

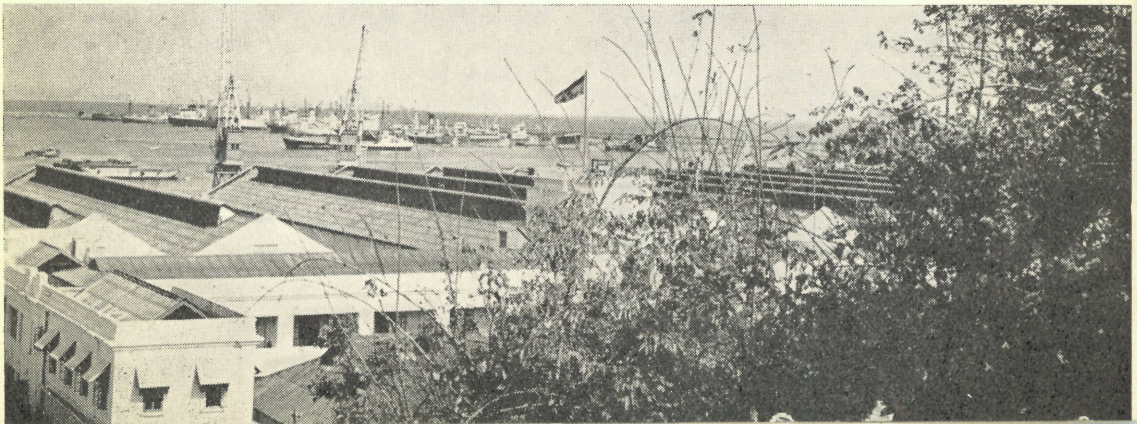
Return to Africa

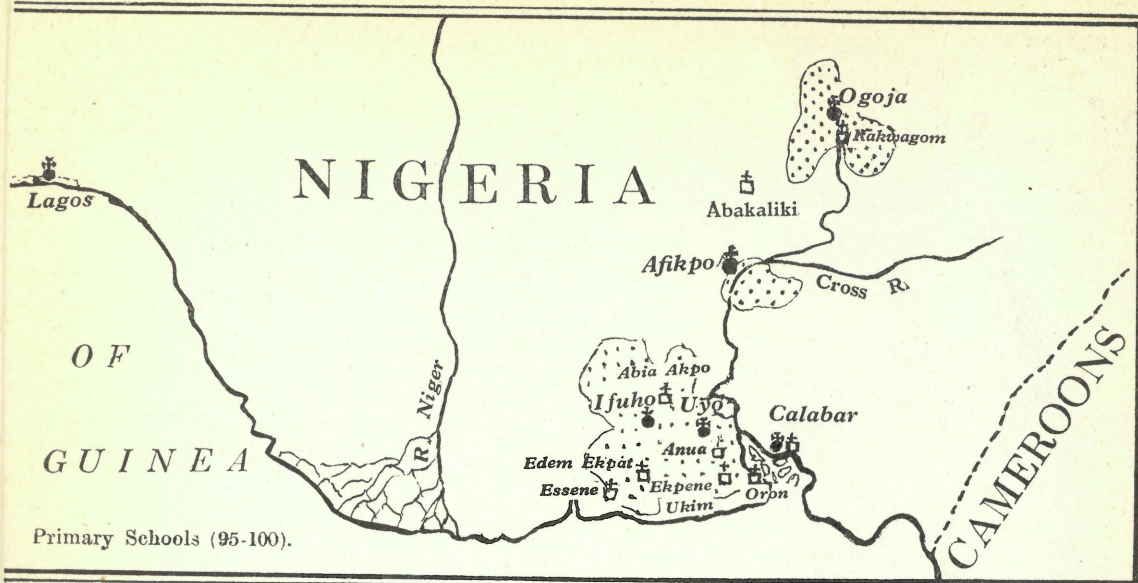
Some journeys are alive with memories as vivid as yesterday. This journey was one of them — and more. It was the rounding out of a sequence of events that had its beginning nearly thirty years ago when three Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus arrived in Africa for the first time. They were the pioneer Missionaries of the Society, the “foundation stones.” One of them, Rev. Mother M. Joachim, is now the Superior and head of the Teacher Training College in Takoradi, Ghana. The other two, Mother M. Edith and Mother M. Laurentia, in the designs of Providence, were to go

