placed to explain to Magdalen the different spirit, formation and customs of the SHCJ and even province variants. Alas, she was seen as unwilling to do this. Again, Amadeus had written that Magdalen would confer with the sisters. Instead, it seemed that usually, Magdalen would "settle" with Joachim only. Since she had no "bush" experience, this was not satisfactory to those with problems in that sphere.

Osmonde's reflections on the situation are helpful, retaining objectivity: she can see the whole picture. Having arrived on March 25th, by April 4th

she was writing to Amadeus: "What on earth is the matter with MMJ? The poor dear is obviously tired out in spite of injections and some tonic to absorb every day." In June she mentions that Joachim "went to bed the day we arrived and has never been well since, with...returning temperature...mixture of fatigue, climate, and spiritual strain...none of these can be removed here, now. She is still on the rest list...just too tired for words...tired out absolutely..." Perceptively she adds that Joachim had been "cut very deep by her difficulty with the others. I think they did not realise that often MJ's manner and ways came from her physical state..."

Magdalen several times wrote of Joachim's capacity for responsibility but was convinced that it would "crush" her. Osmonde sees the effect on Joachim of her responsibilities so far: "screwing herself up to responsibility and authority...she hates it and is not at ease in it...therefore puts all the rest ill at ease when it falls to her." Joachim's effort to "live up to the job takes all her energies...the rest goes at random... Magdalen was the one saving help" that Joachim relied and depended on.

As if the seriousness of Joachim's condition is dawning on her by degrees, Osmonde writes that she had "never thought a woman of our age could

be so utterly 'tired out' without an illness." Osmonde thought Joachim's absence would always be "a great loss to the work...but far better now while S. M. is still here... then [J] could come back fresh and strong for another five or ten years or so."

Only a fortnight later, however, Osmonde is able to say that Joachim's state has so improved that she has gone to the hospital to visit and baptise a little girl from among the Infant School children before she had an operation. On the subject of the school, Osmonde is sure that Joachim will be very good at making the necessary adaptations for the new cottage system. "The freedom they entail is different from that in the old convent, where our spirit held them... The teachers are dear girls."

Sadly, in July, referring to the all-hands-on-deck preparations for the recent opening of Anua hospital, Osmonde mentions that, all together, "there was plenty of fun and...work, and we ought to have been so happy, *non c'è!!*...STRAIN in capitals." She explains: "Sr. Magdalen means to trust the nuns and give them scope...but never makes them feel she does...the result is miserable..." Joachim was still defensive of Magdalen but, Osmonde says, "so thoroughly tired, one feels it is not her fault, but her misfortune and ours..."

In 1933, Joachim's extant letters are few, only one for each month from February to July. These cover aspects of work: the Medics' arrival and preparations for work in the Anua hospital, to open in late June; the bewilderingly expanding building programme; the Anua opening, briefly sketched for Genevieve, with supplementary details for Amadeus, including Bp. Moynagh's designation of Magdalen as a "valiant woman"; the providential unreadiness of the wards, allowing for training of African assistants all "new to the job." Laurentia was not well; Joachim sympathises that the Calabar compound, as by then she knew from personal experience, was "not an easy place to convalesce in." Osmonde had greatly helped in various capacities in school, Joachim having taken possession of her on arrival, to "keep her going." The only reference to her own health or feelings is within the laconic "we are all well" in early June.

At just that time, however, Magdalen was writing to Amadeus that Joachim has "had a good deal of suffering in mind and body," while as always "so good and generous and humble." However, no-one should be tried too far: "If things do not mend I shall ask you to consider giving her six months at home..." In the second of three letters written within three days, Magdalen repeats that "MMJ and MML ought not to stay out much longer. MMJ is not

ill...but in urgent need of complete rest.” Probably after six months “she would be quite all right again...”

Magdalen was then researching the lengths of “tours” of nurses and other expatriate women, including religious, and finding that the trend was towards shorter ones. The Government, in particular, despite cutbacks in hard times, had just shortened the “tour” for European nurses to one year between home leaves. Magdalen strongly recommended that the first deployment of SHCJ reinforcements should be as relief for those already out, not as expanders of existing works.

The third letter says that Dr. Luba will write by the next mail: she insists that both “MMJ and MML” ought to go home. There is “no question about Laurentia,” but “... if possible, MMJ ought to go too... the heat always tries her.” Magdalen still thinks she is “quite fit to work in the Tropics in spite of this.” Describing Joachim as “fearfully overtired after Vianey’s accident” but unable to recover amid subsequent preparations for Osmonde and the Medical team, Magdalen mentions “the difficulties with Anua” of which she “knew nothing at the time.” (See *Crisis at Anua, Justice in Rome* by Elizabeth Mary Strub SHCJ, SHCJ Stories #3, April 1999.)

At Easter, when Vianney had gone to Anua, Magdalen had suggested that Joachim might write “an affectionate letter” to her, stressing that she did not want anything to come between them, both being “out here only to work for God and the Society and souls.” Joachim had done so, “very humbly and nicely, asking pardon for any pain she had unintentionally given,” but her letter was not well received. The “rather wild” response was in exaggerated mode. Magdalen remarked that if Joachim were not so tired and run down, she could have allowed for the other’s condition. As it was, she is “cut deeply.” Personally, Magdalen believed Joachim could “pull together without going home if she and MMO get on all right...they are understanding each other.” Any one or two of these trials Joachim could have managed, but “the combination of all has tried her greatly.” Magdalen was convinced that Joachim was “so good, and will be so useful that she ought to do many years’ work here...”

Magdalen’s next letter, written aboard *M.V. Accra* off Lagos in mid-July, tells Amadeus that she and the doctor think that Joachim ought to go home at once. She is “exhausted...not fit for work. Everything...has been done but she is not pulling up.” If possible, it would be advisable for her to go to a convent on the Continent, not to England: “I do not think you would wish her mother to see her till she has pulled up a bit.

Will you cable the name of the port I am to send her to?" Though Laurentia also ought to go soon, it is now less urgent than for Joachim to go. If Joachim does go, Magdalen herself will have to stay in the Calabar school: it "has gone down a lot as poor MMJ has been far more unfit for any mental or physical effort than I realised..."

Impending Departure

By early August, Amadeus seems to have suggested local leave for Joachim and Laurentia in the Cameroons, which, Magdalen insists, "though undoubtedly healthier are still in the Tropics," and so "useless in the present cases...." Also, the convent where the nuns might have stayed was too small to sustain a sufficiently long visit. Out of this experience of human wear-and-tear came a recommendation from Magdalen for the benefit of future missionaries: that Amadeus would "...let the nuns know from the beginning that they are coming out for only two years at first...this would have a big moral and physical effect...."

In her final four letters concerning Joachim, written between August and early October, Magdalen deals with Joachim's travel arrangements. While herself a patient in the European Hospital in Lagos, Magdalen writes of a Dutch boat sailing on August 25th and

September 25th between which dates Joachim will choose. Magdalen would have preferred Joachim to stay in Calabar until her return, but feared five weeks' waiting would be too hard on Joachim. Though glad for Joachim's sake that she was going, Magdalen ended: "I shall miss her. The Cameroons would be no use."

Two days later, this time from the African Hospital in Lagos, with her friend Miss King "better, but not yet able to sleep," Magdalen writes that a German ship sails for Boulogne on September 10th. This would give her time to get back to Calabar before MMJ left, without keeping her waiting. "You said Havre, but under the circumstances I hope you would not mind. She will get a good train to Paris. I will cable later, when I know what kind of boat it is." Magdalen's brother Charles, due out from England the next day, would find out about it. Joachim seems to have left Nigeria for the first time on the German boat. If it left on schedule, Joachim had already gone when Magdalen wrote to Amadeus on Sept. 11th. By then a new SHCJ Superior had been appointed. Mother Mary Fidelis Hothersall, English by birth, but a member of the American Province, would soon come out, accompanied by M.M. Genevieve. Magdalen apologises for Joachim's unavoidably delayed departure: August was the only month in which the Dutch boat did not sail, and others were unsatisfactory.

A delay until the end of September would have been worse. As it was, Magdalen says, "I am so glad she will see M.M. Genevieve....You will see MMJ almost as soon as you get this, I expect..."

In early October, Magdalen apologises for not having cabled about Joachim's return, but assures Amadeus that Joachim was "not unprepared for her recall." This suggests that Joachim was not simply on sick-leave, but being transferred back to England. There is no reference to Joachim's response to this possibility, or indication of how she felt about it, apart from her own words, recorded in the 1970s, that she was "invalided home...for five years, fighting off anaemia...wanting to go back..." She might well have been relieved to have a name for the "not ill" condition she had been credited with in Nigeria, despite the protracted pallor, weight loss and exhaustion so frequently mentioned!

The actual date of Joachim's arrival in France is not recorded, nor whether she stayed in Paris, or was greeted in transit at the rail station by the Paris community. The house diary of the Rome convent in Via Boncompagni first mentions her presence in an undated entry for November: "Mth. M. Joachim, ...recalled from Nigeria for health's sake, has come to spend some time in Rome..."

She remained there for six months, until June 1934.

ROME/ UK/ IFUHO

1933-1945

Joachim's stay in Rome was chronicled only at its beginning and end. The house-diary entry in November 1933 adds to the fact of her presence that "she is attached to the Mission staff of the new magazine, the PYLON, of which M.M. St. Luke is Editor. Mother M. Joachim will be most useful, as she can supply real 'local color' to the Magazine." On January 6th 1934, the first issue of the PYLON is reported as receiving "a gracious welcome everywhere." The diarist hopes that it will be "a means of helping the Mission in many ways."

Thus began a long, if sporadic, association. Between January 1934 and January 1940, when publication was suspended for the duration of World War II, Joachim contributed to many of the quarterly issues. After the war, her contributions continued for twenty years. The final one, A Backward glance at the Holy Child African Missions, for a special issue in 1968, was written in the first year after her retirement from Africa.

Joachim's early articles ranged chiefly over local life around Calabar. She had evidently taken great interest in all aspects of life beyond her heavy responsibilities in the schools. It seems likely, also,

that in Rome she had access to reliable reference books on anthropology and related subjects. Her first article, in the PYLON Volume I No.1, entitled Our Mission Field, a general Survey covers geographical, economic, cultural and cross-cultural aspects of the Calabar area. It also outlines the “well-defined work committed to the SHCJ Mission”: outreach to “priceless souls” along “two paths obviously indicated, the medical and the educational.” Joachim recognises that the “medical response came second...in time, but may rank first in its appeal,” and reports that, the Anua and bush dispensaries having each treated over 1450 patients during their first three months, “the battle with disease has begun.”

Typically, she also notes that the people quickly registered their desire not only for healing but also for guidance in remaining healthy. Hence, in the educational field, Joachim advocates besides the three R's, “but more vital...the three H's: Hygiene, Horticulture and Handwork...subjects most in touch with real life and therefore a more solid basis for the girls' development.”

She explains the need to provide women with means to earn a living in or near their homes, to cut the great expense of time and energy on heavily laden treks to distant markets. Thus might Christian homes develop,

and Christian nuclear families be nurtured within the local culture, "...not because we think meanly of our people but lest we set limits to what they might become."