back to their homelands and enkindle the flame of their own Missionary zeal in the hearts of others. In 1930 Mother M. Laurentia had been the first American Missionary of the S.H.C.J. in Africa. In 1958 she became the first American Superior General of the Society since its Foundress, Mother Cornelia Connelly.

Few people have an opportunity of seeing the full-fruited results of the seeds they have helped to plant. When Reverend Mother Laurentia returned to Africa last autumn — after an absence of twenty-four years — for Visitation of the Missions with Reverend

Beautiful Takoradi Harbor where the visitors left the *Accra*.





Mother M. Frideswide, she found, as one old Chief said, "A fine forest where you had left a young tree!" From a solitary foundation at Calabar in Nigeria and a handful of bush stations, the work of the Holy Child has developed into a network of Convents and schools, reaching up even into Ghana.

It was early on the morning of October 13th that the Royal Mailboat *Accra* announced its presence in Takoradi harbor with a deep-throated whistle. Reverend Mother

Vicar and, fittingly enough, Reverend Mother M. Joachim, came on board to greet her... She was back in Africa, back among the people with whom she had expected to live her life. But there were no African faces here familiar to Reverend Mother. She was some thousand miles away from the spot in Nigeria where she had originally landed. This was Ghana, the former Gold Coast, newest among the nations of the world.

Joyous reunion... "Ma" Anna, an old friend of Reverend Mother General's at Ikot Ene, welcomes her and Reverend Mother M. Frideswide (left).





At
St. Anne's
Point ...
Fifth Form
Students
wave a
greeting.

Cape Coast

Since the Visitation was to begin at Cape Coast, fifty miles up the shoreline but minus so good a harbor, Reverend Mother Cyril drove down to get the Visitors from Rome. At 6 p.m. all the children (there are 330 boarders in this Secondary School at Cape Coast) lined the drive up the hill as far as the Science building. Mother M. Magdalen has sent a description of what followed: "Great cheers rose from the students as the car came up the drive. (Rilla, our dog, had to be forcibly prevented from joining in the welcome!) Then everyone on the compound gathered in the Chapel for a glad *Magnificat*."

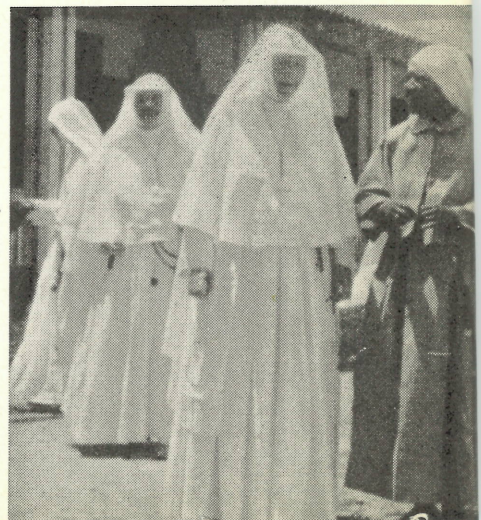
"The five-day visit was all too brief; it seemed to be over before it had really begun. One evening the children gave a performance of 'Papageno,' an adaptation of Mozart's opera 'The Magic Flute,' for which Father Gortz had painted an excellent backdrop. Afterwards, the secular staff were presented to

Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother Frideswide in the Convent parlor. Among them were two of our Old Girls, Mollie Booth, of Winckley Square and Margaret Louizo of Layton Hill, and a former mistress from Harrogate.