Further articles dealt with topics such as The Peoples of the Province of Calabar; a vividly described journey, Bushwards; The Chop Question (food); Juju; and various Bulletins. The introductory paragraphs of an article on indigenous housing throws as much light on Joachim's openness to another culture as on the specified topic:

"Mud huts thatched with leaves, exposed to scorching sun and violent tornado...perhaps our sympathy with their occupants is mingled with...complacency as we sit...within our bricks and mortar. It is probable also that [an African]...would envy our more imposing structure...yet we would both be wrong...we in our easy assumption of superiority, he in his self-disparagement. The 'mud hut', evolved on the spot by the ageless experience of his race, is eminently suited to his needs. As for our bricks and tiles, what are they but mud, fire-baked in default of sunshine, reinforced with straw instead of leaves? They stand between us and the rain and cold; the black man's shield him from rain and heat."

Only Joachim's first two articles were published before she left Rome; perhaps she stock-piled some for later use. The Rome diary records on June 5th 1934, that she left that morning, taking with her

one of the maids who was going to the Oxford community as a maid for six months, to learn English before entering at Mayfield. At Florence, students 'finishing' at Via Boncompagni were to join them for the journey to England.

Joachim spent the academic year, September 1934-35 teaching in the school at Harborne, Birmingham, which is now the Jesuits' Manresa. Nothing is recorded of her time there, but in July 1935 one of her PYLON articles attracted the attention of the TABLET. The August 31st issue of this periodical carried a most appreciative introductory review of "a bulletin of those fine missionaries, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, in Southern Nigeria." The PYLON is described as "so ably written...that we can give a fair idea of its merits only by reproducing one of the sisters' anthropological papers...amidst a rich variety of items: The Ancient Faith of the Ibibios."

After the reprinted article, the review continues, claiming that "This paper...from the pen of Mother Mary Joachim SHCJ...shows how different is the PYLON from...gushing little missionary magazines in which English readers are not taken seriously..." Rather, the reviewer says, it carries us back to the great days of Catholic missionaries who "compiled grammars and lexicons of absolutely new tongues

and made scholarly records of data precious to the anthropologist, the folklorist and the student of comparative religion..." From that July issue of the PYLON, Joachim's article was singled out from others by such well-known writers as Pierre Charles SJ, Cecily Hallack and Maurice Baring. Later articles included such topics as Independence Celebrations at Enugu, (1960/61); the Final Profession (1964) of the first Ghanaian Handmaid at Cape Coast; and The Church in Ghana, some thoughts on adaptation (1965/6). The final one was aptly written for the "C.C. special issue" marking the end, in 1968, of the PYLON's publication.

The writings of Joachim were not at first, or even at all, intended for the PYLON. A series entitled Black Diamonds about notable Africans, saints and others, was contributed first to the CALABAR MAGAZINE and only later - when Joachim was pressed for time and material - to the PYLON. A play, Fires of Namugongo about the Ugandan Martyrs, was written for performance in the school at Cape Coast (1964); papers on The Holy Eucharist and Women (1951) and Vocations to Religious Life (1953) were written respectively for presentation at the Kumasi Eucharistic Congress, and a Kpandu Study Week in Ghana's Volta Region. In the 1970's, in her retirement, Joachim wrote a clear account of the acquisition of

Layton Hill. Later still, in her mid-eighties, she also wrote Reflections on what the Society has gained from our West African Missions (1980).

After her year on the staff at Harborne, Joachim returned in 1935 to Cavendish Square. The following year, on March 13th, her father died in Northumberland, aged eighty-six. In the meantime, Joachim had written for the PYLON at Amadeus' request, The Line that carries the Light or the Making of a Native Teacher incorporating into its title the sub-title of the PYLON. A letter from Joachim to Amadeus about this piece indicates not only that she was involved in the school rather than the college, but that her recollections of Calabar were in mint condition, despite her busyness: "until the children went yesterday it was impossible to concentrate on it." Joachim found that the drawback, writing at nearly four years' distance from the scene, was "not because I have forgotten, but because I remember so clearly." She feared she might not be able to describe developments which had since taken place, but "If Calabar says I am obsolete, we shall be able to publish more up-to-date information!"

This letter also reflects the atmosphere of London in a Coronation Year: Joachim mentions street decorations "beauteous to behold," her sense of humour evident as she tells of "having a party of soldiers in the Square,"

[normally accessible only to key-holding residents. The children of the school used it for play] "...all day, in case they are needed to replace any who fall out owing to fatigue, heat, etc. etc. Judging by the present temperature they are more likely to succumb to frostbite!" Some of the community, she said, had been thinking of running a canteen across the road, until they decided that the heading in the UNIVERSE would be "Square nuns feed spare soldiers!"

A year later, Joachim returned to Nigeria as Principal of the newly opened Government Training College at Ifuho. How that came about she herself recounted in her archive interview in the early 1970s, describing how, when M.M. Fidelis Hothersall was staying at 'Cav' while on leave, she told Joachim of her difficulty in finding someone to run the projected Training College. Joachim who had been thinking for some time that she was "quite well enough to go back, and wanting to go back, asked, 'Would I be any use?' Fidelis did not answer, but...jumped up and went straight upstairs to M.M. Amadeus and the thing was fixed up the same evening!"

Her interviewer noted that Joachim, originally with no personal sense of missionary vocation, was yet keen to go back once she had worked in Nigeria. Joachim's response was typically forthright and vigorous: .

“Well, once I knew about it and how lovable and worthwhile the people were, and the job was, of course I wanted to go back!”

It seems that already, as early as the end of 1934, Amadeus had considered Joachim as a possible novice mistress for the Handmaids. In a letter undated but referring to events of that time, Amadeus wrote to Fidelis that Joachim had understanding and sympathy for Nigerians and was “...spiritual and practical...the past year and her greatly improved health have restored her moral balance.... It is hard to find anyone who has all the necessary qualifications plus the necessary experience...”

In the event, Teresa Xavier was appointed Novice Mistress and it fell to Joachim to head the new Training College at Ifuho from its foundation until 1945.

IFUHO

The Government Training College at Ifuho came into being only fifteen years after Sr. Magdalen started her work of teaching children and then training her pupils to teach other children, and only eight years after the SHCJ joined in her labours. Magdalen, Joachim and Laurentia, all in ill-health,

had left before Fidelis arrived as the first Superior in 1934. The work had continued with, at first, some contraction and consolidation so that expansion could safely follow. Under Fidelis, the Calabar school not only regained its high standard but broadened its scope and increased in numbers until another school had to be started to cope with the overflow. As Calabar was the chief centre for teaching-practice, there was a beneficial effect on the Bush schools also, which grew into a widening network supervised by SHCJ from centres such as Anua and Ifuho.

The division of the Southern Nigerian Vicariate at the end of 1934 brought Mgr. Moynagh SPS as the first Prefect Apostolic of the newly constituted prefecture of Calabar and Ogoja. It also brought to an end a period of uncertainty which had inhibited mission planning.

Both priests and sisters were inspired with confidence by the new Prefect, who, with four years' experience of the whole Calabar area, understood its needs and problems.

In an account of the early days, written c.1953, Edith described how a violent tornado, which destroyed the original mud-built schools of both boys and girls at Anua and Ifuho in 1935/6, was a blessing in disguise:

more durable buildings replaced them. At Ifuho, the rebuilding was slow because there were plans to make it a great centre of the apostolate, with a convent, a school, the Handmaids' Novitiate, and the Training College. Amadeus, on visitation in 1936 had seen that "the time was ripe for a new advance." Additional land was needed. The local priest acquired some and built a house for sixty young women preparing for Baptism and Christian Marriage. Local chiefs contributed to the cost of the new school buildings.

"On the little hill-top at Ifuho," Edith wrote, "literally on the ruins of the past, a foundation destined to extend its influence far beyond the Calabar area" was begun. In 1936, a little group of Handmaids and teachers arrived to re-open the Bush school and take charge of the women's settlement. Early in the next year Teresa Xavier and M. Bernard Coupe followed. In the wake of the great tornado, their immediate tasks were the supervision of the building of the Novitiate; preparation of plans for the new Training College; the laying out of the compound; the development of the marriage training centre; and the direction of the studies of five girls who accompanied them, the first students of the new college which had yet to be built.

All made the best of makeshift accommodation until the permanent buildings were completed, the Novitiate first. Here the sisters, now four, including

Osmonde who was working 'in Bush' from Ifuho, and would soon become local superior, lived with the novices. In this period the first members of the Medical Missionaries of Mary received the habit and made a short canonical Novitiate at Ifuho, directed by M. Bernard. After their profession at Calabar, they took over the new hospital at Anua. Within eight years, Ifuho would be the motherhouse of the newly formed SHCJ West African Vicariate and Osmonde the first Mother Vicar of all the SHCJ Missions. By then, these would include Lagos, and Cape Coast in the Gold Coast, which was to become Ghana.

In the meantime, Joachim left England for Nigeria, this time accompanied by M.M. Helen Philpot who had been teaching in Preston. Fidelis, having recruited Joachim in London, had travelled north to consult R.M.M. Francesca Bolton, who recommended Helen. Soon, Joachim and Helen received letters from Amadeus, confirming their missioning to Nigeria. Many years later Helen wrote to Joachim's necrologist about their journey: that they left Liverpool on September 14th 1938 on the Elder Dempster boat the *Abossoo*, later lost with all her sister ships during the war. Helen and Joachim, however, enjoyed "calm seas all the way." From Lagos they sailed via Duala to Calabar, arriving there on October 3rd, in time to attend the Handmaid

S.M. Cornelia's Clothing in the afternoon. A day or so later Joachim left for Ifuho to head the newly opened Teachers' Training College, about to start with only four students. Each year, however, the numbers increased and the exam results were good.

In May 1940, Helen was sent to Ifuho to help in the college while M.M. Bernard and M.M. St. Henry Parker went on leave to the U.K. Two American sisters, due for leave first, had declined to go lest they be unable to get back from the U.S. Helen stayed for two and a half years at Ifuho, so happily that she was reluctant to return to Calabar, having found it "a pleasure to work with...Joachim who had a delightful sense of humour, though on rare occasions she could ooze ice!"

While the College began with a handful of students, the buildings gradually took shape. A few letters from Joachim to Amadeus provide occasional details of this early stage. In March 1939, Joachim, sending an article for the PYLON "too late and...blotchy...I could not get the typewriter so had to do my best with ink and perspiration" mentions that the new convent's cement blocks were being made but would have to be used to line the water-tank to save carriage on the water. The College "goes on as normal" but, the Standard Six Government exam having been abolished, "will have to devise an entrance exam to

exclude other people's Standard Six girls not up to our standard." Meanwhile, a supplementary list of passes was due for Government examinees, so two who had failed in Domestic Science theory had just a chance of being let through.

In October 1939, Joachim reports that all are well and eight or nine new students are expected in January. The grant is likely to be cut but "we will keep open all we can...M. Bernard's school [marriage training] is full." Miss Plummer, the examiner, turned up unexpectedly, but "was pleased with the practicals...all went well with our six students: two certificates of Merit, Elizabeth our cook, being one...and seven ordinary vocationals...art and needlework...also good."

Joachim welcomed arrangements, to take effect in January, to normalise community life at Ifuho, by the appointment of Osmonde as local superior. This would relieve Fidelis, who could now remain at Calabar. Joachim observes:

"The work here needs more planning...whereas in Calabar it has passed that stage and wants intensive cultivation...it cannot be easy to attend to both at once."

The new convent, to have been begun in September, was still doubtful, but Joachim rejoiced that the nuns would at last be able to secure a "more regulated

community life" than had been possible until then. The shell of the practising school, however, was up, the priest and headmaster having allowed teaching practice to be done in the boys' school until the building was finished.

Forster family news is also mentioned at this time: Mrs. Forster, Joachim's mother, aged 75, had broken her leg above the knee on November 1st at Biddlestone, on the the steep and narrow flight of stairs from the former domestic chapel on the first floor of the house, where the family still worshipped on Sundays and Holy days.