"The first reunion with an old African friend took place when Reverend Mother General visited the Handmaids in Saltpond, sixteen miles from Cape Coast. Mother M. Gertrude, who was the Superior there at the time, had known Reverend Mother in Calabar in 1930. The fervent welcome she had prepared, along with her Community and the women and children of the parish, was carried out in traditional African style... delightful entertainment, tribal dances, and with numerous 'dashes' of poultry, eggs and fruit.

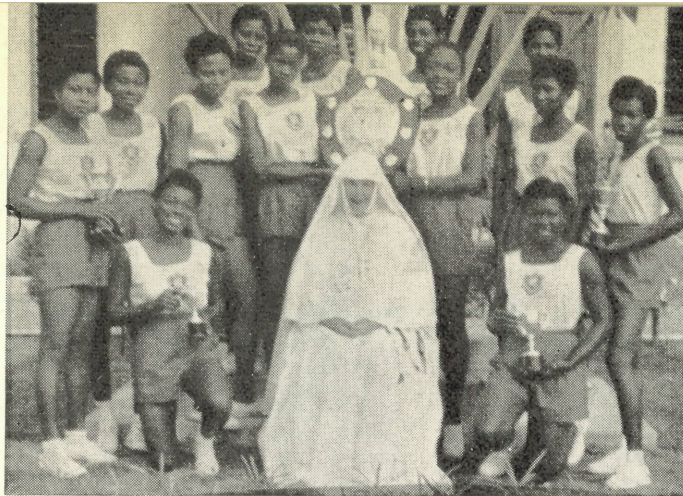
"There were visits also to His Grace, Archbishop Porter, and to the African Regional Commissioner, Mr. Hagan and his wife, both outstanding Catholics with a daughter in the school... On Saturday, October 17th, school history was made in Accra, the capital. Our athletic team had gone there to take part in the Inter-

... Meeting after 25 years.



Salt-
pond.

The
Holy
Child
Team
display



Their
Awards
to
Reverend
Mother
General.

Schools Athletic Competition which is the biggest event of its kind for Girls' Schools. The Holy Child team won the Challenge Shield (highest award) and four silver cups. (Two of our girls may compete in the Olympic Games.) They returned in triumph about 2 p. m. on Sunday. When the school heard the driver's joyful tooting and saw the lorry coming along the road, their excitement knew no bounds. Reverend Mother General and the Nuns came out to meet the winners who displayed their trophies with the widest smiles in all Ghana. Then, spontaneously, the team ran up the Chapel stairs to lay the awards on Our Lady's Altar where they remained the rest of the day.

"On Monday the Visitation came to an end when the car departed for Takoradi between lines of children sadly waving good-bye. One child's unstudied comment in a letter to a friend was: 'We have just had a visit from our Reverend Mother General. She is the most maternal of all the mothers I have seen and we were all very happy with her.'"

Takoradi

The Holy Child Training College here is beautifully situated on a hill overlooking the Atlantic. It is only

five years old but already the College has outgrown existing buildings and additions are being built. Dynamic little Mother Maria Assumpta conducted Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother M. Frideswide around her pride and joy - the "farm." It consists of a cocoanut grove at the beginning of the compound; an orchard of citrus trees, mangoes, pawpaws, guava, and avocado; vegetable and flower gardens - and varieties of live-stock.