In the next letter, Joachim returns to the subject of community life: "It is grand to have the list and to be back under normal government with a Reverend Mother on the spot and I am delighted that it is M.M. Osmonde." The latter had returned with a broken wrist, but very cheerful and "plucky". Student numbers had now reached eighteen, a full first year, but were due to rise to thirty by 1941, so the convent might end up as an additional student 'cottage.' The practising school was already flourishing, with forty infants after only three weeks. Students who had never faced a class before "stuck to their guns and some were really very good." The letter ends on a personal note: Joachim found it "such a relief to have...that list." She hoped all would go well when

the council met, though she felt "so deeply thankful for the privilege of the common SHCJ life again," that she had "hardly a thought to spare for that." Ifuho being so far from Calabar, the nuns had seen little of [Fidelis] except in hurried visits with "little time for discussion of anything, spiritual or temporal...so I am very happy now."

At this time, Joachim became the Secretary on the new Mission Council which met at Oron, "a good neutral spot...and saves time too..." which was much more private than either of the convents. The Fathers were both out in Bush, Mgr. Moynagh had loaned their resthouse, and the meeting had been undisturbed. Later that year, her reply to a direct query from Amadeus about harmony on the council, shows that she had profited from earlier painful experience in Calabar:

"Frank discussion is still a difficulty, as it is apt to give offence, but externally all is peaceful. I sit on eggs...during the meetings. But we are trying our best to make things work in these strange times, and so long as we have a Visitation before things take a more permanent shape, all will be well."

A letter of early February 1940 tells of the arrival of the sixteenth first year student, an Igbo girl educated at Calabar who had resisted her father's desire that she go to Onitsha. A pagan girl from Oron,

successful in Standard Six had applied too late for that year, but would be interviewed. The "flood of youngsters" was more demanding than earlier students: even M. Henry was out of her depth! The new intake, evidently less mature than their predecessors, seemed, however, to be more intelligent. Their good-will augured well.

In March, of the convent "within an ace of starting," Joachim quips that Osmonde has had "a few Mr. Jones's about the plans...very sound ones, I think. One certainly learns by experience in this country...." "Exam results are still delayed, hopefully" not scuttled, "so the anxious examinees are constantly inquiring." Joachim says of the next set that they "now do some work, but they will do a great deal more before we are finished with them!" She hopes for "another big influx next year...the numbers certainly put a bit of life into the place." The students, now with Sunday uniforms, "look like an advertisement for the Riviera...the colour a rather vivid blue." She ends contentedly, "We are all well and busy and Ifuho is a lovely place for a convent," bearing out Osmonde's news to the English Provincial:

"Joachim is keeping very well and likes her College work. During March she had encouraging news of her mother, still in the home in Newcastle with her broken leg, and seems very happy there."

An April letter reports very good exam results and four potential Handmaid vocations among the group. The convent-building is actually about to begin, the site being pegged out. All are looking forward to the Handmaids' Clothings and Professions - and "also to the happy day when they are safely over!" Due to teach Doctrine, Joachim ends this letter rather abruptly, adding only:

"I must say again how grand it is to have a Rev. Mother of our own. When the whole community has grown accustomed to it, it will be grander still. I can't understand...talk of 'missing' a superior who was absent nine-tenths of the time, when God has given...one who is always on the spot!"

November 1940 brought "a solid week of Miss Plummer and Miss Thomson" so everyone "felt limp" but all the students had passed, up to the time of writing. Joachim continues: "As [an SHCJ] once wrote of her students, 'They are, as usual, the weakest we have ever had.' It has been a strenuous task to pilot them thus far...the worst, the written exam, is still to come..." That year, the examiners asked for three exam lessons to be given, instead of one by each student. Joachim acknowledged this as a fairer arrangement, but nevertheless, it had tripled the preparations for all concerned. The following year, the College would enter a new phase to enable the nuns to cope better with the needs and capabilities of each student: "after

drafting those who are fit into a higher course, we hope to train the rest definitely as Senior, Infant or Vocational teachers...a more specialised course."

Family news was heartening: "My people are well. I hear regularly, if not very frequently, from my mother who can get about again by herself. Mary keeps a sharp eye on her, D.G." After Christmas she mentions "good news of home" and adds that, at Ifuho, all are well and "busy as bees and very pleased to be in our lovely new home...opened with Mass in the Refectory...every day something new accomplished either inside or out..." On the brink of the new academic year Joachim reflects on the past one that it had been a "hardish" year not only because of changing staff but because the new students were "of the schoolgirl type, and not tremendous plodders...so we have to adapt our methods and tighten up in many things." One ploy was to hold an internal exam before they went home, "which pricked the bubble of their complacency and considerably depressed us. The second years have done well in the end." A student novice, who had failed badly, was to be given a further trial until Easter, Teresa Xavier reported at New Year 1941.

Around Easter 1942, Joachim "fell in love" with the Ogoja Province during "a lovely rest" at Kakwagum with Teresa Xavier. From there she wrote to an

unnamed Reverend Mother, replacing a letter long unfinished "because there is such a wide choice of things to fill any spare minute that crops up in term time... I make many beginnings that never end." She describes the journey with Teresa Xavier, "following the PYLON map" from Ifuho through Owerri territory to Afikpo, Abakaliki - "the country rocky and grassy instead of the eternal Bush," and Ogoja to Kakwagum, the journey "not so exciting as it used to be since there are now two swing bridges and the culverts and roads are better. We went all the way in the lorry and soon arrived at our lovely little 'convent' as all our girls' schools are called." The priest was "a grand host."

After Epiphany 1943, Osmonde says her two "chiefs of staff...Joachim, land-operator/college, and M. Hubert, air-activity bush" went off for local leave to the Cameroons, over the border to the east of the Calabar and Ogoja territory. Returning via Calabar, they collected M. Lucy Ennis, just out from England to join the staff at Ifuho. In May, Lucy described to Amadeus the convent enclosure "...like a beautifully planned village...exquisitely laid-out grounds...the whole place a hive of activity," yet with "no atmosphere of rush or overcrowding." By then, there were about 1200 children in the schools visited from Ifuho, numbers expected to rise by several hundred within a year. Joachim, she says, "has

certainly cause to be proud of her College...[the teachers] turn out to be both reliable and interested in their work.”

In May 1943, when the SHCJ community went to Calabar for Handmaids' professions, Joachim “of course” remained at Ifuho with the students who could not afford transport. Lucy, writing in July to M. Angelica, describes an occasion when the priests had asked the nuns to host twelve children from bush areas for a few days' preparation for First Communion. Day one brought one child; day two, twenty-five! When days three and four brought the numbers up to eighty, Joachim and M. Henry were put in charge of them and a timetable was drawn up for them. Daily instruction, meals, games, rest...led up to examinations with interpreters, during which loud wails proclaimed those who failed...[those not meant to be there in the first place?] The final morning, however, saw thirty-seven whiteclad first communicants at a Missa Cantata followed by a group photograph and gala breakfast of rice.

On a lighter note, the students distinguished themselves at a concert, given in aid of the Red Cross by the ladies of the area, with a topical song composed by Joachim to the tune of “The Campbells are coming.” The refrain, beginning “The kernels are coming” -referring to the Government's wartime

campaign for kernel production - evidently caught on. The audience encored it enthusiastically and in no time the song formed part of a propaganda campaign in schools, accompanied by a poster made by M. Henry. There was even talk of its being promoted nationally, but the outcome is not recorded.

A letter from Osmonde to the Provincial at Mayfield in November 1943 reports that "Miss Plummer...thinks, rightly, that M.M. Joachim's influence is excellent on the girls, and M.M. Bernard very good indeed in all things practical. Neither of them have anything 'institutional' about them...I was glad to see Miss P. so pleased as it is an encouragement to the nuns, who work very hard."

In May 1944, Joachim's mother died, aged eighty, at Burradon, and was buried with her husband in Thropton churchyard. Osmonde wrote in August to Amadeus in Rome, after its liberation by the Allies, [though the letter still took over two months to reach her] that Mrs. Forster "died in May, a sweet holy death like her life.... It was a deep sorrow for Mother [Joachim] but she knows her darling is in Heaven and is glad." Teresa Xavier, writing in September, after reporting that Joachim "keeps remarkably well and does magnificent work," says that she received before her mother died "a beautiful handwrought

silver chalice to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of her clothing. It was soon filled with the sad news of her mother's death."

Regarding the community, Osmonde at that time mentions that "M. Henry is our treasurer, I have the Mission Treasury and M.M.J. takes charge when I am in Bush." The College results had been "very good indeed," - Elementary, Higher Elementary - and also the Senior Certificate, part one, taken by two of the Handmaids.

In 1944-5 letters seem to have been scarcer or lost in transit until after the war ended. Sisters who lived and worked at Ifuho in the early years still have positive recollections of Joachim. M.M. Hubert Jacops, mostly "busy running about the Bush, trying to persuade little girls to come to school," remembers Joachim's sense of humour and her gift for writing, lamenting that she had not written a personal Mission history. Sr. Ellen Hare's clearest recollection of Joachim is as "a community member delightful to live with...outstanding in her respect for all people." Despite her sense of humour, she "never disregarded anyone's feelings or forgot the consideration due to each." One who lived at Ifuho later, meeting Joachim only during her visits for Vicariate Council meetings, recalls her impression of "a wonderful person...very positive and affirmative

in her dealings with others.” To M. Bernard Coupe, Joachim was “a great community nun, always cheerful and helpful, her teaching experience a great asset...She was a good organiser and an excellent Principal...the students loved and trusted her...the priests admired her...Miss Plummer was very impressed by her achievements and success.”

With the end of the war, Joachim’s time at Ifuho was also ending. In 1942 she had written of the two Reverend Mothers’ being in Lagos “over the new school business” adding that “various members of the Ifuho community are being teased about going there...not I: I am taken to be a fixture here.” By the time the new school had begun at Obalende, Lagos, in 1945, however, Joachim was destined to be pioneering again. Soon after the war ended, Joachim went on leave with M. Rosario Hore. In Helen Philpot’s words, “They travelled on a troopship, slept in a dormitory and queued for meals...it was not a joy-ride!”

When Joachim returned to West Africa, it was to the Gold Coast, now Ghana.

CAPE COAST

1946-1953

Early in May 1945, having asked for SHCJ since 1934, Bp. Porter of Cape Coast in the Gold Coast, wrote to R.M.M. Paul O'Connor, Provincial at Mayfield, to thank her for "the good news that the staff for our new venture has been fixed." One more sister was to be chosen, after Joachim had seen the situation for herself. Priority passage for the pioneer sisters was already applied for.

Three months before, Bp. Moynagh had written from Calabar to the Provincial, of his concern that Joachim, "one of our 'key' nuns," was to go to the Gold Coast. He had himself suggested her for Lagos, considering her well qualified for secondary-school work. When M.M. Damien Hare was appointed, however, to the new Holy Child secondary school there, the Bishop seems not to have realised that Joachim also would be leaving his Vicariate. Nor had he expected the 'rumour' of the Gold Coast project to become reality for some considerable time. While "pleased and happy to know that the SHCJ, which has been such a blessing to us here, should be given wider tasks ... and that God is calling you to that work," he also feared that the first mission work undertaken might be jeopardised by new works. Projected postwar

schemes for secondary education in Nigeria might cause Catholic pupils to proceed to non-Catholic schools unless his Vicariate could provide its own.

Bp. Moynagh also urged that “the single job” of secondary teaching in the Gold Coast could be done by inexperienced new missionaries, once the school had begun. Thus, sisters like Joachim could be freed for “general mission work,” which demanded experience to deal with its inherent difficulties. Joachim’s “long years” and her knowledge of language and customs, would be wasted elsewhere. He insisted that he was “not quite reconciled” to losing experienced sisters permanently, specifying Damien as well as Joachim.

Bp. Porter wrote again to R.M.M. Paul, in June 1945, mentioning that Joachim had recently passed Takoradi on the homeward boat, joined aboard by one of his priests who would brief her “with full details of preparations here.” It was at this point, apparently, that Joachim learned that a Training College was to be transferred to the SHCJ compound in Cape Coast! Bp. Porter was anxious for the school to open at the start of the new academic year, early in 1946, even hoping that Joachim would arrive with the first of the SHCJ group in September, if possible. Perhaps unaware that this was Joachim’s first leave since her return to Africa in 1938, he suggested she have a short leave before the

opening and take further leave once a substitute was "worked in" to replace her. At the end of September, however, Amadeus wrote from Birmingham that Joachim was there, "looking very well, in excellent spirits and her same dear whimsical self. At first...rather overcome at the prospect of her new office, and...the parting from Ifuho where she will be sorely missed." Amadeus lists the "very fine" staff for Cape Coast: S.M. Julia [Ryan] Science, Maths, Geography; M.M. St. Edward [Charlton] Art and P.T.; M.M. Cyril [Smith] "who can teach almost anything..."; S.M. Oliver [White]...just finished training at Mt. Pleasant.. "Mgr Porter ought to be very pleased, for it promises well." Amadeus hoped to see them on her way back from her first post-war visitation, by which time they should be settling in.

Of the Gold Coast pioneers, Joachim, Cyril and Edward sailed from England aboard the Sobieski on January 28th disembarking at Takoradi on February 20th 1946. On Sunday the 24th Joachim wrote to R.M.M. Romana Koe at Mayfield that, safely arrived, the nuns had met R.M. General and R.M. Provincial "after all" at Takoradi.

Edward wrote of their not having dared to pray to meet the two Superiors, fearing disappointment, but their own arrival day, which was also that of the Visitors' embarkation for Europe, was hectic.

Amadeus and Paul had to drive on to Cape Coast to meet Bp. Porter while Joachim, Cyril and Edward dealt with their baggage. They were then driven to the Mission at Sekondi along streets lined with schoolchildren shouting, singing and waving flags. The car got through by degrees, the nuns “grudging every minute that kept us from R.M. General and R.M. Provincial ...but smiling nevertheless.” At the Fathers’ house, as numerous delegations welcomed them. Joachim tactfully fielded a request for a school holiday by referring it to the Headmaster. Lunch followed, “a bit of the Gospel fore and the Martyrology aft.” Only then were they driven the fifty-one miles to Cape Coast.

There, they “dismounted and went up a lot of steps to the Catholic Mission,” only to find that the Bishop had taken the two Superiors to the new Convent, where at last the newcomers caught up with them. A comprehensive tour of the site before tea at the Mission filled what time remained before the Superiors’ return to Takoradi for re-embarkation. Joachim commented: “We saw nothing of them in private, but...it was so good to see them at all.”

It had been a long day but it was not over yet, as Edward later recounted to Amadeus. After seeing her off the nuns returned to their “magnificent school and convent.” By 5 p.m. however, the open space

between was crowded with schoolchildren singing 'John Brown's Body,' while the nuns were introduced by the Bishop to his "chief parishioners, whose wives and daughters displayed magnificent 'dashes'...yam, cassava, etc." Then, after the expected speech from Joachim, "the crowd broke loose...to visit our buildings," exploring everything and "thrilled with it all...Then more handshakes and good evenings and they reluctantly left..."

Edward adds: "There is nothing Fr. Fisher [the Vicar General] does not think of... He is as considerate as the best of mothers. We are still living on dashes." The three sisters would do their best to "live up to all that is expected of the Society here...on all sides we hear praises of the Nigerian Mission."

In a densely-typed aerogramme letter to R.M.M. Romana Joachim describes the "whole top of the hill...sliced off to get a flat place on which to build," approached by "a causeway between two ravines...We live on an escarpment without a blade of vegetation" apart from planting already begun since the nuns' arrival. Joachim worried lest the nuns fall off the edge; already Cyril had fallen from one terraced level to another, luckily not a steep drop. All the buildings stood necessarily on different levels, dormitory blocks, dining halls and kitchens receding upwards from the convent, and college-blocks fronting the compound.

The two-storey Convent was large, with six large and two small rooms upstairs, besides two bathrooms at the end of each wing. Electricity and water were still to be laid on, but the combination might provide *hot* water before long...Pleasant prospects however gave way to hard realities: "There is an awful lot to be done and we have to open on March 6th, so we must just do the best we can..." The nuns had a minimum of basic furniture but the rooms, with no front verandah at either level, were very exposed and curtains a priority, as for the pupils' dormitories too. Accordingly, a shopping expedition to the town, and the coming of a seamstress were planned for Monday. On Tuesday the priorities were to be cleaning-equipment and a washer-woman. The nuns already had "a nice little cook and a kind of watchman factotum who is most attentive and seems...content with three hours' sleep" per day. The large airy buildings were imposing and durable but Joachim's experience caused her to regret that she "was not here before they were put up, as with less cement I could have got little cottages like Ifuho, instead of barracks." However, "the kindness of the Bishop, priests and nuns makes up for much. We are well and happy."

Already, amid their many and varied preparations for the new term, the nuns had received welcoming

visitors, including the Governor and his wife on Friday, and, on Saturday, an unnamed American Bishop whom Amadeus had met in Lagos. With him came two of twelve nuns, all graduates, who had hoped to start a secondary school in Accra. Ten being delayed, the two would start a primary school instead. Though Bp. Porter called in most days to see that all was well, and had supplied everything necessary for their little chapel, he considerably deferred visiting to discuss business until the nuns were more settled. On Sunday, however, after writing the letters, Joachim and Cyril intended to visit the OLA Sisters in the town, to ask their advice and to establish friendly relations with them.

Holy Child College, named before the Holy Child Sisters' arrival, was to have been a new Girls' Secondary School only. By arrangement between the British Colonial Education Department and the Catholic Mission, however, a three-year Catholic Post-Primary Training College with over a hundred students had been transferred to the compound from the OLA convent. The three SHCJ, forewarned, realised that the OLA Sisters might well be less than happy about the new arrangement. Edward recalled years later that they were in fact very hurt by it. From the outset, however, they proved to be very helpful, friendly, and welcoming.

Already, that Sunday, the SHCJ were settling in very well, aided no doubt by their very busy-ness and the visible results of their labours, which included the readiness of their oratory for the Blessed Sacrament, now installed. They were also celebrating the Vicariate feast of the Flight into Egypt that day - really its octave. Cyril wrote in her portion of the letter to Amadeus, that "regular observance" would begin on Monday.

Somehow, by March 6th the school was able to start, though at the end of her letter about the day, Joachim exclaimed that had she realised what it would be like, she would not have agreed to open so soon. Besides the founder-members of the Secondary school, a first year class, there were thirty-five new students for the Teacher Training course, twenty second-years, thirty third-years; also several fourth - years, exam-repeaters. The Training College and school were as separate as possible except in Chapel, and initially, in the refectory. Each had its own dormitory block for up to a hundred students. On March 11th Joachim wrote that much had happened since her last letter: "...interruption has been continuous and I have no Handmaid to relieve me of 'chop palaver' and bathwater disorder." But the African teachers were very helpful, the old students "as good as gold, and my two nuns...taking to Africa like ducks to water."

The letter also hints at the difficulty of unpacking with no storage facilities, and the immediate domestic needs; the “tackling of timetables, allocation of classrooms, lamps, crockery, supplies of food for 120 etc.,” that preceded the tidal wave of eager students, “in on top of us, mostly arriving after dark!” By the next morning “several ‘gate-crashers’...had arrived under cover of night, complete with fees and all requirements!” Then, all the beginnings-of-term: while Cyril and Edward dealt with fees and domestic arrangements for “120 complete strangers, two-thirds new to the College altogether...” Joachim was trying to “trace people who should have arrived and sort out people...not on the list...trying (in vain) to find jobs my ‘secretary’ could do”; interviewing teachers between “fighting...cooks and marketers, wrestling with all manner of unauthorised ‘chop’ and purveyors of the same..” and “coping with sanitary inspectors, sanitation (and smells!).” Throughout, “visitors, including superior gentlemen to ‘inspect’ the premises; priests, two bishops; nuns, Catholic and Anglican; contractors, electricians and smaller fry!...” Meanwhile, school equipment was still lacking: “...the desks will be ready soon and the dormitory cupboards sometime.” Nevertheless, Form I was “sorted out” from Form II and classes would “start in real earnest tomorrow.”

The Bishop, Joachim continues, had “elected to bless the whole place with full ceremonial” so the nuns had

everything as clean and tidy as possible by 7 a.m. when he celebrated Mass. Then he said he would return for Benediction in the afternoon so they got ready for that first, but, "he did the Blessing first, and chose his own route...past all the places I had planned to avoid." A realist, she ends philosophically: "...he must have seen...the drawbacks of starting on this scale without sufficient preparation, so I am not really sorry!"

The formal opening of the College took place in June 1946, the ceremony performed by the Governor of the Colony, Sir Alan Burns. His daughter, he was careful to point out, had been educated by the SHCJ in England. It was a great occasion not only for the College but also for the town, and the people were delighted. Together with the Bishops and priests were Chiefs, Government officials, students' relatives and countless others.

The College began just before a disturbed period in the evolution of independent Ghana. Among various developments, a new Constitution was introduced in 1946. This provided for a Legislative Council in which for the first time the eighteen elected members, all Africans, out-numbered and so could outvote the twelve appointed members. Without directly bringing Independence nearer, the new Constitution was more open to the possibility of it. The difficult period began within eighteen months of its introduction.

Gold Coast servicemen returning after World War II to unemployment were discontented; farmers resented the drastic methods used to save the cocoa industry when their trees became diseased; the scarcity of imported goods led to high prices and profiteering, despite Government attempts to control prices. Then, in December 1947, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah became general secretary of a national political body, the United Gold Coast Convention that spoke out against Government failure to control the situation, and in favour of self-government for the country. Continuing high prices led to boycotts of European goods, which early in 1948 escalated into rioting and looting, in Accra, Kumasi and other towns, but not, apparently, in Cape Coast.

It is to such events that Joachim alludes soon afterwards, in April 1948, when writing to R.M.M. Genevieve, now Superior General, regarding the danger, "proximate as well as general of Communism...to which, as far as one can judge, the responsible elements in the country have wakened up." She hoped that the rest would keep the peace, to allow an unspecified commission do its work. "The time of the strike," she wrote, "was not without its worries, ...unknown factors being the hardest to withstand." However, "our girls have stood firm and to help them to do so we have kept to 'Business as usual.'" For the time

being, "things proceed normally, both on our...hill and in the town. We are all well and happy."

The Holy Child campus, if unaffected by politics, was, however, having problems of its own. As the school grew with annual Form One intakes, it became increasingly difficult to run both school and college on the one hill-top compound. Academically separate, the two interacted eventually, with some teaching practice done in lower-secondary classes, and supervision of order and discipline in the school by senior trainee teachers. Certain unhelpful aspects of the situation, however, convinced Joachim that change was necessary. Writing to Genevieve in April 1948, she was emphatic that she would never advocate a joint secondary school and training college and would "cheer" if the college were "snatched...back" and returned to O.L.A., it being almost impossible to manage both. She had considered all possibilities and concluded that "if we have to keep it," the only feasible plan would be to transfer the teachers, at least in their last two years, to another place..."