At 6:30 one evening Class A1 presented "Lady Precious Stream" with verve and no little finesse. The play was given in an outdoor setting and lasted 2½ hours. Reverend Mother General delighted the performers when she said she wished she could take the cast back to Rome with her. An unscheduled scene occurred when the two Convent dogs, Sandy and Susie, resented vociferously the entrance of a canine visitor. All three raced backstage, yapping and growling, but the cast ignored the intrusion with admirable control. Finally the trespasser was triumphantly ejected from the stage by Sandy. In the heat of the chase, however, both pursuer and pursued overstepped the mark and shot out dramatically into space. After this Susie and Sandy were tied to the legs of the Nuns' chairs and went



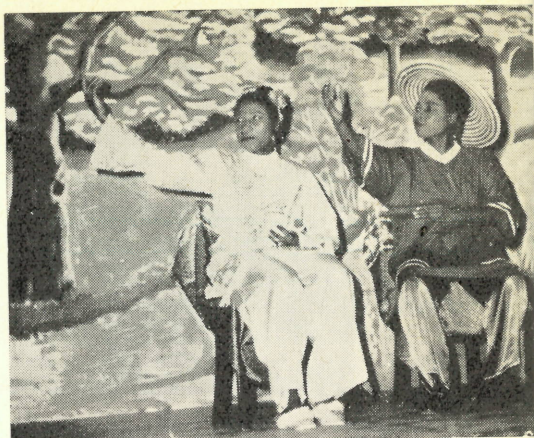
**'LADY
PRECIOUS
STREAM'**

**Property Man (Stella
Obeng) and Attendant
(Eliz. Gbogblogbe).**

peacefully to sleep while the play went on. (Later, performances were given in Cape Coast, and for the Government Secondary Technical School by request of the Headmaster. In February the play was presented to the general public and won a tremendous ovation.)

Lagos

A two-hour plane trip from Ghana brought the visitors to Lagos, a teeming Nigerian city built on a low island. Once before, long years



... "And so, good-bye" ... Precious Stream (Anna Dsane), daughter of the Prime Minister, is banished from her father's house for marrying the poor gardener, Hsieh (Faustina Wilson).



Hsieh, on his valiant steed, rides off to make his fortune in the wars of the Western Regions.

ago, Reverend Mother General had passed this way - but there had been no big Holy Child Secondary



Family Council ... Wang, the Prime Minister (Rose Gboney) with his wife (Eliz. Gozo), sons-in-law (Eugenia Simpson and Rose Adjaye), and daughters (Eliz. Krakue and Cornelia Bartels).

School then ... no International School for younger children where some ten different nationalities are represented. In the concert given for the guests one Junior recitation showed little boys with pictures of various queens: Elizabeth, Mary Queen of Scots, Victoria, and finally Our Lady. Each boy extolled the virtues of his queen. The kilted defenders of Mary Stuart were Africans, while the champion of Our Lady was a freckle-faced lad from the North of Ireland.



Off to Lagos by plane.

Calabar

This was the first of the Holy Child Foundations. As the airplane circled the field before landing it was quite easy to distinguish Reverend Mother Damien and Mother M. Audrey waiting below. With them were three St. Patrick Fathers, also waiting to greet Reverend Mother General with a message of welcome from Bishop James Moy-

nagh who was up-country. One of them, Father P. J. Costelloe, had been among that first group of Fathers and S.H.C.J. brought out in 1930 by Bishop Shanahan.

Each one in the Calabar Community has joined in giving an account of Reverend Mother's recent visit. "The route back from the airport was, of course, unfamiliar to her," they wrote, "but once she entered the 'town proper' she was on well-known territory and enjoyed seeing the old landmarks again.

"When the car entered the Convent compound that she had helped to plan and plant so many years ago, two rows of enthusiastically waving children greeted her. The tiny 'red-checked' Infants first, then the Junior and Senior Primaries in brown, and—surrounding the Calvary—the Secondaries in blue. After welcoming Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother

Reverend Mother General with small friends at Lagos admires Convent dog.





... With the
Community at
Calabar, and
Carol Brandt,
Lay Helper from
California.

M. Frideswide a hush fell over the whole group as they went to Chapel for the *Magnificat*. Reverend Mother M. Laurentia was back in her well-loved Calabar!