Saltpond, twenty miles east on the Accra road, seemed a likely place, but, as yet, Joachim had not broached the idea to either the Bishop or the Education Department. In the end, eight years later, the Training College would migrate to Adiembra, near Takoradi, fifty-one miles west of Cape Coast. Evidently, the

men's Catholic College, St. Augustine's, in Cape Coast, was also in difficulties after a "...strike involving quite possibly the loss of seventy men teachers, who should have finished the course in Dec. 1948..." This had convinced the Principal "that the combination of teachers and secondary schoolboys is not a good idea...For the moment, all we can do is think things out..." Joachim would keep both Genevieve and Osmonde informed.

In this letter Joachim also mentions one of her community "who most feels the strain of a small community and the lack of 'props' of religious life at home." Once overcome at the prospect of becoming a superior, which Magdalen in Calabar had considered likely to crush her, Joachim now seems more confident: "I can generally right her when the atmosphere becomes charged," she says, adding with characteristic appreciation, "she is a grand worker." Joachim was to be a superior throughout her remaining nineteen years in West Africa, only three of which were spent in Nigeria. This gave rise to a fiction that she and Cyril boxed-and-coxed on a six-yearly basis between Cape Coast and Takoradi. In fact, there was only one such direct exchange!

Regarding confidence, the Apostolic Delegate for English speaking Africa, Bishop David Mathew, had written from his delegation in Mombasa, Kenya, a

year earlier, to R.M.M. Paul at Mayfield. Praising SHCJ work in West Africa he emphasised in "an entirely official letter [...copies to Mother General and M. Marie Osmonde (sic)]" that "Among the superiors, Mother Fidelis and Mother Joachim inspire, (after M. Marie Osmonde) with great confidence..."

The Delegate singled out the SHCJ formation of the Handmaids HCJ at Ifuho: "I am not happy about most African sisters in East Africa," he wrote, "owing to the unsympathetic way that the European sisters handle them. The West is much better...your work is inspired." At least part of that inspiration possibly reflected some of the suggestions Joachim offered to Amadeus in the earliest days in Calabar.

Few later letters from this first period of Joachim's at Cape Coast seem to have survived. The Secondary school continued to grow, with a hundred and twenty students by 1950, and by 1952, over a hundred and fifty. By then, also, two sixth-formers were attending Higher School Certificate classes at St. Augustine's while still lodging at Holy Child. Examination results improved with a fifth year added to the course, and higher standards reached. Joachim left early in 1953; a community newsletter in December listed the achievements of the young women who had already completed courses. Thirty-four were placed in schools around the country. Three were postulants HHCH en

route to Ifuho, one having entered the school in 1946, gained her School Certificate in 1950, trained post-Secondary for two years and tested her vocation by teaching at Sekondi for a year. Of the sixteen School Certificate candidates in 1953, ten aspired to Post-Secondary training; one gained a three-year Scholarship at the Kumasi College, later University, of Technology; one embarked on nursing training, and four were going to be employed near home or go abroad for further education.

The SHCJ sisters during this period were happy to have had Genevieve with them during her General Visitation of 1949/50. Writing "aboard *M.V. Accra*, leaving Takoradi" on the outward journey to Nigeria, she told how the whole community from Cape Coast, now seven sisters, had come aboard for

"a very pleasant reunion....quite an array...they looked so nice in their white habits...their advent caused a mild sensation on board."

On the return journey, when Genevieve and her companion, the American Provincial, M.M. Pauline Pesch-mans arrived earlier than expected, one of the priests met them and drove them to the mission, meeting the nuns from Cape Coast just as they entered Sekondi. Here Genevieve extracted Joachim and Fr. Fischer drove them back to the boat to meet one of Joachim's cousins aboard who wanted to see her.

Later, installed for a few days at Cape Coast, Genevieve wrote of the now four-year-old foundation that it "is wonderful what the nuns have accomplished in this time..."

In 1951, at the first West African Eucharistic Congress, held at Kumasi, Holy Child Sisters and students were among the 80,000 participants. Joachim summed up her paper The Holy Eucharist and Women in a final paragraph which perhaps reveals a little of her personal piety:

"For us women, the Blessed Sacrament is first and foremost the Person of Our Lord, living in our midst and...in our hearts, and the Eucharistic life is our own ordinary work-a-day existence shot through and transformed by His Presence and His life into the very life of our Blessed Mother at Nazareth."

The Holy Child students' special contribution was the designing of a large diocesan flag, banners and vestments for the Congress. In other areas, also, the students had many contacts and commitments. The teachers practiced in Government and Methodist, as well as in bush schools at Yamoransa and Mouri, quite close by. They also went to larger Catholic Secondary schools farther away, at Saltpond, and along the Kumasi road, at Fosu, where O.L.A. Sisters generously housed them for fortnights at a time. Students also helped socially, off the compound, by providing choir-groups for Mouri parish's patronal feast, and Fosu's

Corpus Christi celebration. Others visited lepers weekly and undertook to do their shopping, or raised money for the Mission Sunday Fund. In the inter-school area, a Challenge Needlework cup, a British Council Art Competition and victory at netball over the country's most prestigious school, Achimota, were among their successes.

The community letter recounting these activities also noted that "our list arrived on January 1st and we said goodbye to R.M.M. Joachim on January 7th..." Edward, who never again lived in community with her, after that original "very happy co-operative trio...plenty of fun!" recalled Joachim as "...so diffident...yet so gifted...clear-sighted, such a delightful storyteller and entertainer with a lovely refined sense of humour..." As a superior, she "allowed great freedom and encouraged initiative..." and though "responsibility as a superior was a great burden to her...she would square her shoulders and stride out to meet a challenge. A very holy, lovable person. I cannot do her justice..."

Another sister still recalls Joachim's eyes, "twinkling wickedly" in a moment of shared amusement during the community recreation. There were many such moments, wherever she was. Joachim spent the next three years as superior in Lagos, before returning to the Gold Coast and the transferred College.

LAGOS 1953-1955

Five months into her first year in Lagos, Joachim wrote to Edith: "After Cape Coast, life here is rather uneventful...Names are very hard to get hold of and I still feel like M.M. Laurentia when she was so confused with new words and explanations about everything." She was, of course, growing older, now approaching sixty. Several sisters who knew her in this period however, provide a picture of her very consistent with her earlier years. An Irish sister remembers Joachim as "a very pleasant person...fully alive...interested in everything...[with] a clear understanding and vision of what we should be doing in Nigeria...[who] gave those around her great support and help." Help, in this sister's case, included a pair of shoes to wear on leave, when she passed through Lagos in February on her way home.

An American sister first met Joachim when with two others, in September 1953; she stayed at the Lagos convent while their ship discharged cargo for Lagos before proceeding to their destination, Port Harcourt. Joachim graciously welcomed them, and the sister was specially "touched by Mother's gentle manner, a characteristic I became well acquainted with ...a year later" when she was transferred to Lagos to teach in Holy Child College. In the next two years she "grew

to love her quiet ways, her practical approach to situations, her delightful sense of humour and, above all, her spirit of prayer..." Attempting to do justice to her life and labours, this sister recalls that Joachim retained her joyful enthusiasm for new ventures, her pioneering spirit and her ever lively humour, "...which made living with her a happy, pleasant experience...[she] had so many skills...her accounts in the Lagos house journals...pure delight to read and she was really a barrel of fun at evening recreations...after the fifteen minutes of BBC news..."

In January 1954, Joachim went on leave, joined on the boat at Takoradi by Cyril, whose leave was also due. In the last months of 1955, another American sister was with the Lagos community until she went to Afikpo, and Joachim to Takoradi. She remembers, besides the humour and storytelling, an occasion when Joachim asked her to teach the poem "The Ride of Paul Revere" to a literature class, ostensibly because she declined to teach that American troops chased (British) Redcoats down the lane!

Though she was over twenty years older, late in 1955 Joachim seems to have written to Genevieve just as she did to Amadeus, from Calabar. Expressing an opinion, apparently invited by the Superior General, about a potential new superior, Joachim reveals real appreciation and understanding

of the sister's capacity, despite possible indications to the contrary. She also suggests aspects of the role and its relationships, for example, with a compatible assistant, that would maximize the sister's particular gifts. Joachim asserts that she has "tried to write straightforwardly, with no *arrière pensées*," but also at length, because Genevieve used to say her letters were "cryptic... I am quite ready to be told I have no sense at all..."

Joachim defers her own "proper letter" until her return from the East - probably Ifuho - for a council meeting. She was due to leave in two days' time, so had to prepare for the next day's celebrations [i.e. October 13th, the SHCJ feast of St. Edward, or possibly the anticipation of St. Teresa's] "We are having a sung Mass, sports and a feast for all the children, a trip to Ikoyi Park in the evening for the nuns and an entertainment by the boarders after supper!" There were still clues to be devised for three treasure hunts," so 'Time no die'!"

When, at the end of 1955, Joachim set out for the Gold Coast a second time, she was already well into her sixtieth year.

TAKORADI /CAPE COAST

1956-1967

When Joachim arrived at the College at Adiembra, by SHCJ usually known as Takoradi, the convent and College had been functioning for ten months, since mid-February 1955, as an off-shoot of Cape Coast. Joachim described the beginnings in her first report - for 1956-57 - to the General Chapter of 1958. In June 1954 when Osmonde was visiting Cape Coast, the Director of Education had proposed the transfer of the College to new premises originally intended for a men's Emergency Training College. Approaching completion on a hill over-looking the sea between Takoradi and Sekondi, the buildings seemed adequate for immediate needs. Just when the need for a second stream in the school was becoming urgent, the transfer of the Training College would make it possible. Extensions and alterations were proposed, even further buildings - Assembly Hall, D.Sc. Block; an extra room, big enough for a chapel, to be added to the Principal's bungalow, enlarged to accommodate five or six Sisters. It seemed too good to be true.

It was Joachim who wryly commented that "only after Cape Coast had accepted extra children into the school did it transpire that the Adiembra buildings would not be ready for the new College year." The convent extensions were not to materialise for

months; it would be years before the new buildings were begun. They were still awaited when the report was being prepared for the 1958 Chapter.

The transfer was delayed for a short time. The nuns, not realising "the magnitude of the tasks or the disappointments ahead," Joachim reported, cancelled the extra class, postponed the opening and waited at Cape Coast until R.M.M. Genevieve arrived for her visitation in late January 1955. On February 1st she visited Adiembra, discussed the situation and approved the new venture so that a fortnight later the little off-shoot community migrated there, only ten days before the new term began. The nuns settled into two staff bungalows, and arranged a temporary chapel. On the 19th the first Mass was celebrated, and from the 21st the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. Only on the 25th, the day of the students' arrival, were the buildings handed over to R.M.M. Cyril by representatives of the Education Department, architects and contractors. She reciprocated with "a formidable list" of the deficiencies already discovered.

Before this exchange was complete, the students had begun to arrive. Until well after Joachim had also arrived, the following January, the "arduous struggle" continued to get the buildings into a safe and sanitary condition, with regulated supplies of electricity and water, and to "transform the bush which came up to

the very doors, into an orderly compound.” Meanwhile, the work of the College was carried on “as normally and effectively as circumstances would allow...”

After Ifuho and Cape Coast, Cyril’s list must have seemed to Joachim very familiar. Despite the difficulties, it was a credit to all concerned that within three years, an average of a hundred students had been maintained, and 157 qualified teachers had gone to schools around the country. A factor intended as beneficial, the frequency of leave for expatriate staff insisted upon by the new Ministry of Education, further complicated the running of the College. Joachim ruefully reported that there were rarely more than three nuns and two lay European staff actually in residence. African staff had also been in continuous flux, as had Educational policy. The Ministry tended to tighten its control by imposing external Entrance and Certificate examinations, but lightened its burden by throwing back on the College and the student body responsibility for upkeep of grounds and premises, taken from them in 1952.

Stringent regulations regarding staff qualifications were also enforced, resulting in serious understaffing, conditions of service now comparing unfavourably with other countries. Some expatriate staff did not return after leave, others declined to renew contracts.

Two of the oldest and most faithful African staff had to resign after a Government Inspection and there were too few qualified African women to replace them even numerically, let alone in experience. Joachim's own evaluation of the College however, by the time she wrote her report, was positive: despite the difficulties, hopefully transitory, and the hard work they entailed, the welfare of the College had not suffered. "...The students have accepted with equanimity the extra financial burden...pressure of examinations has improved their spirit of work and relations between students and staff have never been so satisfactory..."

The latter benefit was partly due to "the large measure of self-government introduced among the students," reflecting the political trend in the country, which achieved Independence in March 1957. Joachim rejoiced in the students' encouraging response: "growing initiative, poise and esprit de corps." The national celebrations of Independence covered a week of "festivity and great good will" in which the students and staff took their full share. Most gratifying, however, was the "steadiness and good will with which they settled down to work when the celebrations were over..." This "argued a healthy realisation that freedom brings its own responsibility..."

Joachim also reported the helpfulness of the Board of Governors, mostly African women, jointly appointed by

Archbishop Porter and the Civil Education Authorities; the cordial relations of the SHCJ with the Archbishop and clergy of the Mission and with the staffs of schools where students practised teaching. Most of all, she cherishes "good reports of most of our old students." On the brink of Ghana's independent future, she concluded that

"With much to be thankful for, we have confidence in going forward into a future, uncertain and probably not easier than the past or the present, but full of promise of good work to be done in Ghana for the Holy Child."

Two months after the General Chapter, Joachim wrote to the newly elected Superior General, R.M.M. Laurentia Dalton, her fellow pioneer in Calabar in 1930. Her letter expresses heartfelt dismay and sadness about the apparently sudden recall of R.M.M. Osmonde to Europe, after twelve years as the Vicariate Superior. The day before, Joachim had seen her off on a plane to Nigeria, but hoped for a farewell glimpse of her at Takoradi on her voyage home. Joachim felt that she spoke for the great majority who were also "deeply grieved and sadly puzzled" by the "sudden and bitter blow" of Osmonde's replacement at that juncture. With her great capacity for loyalty, Joachim had long appreciated Osmonde: her first experience of Osmonde's understanding and perception had occurred at a painful time in the early Calabar days.

As local Superior at Ifuho and then as Vicar, Osmonde had been an "inspiration for twenty five years, an unfailing support, never more so than during the crises and perplexities of the last three years." In the light of Osmonde's outstanding record in many areas, Joachim found it very surprising that she also should pass from office at the end of an era marked by the replacement as General of Genevieve, the "co-foundress" with Amadeus, of the Mission. Typically, having candidly stated her case, Joachim continues

"forgive me if I speak too freely, and perhaps unjustly, for I know from the Rule that you are not a free agent in such a matter. But I should be disloyal to you, even more than to the Mission, if I did not state the case frankly and squarely..."

Without going into detail, but evidently from her long experience as a Vicariate Councillor, Joachim considered that the Mission was "really...in a bad way, in different ways in both countries, and as far as the Society is concerned, much will depend on the next R.M. Vicar." She assured Laurentia that "in my own sphere, I will do all I can, subject to R.M. Teresa [Teresa-Xavier Fletcher, Vicar 1958-1964], to obtain and secure the best terms possible for the work in this country," and to "avoid antagonising the authorities, if only I can." It must have been painful to write that the nuns in Nigeria,

too, would “salvage all that is possible.” In both countries, “limitless patience and forbearance” would be essential.

Joachim had just become the first Vicariate Councillor, after six years as the second, and would remain so until 1964, when her periodic journeys to Ifuho for Council meetings would cease. The years of the problems only briefly referred to in her letter belong to the time when Ghana was working towards its declaration as a Republic, and Nigeria towards its Independence, both in 1960. The letter ends on a more personal note:

“ I know that you will pray for us. I realise, too, that our burdens are but a part of your own and so I promise again that I will keep you constantly in my prayers...”

In the following year, 1959, Laurentia returned to West Africa for the first time since 1933, for her Visitation of the Vicariate. R.M.M. Frideswide, journalist for the expedition, noted that, having left Liverpool aboard the Royal Mailboat *Accra* on October 1st they docked at Takoradi on the 15th but were unable to disembark until later. Going on deck between Mass and breakfast, however, they found Teresa Xavier and Joachim there already: they had heard the ship’s siren during Mass and had gone to the harbour after breakfast.

Later in the day, Cyril bore the travellers off to Cape Coast for a few days, before their "very enjoyable" similar stay at Adiembra. On the morning of the 24th Joachim and a companion drove with them the 160 miles to Accra, to board their flight for Lagos. The reunion of Joachim and Laurentia is unrecorded, but a photograph survives of them seated together on a verandah, which the presence of Bishops Moynagh and McGettrick, standing behind them, seems to indicate was taken in Nigeria sometime during that visit. That it was significant for Joachim is suggested by the fact that she sent the photograph home to her family.

Two recollections of that period, one from the few days of Laurentia's visit, were recalled after thirty years by sisters who knew Joachim at that time. Both concern dogs, one real, one not. The first is connected with the production of the play, Lady Precious Stream, staged in honour of the visitors. Takoradi at that time still had no hall, so the performance was in the open air. Sandy the dog [also, in his time, photographed with Joachim] over-excitedly running and barking among the cast, was collared by her and tethered to her chair. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a tropical downpour scattered the whole gathering in disarray. Except Joachim: with great aplomb she gathered up chair and dog and made a dignified departure until the shower passed. Both dog and dignity could be dispensed with

on occasion, however, as Joachim effectively demonstrated. When she woke one night to hear someone trying to get into her room from the ground-floor verandah, she crept over to the door, barked like a dog, and routed the intruder! Evidently her humour and resourcefulness were proof against the anxieties of the times.

In due course, in June 1961, Joachim returned from Takoradi to Cape Coast, again as local Superior. This as the only occasion, despite the legend, on which she and Cyril actually exchanged places!

Cape Coast 1961-1967

Of Joachim's second period in Cape Coast, there are only occasional glimpses, gleaned from rarer letters or recollections which shine small spotlights on her life there. In her taped interview, she says only that she taught in the school part-time, and took especially under her wing the garden boys, who enthusiastically flocked to see her when she revisited Ghana in 1971 for the school's Silver Jubilee celebrations.

The years before the coup that ousted Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in February 1966, however, were troubled waters through which to navigate. The deputy Headmistress, who later became her Assistant, remembers that Joachim was relieved to be free of

responsibility for the school, but “slipped into part-time teaching with great enthusiasm. She really loved the African girls and appreciated profoundly their different way of perceiving life.” From this time there survives, in rhyming verse, a fairly comprehensive catalogue of the inconsistencies of English spelling which she compiled for the profit and amusement of Sixth form classes. On the whole however, she preferred a younger age group, or the training of teachers.

Joachim was still the local Superior, in a particularly difficult time for the school. It began as a prosperous time for Ghana, but a communistic form of government deriving aid from eastern Europe, threatened the position of the Church and so of the school. Some years later, a new librarian found copies of George Orwell’s Animal Farm far back in a locked cupboard, and learned that the book was proscribed under the Nkrumah regime: even Ghana’s schoolchildren could draw parallels between the book’s characters and contemporary politicians. Amusing perhaps, but indicative of oppressive aspects of life.

By now, Joachim was almost sixty-five and well past retirement age. Perhaps for that reason, for the first time since her early days in Calabar those around her noticed and remembered that she seemed tired and indecisive.

One Sister adds that Joachim remained as always, “outspoken, fun-loving, and very perceptive, - but not too practical!” Another says that despite evident tiredness she was “always very sweet and buoyant.” This sister realised only later just how much work Joachim was doing at this time, with their SHCJ novice-director, in connection with the Rule of the Infant Jesus Sisters, newly founded by Archbishop J.K. Amissah of Cape Coast. A third sister recalls, when she first joined the community, liking Joachim instantly when warmly welcomed and helped to feel at home. The younger sisters also perceived Joachim as disinclined to grant permissions, uncertain of what to expect, and content to remain rather in the background.

Quite possibly, as a founding member of the convent, original Principal of the double College at Cape Coast, and until recently Principal at Takoradi, Joachim instinctively adopted a lower profile to allow scope to the Head mistress: robust and not always conventional strategy was needed to negotiate the current problems. Certainly, Joachim worked closely with her in face of intrusive Government policies during those “challenging - funny - and scary years,” as one member of the community at that time later described them. When unacceptable regulations had to be modified or politely but firmly declined, as when Nkrumah claimed the title “Osagyefo” [Redeemer] and expected it to be used, Joachim

diplomatically worded a successful representation about its unsuitability in a Catholic context.

In 1962-3, when a communist-style youth movement, The Young Pioneers, was made obligatory in schools, the chairman of the Governors advised the Headmistress, M.M. Marcella Brennan, to delay until the Archbishop's return from the Second Vatican Council. Baulked officials reported her to Flagstaff House, the Presidential palace. The Commissioner then came to the school, followed by a politician, Mr. Kofi Baku, with an impressive retinue, including the official Y.P. Chaplain. Both missions were unsuccessful. By now, all the other local secondary schools had accepted the Y.P. organisation. 'Holy Child' had to follow suit, but the next day received permission from Flagstaff House for "Liberator" to replace "Osagyefo" in the inauguration ceremony.

Joachim duly wrote Marcella's speech, and the girls performed perfectly. Mr. Baku declared it was "the best we've ever had...but you were difficult to deal with" - and sent his daughter to Holy Child a few years later.

To counteract the influence of the Y.P.O., the Church Promoted mass enlistment in the Catholic Youth Organisation, introduced from the United States. Marcella consequently made obligatory in Forms I-III,

membership of both organisations, so on two days each week, two hundred girls in green and white uniforms “whipped up by the school seamstress,” drilled on the games-field with two American sisters. On two other days, the same two hundred, in government-issue uniforms, drilled on the tennis courts with a Y.P. instructor. “It must have been hard for SM Joachim,” one sister later reflected, “concerned at the bee-hive of un-Holy-Childlike activity.” It was said later that the Headmistress would have been deported had Nkrumah returned from a visit to China. Instead, he himself was deposed in his absence, to the joy of the people, in the bloodless military coup of February 1966. The only resistance came from the two hundred strong, Russian-trained Bodyguard at Flagstaff House in Accra.

Within the community, the effects of Vatican II were beginning to be felt, but at least one of the younger sisters wondered if Joachim took seriously enough communications from Rome. Of “renewal,” Joachim later said that she did not personally find it difficult, because the constant adaptations demanded by missionary life had been a good preparation for it. On the other hand, with the political situation in Ghana up to 1966, and the secession of Biafra leading to civil war in Nigeria by 1967, affecting the whole Vicariate and its works, there were more immediately demanding matters in prospect.