"On the following day there was a special Mass at the Cathedral offered for Reverend Mother's intentions by the Church Committee and sung by the children's choir. The old Convent in which the first S.H.C.J. lived is still in existence. But now the ground floor is used for offices and printing rooms managed by the U.S. Lay Helpers who are rendering such valuable service to the Mission. It was amazing to see a big press rolling out the monthly magazine, *Catholic Life*, in what had been a classroom! In the evening the members of the Committee presented her with a handsome brass tray with her name engraved on it.

"On Sunday St. Theresa's Old Girls, the Alumnae, and the Catholic Women's Association had a special Mass offered at the Cathedral for their beloved 'Mother - who - comes - back - to - us.' (If you could have seen the

faces of the dear old Ma's who remembered her you would really have been touched.) Later in the day these women, wearing smart uniforms, walked in procession to the Convent, singing and carrying banners and led by a woman bearing a huge 'Welcome Reverend Mother General' sign.

"The impressive Presentation by the different Catholic Societies took place at 5:30 in the Primary School. The presidents of the different groups read their addresses, then came the offering of special gifts. Chief among these was a black velvet tea-cosy of immense proportions worked all over with fine beads. This kind of bead work is done only by certain Efik families, especially by the famous Duke family, and it is considered a great honor to be presented with a specimen of it - the Queen, on her visit to Calabar, received just such a black velvet bead embroidered tea-cosy!

"Because their stay was so short, the schedule for the visitors was, of necessity, 'packed and trimmed at the corners.' One

morning they began at 9 a.m. by visiting our 3-stream, 19-room Primary School on the Convent grounds. (In the Infant School, Reverend Mother thrilled the little people by speaking to them in *Efik*.) Then they were carried off to see a rural school while the Infant School was turned into a 'concert hall.' The entertainment began at noon with an address by Roseline Ekpenyong, whom Reverend Mother was particularly pleased to see because she had taught her mother in the opening days of this same school.

"The next day it was our new Secondary School's turn (Marian Hill.) After their tour of the buildings, our guests went to the little Atu Street School close by where the Headmistress, Mrs. Magdalen Efana, is an old friend of Reverend Mother's. The little ones acted out the five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary in *Efik* and 'Our Lady,' a tiny Class II child, sang the *Magnificat* in that language. Back again at Marian Hill the students gave their concert, 'An Hour in Shakespeare's Time,' which included scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*.

"Meanwhile His Lordship, Bishop Moynagh, had returned from up-country to welcome Reverend Mother

General in person. He had been ordained a priest only a short time when he came to Africa with the little group shepherded by Bishop Shanahan in 1930."

On November 5th the "Reverend Mothers from Rome" set off early to visit Ikot Ene, a small station in the bush where Reverend Mother General and a companion had lived at one time with some of the Calabar boarders. Now they have a resident priest and a nice little Church in this jungle clearing. The two Medical Missionaries of Mary who run the maternity home and dispensary there, greeted the travelers with the genial hospitality of the M.M.M.'s, and a large delegation of villagers came to see Reverend Mother General. One old lady was so overjoyed to see her again that she embraced her three times saying in *Efik*, "She is my mother!" This was Ma Anna who had been a mainstay for Mother M. Laurentia in those long-ago days.

Back in Calabar the visitors just had time to say good-bye to the Community before boarding the launch for Oron. This was a trip that Mother M. Laurentia must have made a hundred times going back and forth to the bush stations during her five years on the Missions. Every curve of the river as

At Calabar Primary School each pupil brought an orange, banana or pawpaw for the visitors... which resulted in a shortage of containers!



it swept along between dense mangrove swamps, must have seemed an old acquaintance.

Uyo

The Cornelia Connelly Secondary School here has a wide open compound, remote and quiet after the bustle of Lagos and Calabar. The Fifth Forms were in the throes of revision for the School Certificate Examination, still taken in West Africa in December, the end of the school year. The whole student body was preparing for their Prize Day the following week, at which *Twelfth Night* was to be produced. "They gave an advance performance for our guests," wrote Mother M. Kieran, director of the Dramatics Club. "Shakespeare is far from neglected in these parts!"