Joachim's letters are spread thinly across these six years at Cape Coast. In April 1962, we glimpse "a beautiful Holy Week with all the ceremonies at the major Seminary, Pedu...the children on holiday...the nuns busy...with all sorts of educational meetings, so...not much rest possible." The two communities had however managed "a very nice day by the sea" at Komenda beach. In this letter Joachim also comments, re national affairs, on "the former left drift" being sometimes intensified, then "sometimes...a check...or an ebb.... The movement...not Ghanaian but apparently imposed from outside..." Real education, she says, has not so far been interfered with, but all sorts of directions complicate it: about who should supply food; what dates schools should open and close; what societies should be run in schools; which expatriates schools might employ. Buildings were held up, though plans had been long approved and money voted, so "we live rather from hand to mouth, and teach and train as usual."

The Vicariate Newsletter for that year, 1962, records, besides the Handmaids postulant from the school at Ifuho, the founding of the Infant Jesus Sisters; the opening of a Handmaid Convent at Dunkwa, ninety miles from Saltpond; Joachim's "well-received" paper at Kpandu in the Volta region on vocations to religious life; the reception into the Church of a

European member of staff; the arrival of an American Peace Corps teacher, and, in the school holidays, a retreat for married women who came with their young children; the billeting at the school of German women athletes, in Ghana for a display; and frequent foreign educational films "circulated and enjoyed in both schools." Notably, when the school was visited by the President of a neighbouring state, Dahomey, the students read him an address and conversed with him and with members of his entourage, in French. They, in turn, were impressed by his devotion in Chapel.

In March 1963, Joachim wrote to thank Laurentia for writing speedily about Teresa Xavier's recovery from surgery, while Marcella's recent return after an accident in which she broke a hip "makes a wonderful difference... We are taking care of her." The rest of the nuns, Joachim continues, "are all right here." There are still sudden changes in educational policy, which often change again before implementation is due, so "we are becoming more philosophical about them." Joachim also feels that things should settle down in the long run, when the "anti-colonialism" fever has worked itself out. Materially, the nuns are "as well placed as before" though vexatious import-restrictions rotate from textbooks to cloth. Locally produced food is plentiful but fairly expensive, and essential imported food is still available. With 345

boarders in the school, a serious water shortage was about to be relieved by a reservoir and elevator pump in the valley beside the school hill, at “not great” cost. In closing, Joachim looks forward to one of the earlier summer retreats in England during her leave.

Christmas Day 1964 was quiet, after three Masses and Benediction at midnight on the Infant Jesus hill, and two Masses in the convent oratory in the morning - a pre-renewal marathon with shades of Calabar thirty years earlier. On the 28th the two communities again met at Komenda beach, and some from Cape Coast had been to Takoradi for New Year's day. The Takoradi nuns were to spend Epiphany at Cape Coast after the Triduum, which, at Cape Coast, would be aided by a tape-recording of Fr. Lyons SJ, of which Joachim had had good reports. Among other news, she mentions that two novices on the hill have just left on completing their examinations; “...disappointing, but not unusual,” is her comment, “very often the vocation is the parent's, not the child's.” She looks forward to Laurentia's second Visitation in April/May, and to discussing numerous problems. Joachim will miss “terribly” Teresa Xavier, replaced as Vicar, but hopes she will be happy in Abakaliki. Of herself she says, “It was sheer common sense to replace me on the Council and I don't mind that a bit...I scarcely know M.M. Ronald [Egan, the new Vicar]...we are isolated here.”

In 1965, Laurentia and her companion, R.M.M. Arthur Gorvin, arriving in Ghana from Lagos in early May, were met at Accra airport by Cyril and Joachim. After "an all too short visit to Takoradi had passed into happy memories," as M. Arthur wrote, Joachim arrived to accompany the visitors back to Cape Coast, which had much to display. Not least was "the program of Africanisation which included appreciative retention and cultivation of native culture and traditional customs." In December of that year, Joachim's chief concern was the planning of the new Chapel on an awkward site. The old one was rapidly becoming too small for the growing school. Besides sending the proposed plans to Ifuho for examination by the Council, Joachim made sure that all the nuns heard the architect's explanation of the site itself, essential for informed discussion.

In the same letter, Joachim outlines new difficulties for the young congregation of the Infant Jesus. The Archbishop had said that, before Professions could take place, the new Rule must be completed, translated into Latin and approved in Rome. Joachim writes of conferring with the Archbishop and the novice-mistress, M.M. Tarcisius Lee, of deferring the Professions, and of continuing to educate the novices and postulants, respectively in the Fourth and Third years in the school.

By July 1966, seven months later, the Chapel problem was still not solved, even at the planning stage: "how to get a chapel, liturgical and beautiful...yet large enough, on the available site, the slope in front of the school." The solution now proposed "to cut this knot which has been strangling me for...five years...in Cape Coast..." seemed the only possible one: to build a Hall, use it as a Chapel and finally build the chapel on the present block "a costly project, unless funds were forthcoming from outside agencies, and a headache!" Encouraging, though, was the contractor who had built the whole compound, but hated the ugly Chapel-over-Hall block erected in his absence. Joachim reports that he was "so keen to do the whole thing that he is prepared to wait for payment." She would be satisfied with "a mere beginning before my time is up next September year."

In other respects, things were better in many ways than for years: "there is a new air of freedom everywhere and while one cannot live on free air, it is a great help in meeting what difficulties there are. We don't go short" - though there were spasmodic shortages - of butter, then potatoes, then rice, or tea and coffee...and yams. The new Budget however, seemed to be "a nine days' wonder.... Whoever heard of taxation going down?" Food, petrol, kerosene, diesel oil were cheaper. Local postage is down, and air letters, soon to be 10d, had been 6d much longer than elsewhere,

so "far from feeling penniless and insecure, we feel a new optimism." The nuns were "really getting forward with plans for our third stream in the school and...new buildings to house them." Joachim ends this letter, "we are having, as we expect as missionaries, some difficulties, but nothing like what we went through in 1930 and during the War, and it brings the hundredfold." She was grateful for offers of help and "would really ask if...in need. At present we are short of laundry soap, but it will come in again before long, so please don't worry!"

Almost a year later, in June 1967, Joachim was writing to Laurentia partly in the hope of keeping her in touch with events in Eastern Nigeria, where Biafra had seceded in May. She was not sure that the Vicar, Ronald, would be able to communicate with Rome from the east: she was to have been in Ghana from the 9th, but as things had turned out, Joachim was relieved that Ronald had not come. Most of the letter is concerned with the complicated arrangements to accommodate the leaves and moves of SHCJ to the drastically altered situation in Nigeria. Meanwhile, a counter-coup in Ghana had killed the popular leader of the bloodless coup which ousted Nkrumah, Major-General Koteka. "Mourning has been universal...he was a fine man." Yet more building plans and projects follow, Joachim hoping for a new library, and M.M. Magdalen O'Brien for a language laboratory, if

promised funding materialises. Even the extended dormitory accommodation, mooted in 1966, just might come about. Amid these hopeful uncertainties, with "all real" decisions awaiting the outcome, Joachim ends:

"Having laboured against great odds for six years to get something done, I feel I must labour to the end for Ghana. I have been looking forward so much to my retirement and return to Nigeria. Now, for the sake of that dear country, and for peace there, I have offered the sacrifice. Whether I get my heart's desire or not will be as God wills. It doesn't matter much, if only He will save that country and our mission there among its people. This is not despondency...only an inspiration to do 'my bit' at once, so that I now await events in peace."

A letter written four days later reports the arrival of two letters from the Vicar, enclosing the list of community changes. Joachim was missioned to Uyo.

In a letter of June 14th Joachim continues her efforts to bring Laurentia up to date with Vicariate affairs. Fathers going on leave would carry the letter to Rome and report on the situation themselves. Bishops had arranged for the evacuation of missionaries from eastern Nigeria, if necessary, but none had gone yet, except on leave. Other expatriates who had left were mainly women and children who also would normally have gone home at that time of year. A number of

SHCJ eventually stayed in Ghana awaiting the time when they might safely return to Nigeria. Of two sisters whom she knew well, however, Joachim sensibly suggests that “they had better wait at home. Neither is very strong, both are inclined to worry, and as we should be on holiday here, and Lagos is such a small compound, they would find little to do and might upset other people by their restlessness. You won’t want two caged lions at the mother house either!” After outlining various other complicated possibilities, some of which came to nothing, Joachim assures Laurentia that “we are all well here and have no anxieties of our own.” The ‘counter-coup’ could have been serious, but was foiled very quickly and much vigilant clearing up was still going on. The spirit of the people was good, but they were “still inert after their experience with the old regime, and too much inclined to wait to have things done for them.” The children were delightful, and that year there was “a very large School Certificate set, for some papers 93 of them, but...they are no trouble at all, in fact very friendly, calm and co-operative.”

On August 12th, Joachim wrote to Laurentia for the last time from Africa, thanking her for a feastday-letter and a “very generous gift.” She reported a message from M. Vicar urging her to take leave as soon as possible, so had booked a direct flight to London on Ghana Airways. She admitted to being tempted to

take another flight which stopped en route in Rome, had the onward leg of the journey not reached London at a very awkward hour. By arriving in England on August 26th she hoped to be in time, still, for a retreat. Meanwhile, at Cape Coast, the rest of the community were sharing a retreat with two Servants of the Sacred Heart, three St. Louis sisters, and five Handmaids HCJ who were staying at the Infant Jesus Convent. "All will pack into the bus twice or even thrice daily for the three and a half days of the preached part, which is all that the Padre is prepared to give us!" Three SHCJ from Lagos, and one from Takoradi were also taking part, as well as twenty retreatants at OLA where the "lectures" would be given.

By now the Nigerian Head of State was predicting full-scale war with Biafra. M.M. Helen would sail to Lagos with Cyril in Joachim's place, on the 23rd. To the last, she offers help: she "could take others besides the two mentioned." Almost incidentally, Joachim refers to "a request from Bolgatanga in the north of Ghana, that SHCJ open a secondary school." Joachim had refrained from pointing out to the supplicant priest that "Bishop Dery, in whose diocese Bolga is, was the one to do the approaching," though she did tell him that Laurentia was the one to approach. "If he does," she wrote, "you will not be taken unawares." Archbishop Amissah had also suggested that SHCJ participate with OLA and St. Louis Sisters in starting a

Polytechnic Institute at Elmina, to the west of Cape Coast, with responsibility for Drama and Journalism. Joachim doubted that it would work, but confessed that the Bolgatanga invitation appealed to her if ever it should come about. It did, in 1971. She ends:

“I am busy tidying, sorting and packing. Takoradi presented me with a large and beautiful ‘chop box’ which will be very useful for my notes and books. It, with our trunk and old typewriter, will await my return in Lagos, as it can travel freely on...Helen’s ticket... I am writing of what my mind is full of. My heart is full of the end of one era and the uncertainty of the next, but I feel quite calm. The Lord knows that we want His Will. All we can do is pray for our own and our people, who will need us more than ever, and that a peaceful settlement may somehow be effected, and soon. I need not ask you to pray for all of us...”

As Joachim flew out of Accra on that late August day in 1967, she was leaving Africa forever, apart from a brief visit in 1971 for Cape Coast’s Silver Jubilee. That she suspected this was so, even feared it, is implicit in her letter, but she was not one to go back on a “sacrifice.” One who knew her well wrote after her death:

“When she had to leave Africa in 1967, because of the closure of the Nigerian schools during the Biafran war, she was truly heartbroken.”

HOMEcomings

1967-1987

“It is of the essence of missionaries that they are sent. Those sent may be and usually are extremely keen to go, but this strong urge is not necessary. What is essential is that, having accepted the sending, they are always prepared to be sent on...and on again, until the final sending, usually the most difficult of all, being sent back, returned home for good”

This passage, from an undated paper or talk on mission work, may well be Joachim's most concise yet explicit expression of her own experience of mission - the unexpected going, the constant readiness and the “being sent back.” Just when her leave crystallised into permanent repatriation is not clear; the Biafran war continued until January 1970, with its terrible starvation, uncertainties, disruption of communications, education, travel and much else, especially in Eastern Nigeria.

In 1967-8, Joachim's leave was certainly over as to duration, when for the period of the renewal Chapter she was asked to take charge of the Scholastics in London while their director was away at the Chapter. A brief but revealing glimpse of Joachim remains from this interlude. A Scholastic recalls her “understanding of human nature, her experience and her kindness,” when she went to Joachim with a

problem. “To what I said, she answered with a smile and real goodness, ‘Oh, but it’s natural...you’ve been so long outside your own country.’ I remember being very cheered up by her...”

During 1968-70, Joachim joined the community at Lancaster, serving as Assistant and Treasurer, and helping the headmistress of an outlying parochial school to clean the little church every week. Faithful, thorough and unobtrusive, Joachim was responsible for the sanctuary.

From 1970-71, Edgbaston welcomed her as Treasurer. A young sister who lived there with her at this time, and later at Blackpool also, remembers Joachim as very happy to be in community again with one of her set in the noviceship, almost exactly the same age. When she died in 1984, Joachim “found her last illness and death rather hard,” though she said typically little about this.

The same sister describes Joachim as “a most down-to-earth, undramatic person...real ‘salt of the earth,’ and very cheering and encouraging to one so much younger.”

The highlight of this period for Joachim was a short visit to Ghana in March 1971, of which she wrote a vivid account, entitled Jubilate! Invited by Archbishop

Amissah to be present at the opening of the new Chapel, and at the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the opening of Holy Child School, she met Sr. Julia Ryan at Heathrow just before midnight on Tuesday, March 2nd. Joachim wrote, "our spirits were soaring, for we were bound for Ghana..."

On their "modest and unsuspecting exit from the plane," at Accra the following evening, they suddenly faced flashing cameras, and staggered half-blinded towards SHCJ on the tarmac. Soon they were engulfed in "a bevy of smiling, familiar and very dear faces of long ago," for the first and last time in their lives, in the VIP Lounge. Here "a large concourse of excited, vociferous and beloved Old Girls" vied with the press. Dazed, but in no doubt of the warmth of their welcome, they were even televised. What most stirred both to gratitude and pride was "to see in gracious lady after lady the children we so loved and strove to train in the early days, and days not so remote. 'These are ours, and how they have blossomed!'" Through relays of greetings they moved down the staircase, before, "in true Ghanaian fashion," prayers of thanksgiving were offered and libation poured, before the Holy Child Hymn, 'Thou art the Light,' was sung.

A similar welcome awaited them at Cape Coast. The next morning, Joachim and Julia were taken round

the school, “especially the lovely new chapel, the Assembly Hall below, and marvellous developments everywhere,” since only four years before, when Joachim had left, still agonising over that much needed Chapel. That afternoon, Cyril also arrived, from Lagos, “with like pomp and ceremony.” The next day all the non-teaching staff of the compound gathered for their own special moment, welcoming the visitors with a fine turkey and presenting Joachim with a little brooch of Ghanaian gold in the form of Cape Coast’s civic emblem, the crab, “so that you will not forget us...” As if she could!

On Saturday morning Fr. van den Plas SMA, an early chaplain of the school, celebrated an adapted Christmas Mass with the nuns and early arrivals, though Old Girls came continuously until Sunday. The celebrations, “from first to last a family feast,” were attended by many distinguished guests: the Archbishop, the Regional Commissioner, the contractor (an old friend), the Swiss architect, parents of students. Lunch was provided and prepared by the Old Girls, helped by the “Present” who had beaten them, only just, at netball that morning. The formal afternoon function, ably chaired by the first Head Prefect, was followed by a performance of The Insect Play over which Joachim “rejoiced again...that the Present have not declined from the standards of the Past.” Then

came the presentation of gifts to the three visiting nuns and others, including the long-time contractor and two long-serving cooks.

The ceremonial opening of the Chapel took place on Sunday with Mass concelebrated by Archbishop Amissah and Bishop Sarpong of Kumasi. After this followed another luncheon, for Old Girls and guests, "a heart-warming occasion...with speeches galore!" among them Joachim's heartfelt vote of thanks. Finally, in buses, cars and taxis, the guests and even the Old Girls, melted away and the "Hill of the Angels became once more what it had been for five and twenty years: 'HCC -O !'" For the few who remained there was "one last, never-to-be-omitted item," the customary cultural display of songs and recitals, dances and drumming." Long after dark a tired but triumphant company broke up. Next day, "a blissful holiday and rest! And thus, a new beginning... *Floreat in saecula!*"

The following September, Joachim moved to Blackpool where she lived for eight years. First at Layton Hill and then at Newton Drive, she was very supportive of successive superiors, especially a young one, in a difficult time of transition and renewal. Anything approaching criticism of superiors or disunion in community distressed, even angered her, but a young sister remembered

Joachim's loyalty to those in authority as "an enduring lesson and example which I will never forget."

In 1974, an ex-missionary following a diploma course in Religious Education appealed to Joachim for help with an essay about the beginning of the mission in Nigeria. She received "great help...and I understood more about our work there than [in] all the years I had spent there already." This sister did not meet Joachim again but remained in touch and always interested in the 'doings' of "a lovely, kind and thoughtful sister, always ready for a chuckle and a joke" whom she "only really knew in Blackpool and loved her dear self and her humour."

When Joachim's former Assistant at Cape Coast met her again in Blackpool, she found that though "her thoughts and interests were constantly in Africa...she fitted into community life and contributed more than her share to the practical side. Her gifts as a writer she still had, and used quite frequently." To this time probably belongs her history of the acquisition by the Society of Layton Hill, a clear account of a complicated process.

When the nuns eventually vacated Layton Hill and formed two smaller communities, Joachim was assigned to the house in Newton Drive. There she

devotedly helped Cyril whose memory was failing, reading to or with her, finding things she had mislaid, guiding her around the house and garden - lovingly repaying the support Cyril had given her during good and bad times since 1946. When Cyril's needs demanded more than Joachim, by then almost eighty herself, was capable of, she moved to Harrogate. Joachim missed her company but faithfully followed her own regular pattern of prayer, reading, and service to the community, never retiring before 9 p.m.

In 1979, Joachim followed Cyril to Harrogate for the last eight years of her life. The first five were still very active, her days "well-planned, prayer filled, busy and happy." Ever ready for an outing, she enjoyed the occasional drive into the local countryside, revelling in the beauty of sky, moorland and birdsong. Nearer than ever before to her family home in Northumbria, Joachim continued to enjoy her annual visits until, reluctantly, she decided she could manage them no longer.

One special highlight, however, was still to come. In late August 1979, Bishop Moynagh wrote very shakily, from Ireland: "in a month from now it will be 49 years since we boarded the *Appam* in Liverpool!" He thanked God that the "3 HCJ sisters are still with us, and...from Kiltegan...six of us are still at work in the Vineyard..." and that the SHCJ "made an impact

on Nigerian womanhood that will stand as memorable.” The letter ended “with love and a blessing and so many happy memories.” In January 1980 the Bishop wrote again: “Your last letter was of great interest and a joy to me! It showed...there is nothing wrong with your memory, nor with your clear retailing of events!” He urged her to preserve her recollections on tape, which she had partly done seven years before. His next letter, in September, told Joachim that the Bishop of Ardagh, Dr. Cahal Daly, had invited “a number of us” to a concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiving on October 1st “to commemorate our going...to Nigeria in October 1930.” Bp Moynagh hoped that six of the original seven St. Patrick’s Society priests would be there, with a number of diocesan priests who had served in Nigeria. However, he had informed Bp. Daly that he wanted “very much that you be with us to represent the Society HCJ...” He would cover Joachim’s travel expenses from Leeds Airport, meet her, or have the MMM sisters do so, and take her to Edgeworthstown for the ceremony at 5 p.m. on October 1st.” It was not to be “a large publicised function...just a simple ceremony of Thanksgiving and Intercession for Vocations and Missions. I hope you can come...”

Telephoned acceptance to Kiltegan delighted the Bishop who sent open-ended flight tickets, with suggestions for a visit to Knock on the 2nd, an

overnight stay with Marist sisters at Carrick on Shannon, and a visit to older MMMs at Drogheda. After the celebration, he wrote to assure her “that the joy of having you at the...Mass and the gracious welcome by the Sisters and dear Bishop Daly was...fully shared...especially by the ‘old hands’ of the *Appam*.” For himself it was “a token of my gratitude to the Society HCJ for fifty grace-filled, dedicated years. The SHCJ and I have worked and suffered together, thank God!” Describing the occasion as “the most familial of all 5,” he added: “You represented for me and all the Jubilarians the dedication of dear Sr. Edith and Sr. Laurentia...dear M.M. Amadeus, Josepha [Burke], Brigid [Coyle], M.M. Osmonde, M.M. Fidelis...and all the devoted hidden work and prayer at home. God has been very good to us all.” The Bishop’s final paragraph affords a rare glimpse of Joachim’s thoughts at this time:

“You speak of the ‘few years’ that may be left. I try to thank the dear Lord by the day!...to live each day in gratitude for his graces, not thinking too much of how long he has assigned.”

In his thanksgiving after Mass he liked “to recall...dear friends who have gone before and unite my praise of Him with theirs.” To Joachim’s “How can I thank you?” he replied: “Just try to remember a fellow missionary among the intercessory prayers in the Office, or a ‘Salve Regina’ at the end...”

Joachim's companion at the celebration in Ireland wrote of it as "a marvellously happy reunion for Joachim and for so many of her old friends," which she talked about "for many a long day afterwards". It was probably the last time she saw Bp. Moynagh or any of the others gathered there. She lived for six and a half more years, celebrating her Diamond Jubilee of Profession in March 1981 and carrying on as far as possible in her quiet, peaceful way, relinquishing more active tasks when no longer able for them. The house-diary was the last to go, though Joachim sat daily in the community room until afternoon tea, patiently trying to keep it up to date. Her successor realised, when compiling the 1984 Annals, that Joachim's memory had been failing for some time: community entries were interspersed with family news, and events were sometimes duplicated..

Once Joachim's health began to fail, it deteriorated rapidly, as Parkinson's disease impaired her mobility and speech. It seems that unresolved hurts, heroically but unwisely buried for so many years, remained with Joachim into this sadly disabled period, causing her depression and anguish of spirit. A sister who had known her well in Africa recalls going for a walk with Joachim during a Province gathering, when the early Calabar time was mentioned. Joachim explicitly declined to speak of

it, as “too painful”. For one so articulate, it was particularly frustrating not to be able to make herself understood. To others, it was painfully clear in her eyes, at times, that she was well aware that what she uttered was not what she was trying so hard to say. On one memorable occasion, however, she did manage to rout a somewhat patronising visitor!

After the joy of the reunion in Ireland, recapitulating her first missioning, Joachim passed through the darkness of her illness into an acceptance that restored the peace in which she died, a few weeks before her ninety-first birthday. On Palm Sunday, April 12th 1987, her “final sending,” she “returned home for good,” her mission faithfully accomplished.

Acknowledgements to

- i Audiotaped interview of S.M. Joachim by S.W. Wickins shcj Mayfield archives c.1973
- li All the shcj, especially ex-missionaries, who so kindly responded to the request in November 1996 for recollections of S. Mary Joachim.