"During their brief five days here, Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother M. Frideswide paid only two outside visits: To Anua, on the invitation of Reverend Mother M. Martin (Foundress of the Medical Missionaries of Mary)



Reverend Mother M. Martin, M.M.M.,
with African tribal dancers.

who was then visiting her Convents also. She took them all around the Hospital and our Reverend Mother General saw again the little Convent where she had lived for some time in the early days of Anua. Now the Handmaids have a big permanent school on this Mission compound.

"The second outing was to St. Mary's Technical School at Ekpene Ukim which was organized by Reverend Mother M. Bernard last year. There was much to see as the girls have been working hard at their embroidery and weaving, along with the other lessons, under the direction of Sister M. Monica, H.H.C.J. The people of the village have been most co-operative in helping with sand and gravel to provide new cottages, weaving shed and classrooms for them.

"When Reverend Mother General addressed our own school on Tuesday morning, she gave them some interesting firsthand information about our Holy Father which delighted them. (One child had asked, before her arrival, if Reverend Mother General was 'for the Mothers what the Pope is for us'!) "

Ifuho

All the works of the Society in Africa are represented in this Vicariate House. It is like a little village in itself. And it was here that Mother M. Laurentia came upon the choicest fruit of the Missions - the Novitiate for the Handmaids. As she made the rounds of the Primary Schools conducted by them, the good work they are doing among their own people became very evident. The influence of the Handmaids obviously extends far beyond the classroom and into the homes of the children.



A visit to the new Church at Urua Akpan with Reverend Mother Vicar ... Father T. Grealy (right) and Father James Byrne conduct tour of Mission compound.

Innumerable other S.H.C.J. rural schools, conducted by our African lay teachers, seem to stem off the main roads or peer suddenly out of the bush. Some have excellent permanent buildings; others are still in the mud-and-wattle stage all depending on the co-operation of our Pylon contributors and of the villagers. But one and all they bear the unmistakable stamp of the Holy Child. "We try to give the children the same spirit we received in the Holy Child Training Colleges," one African teacher said simply.

Afikpo

There are two such Training Colleges up in Afikpo and Ogoja. Afikpo lies on a gently sloping hill

with an incredibly beautiful view. In addition to the College, Reverend Mother M. Bridget supervises more than twenty bush schools. But the roads were so bad that they could visit very few of them. The school at Uburu, demolished in a storm a year ago, has been rebuilt and the little concert given there was in the nature of an "official opening." The visitors had first hand experience also of the exigencies of shopping here when they discovered one has to go 90 miles for a pound of butter. On their trip to Enugu to see the Major Seminary, Reverend Mother Bridget introduced them to the only "African super market" in the vicinity when she bought supplies and put them inside the cold box in the car...

Piccins with
new-found
friend.



Ogoja cook
smiles her
approval.

At the Handmaids' big school in Abakaliki Reverend Mother M. Aloysia had prepared a heartwarming welcome; she had been one of the original four Handmaids when Reverend Mother General was on the Missions. A few days later at Kakwagom another member of that early group, Reverend Mother M. Ignatia - whose work includes giving religious instruction in a leper village - repeated the welcome in the same jubilant manner. (The other two are Reverend Mother M. St. John and Reverend Mother M. Gertrude.)

Ogoja

This is the newest of the Holy Child foundations in Africa. The final painting and polishing for the Visitation caused one of the children to exclaim, "It makes the house to be as shine on the sun."

A dream of the Community

materialized during this visitation. On Sunday, Bishop McGettrick, who had been the youngest in that intrepid little group in 1930, laid the cornerstone for the new Chapel in a ceremony attended by villagers from miles around. "From the Tabernacle in this Chapel," he told them, "Our Lord will look out and bless the people round about as far as the eye can see, even to the Obudu mountains."

The evening before, the students had given a presentation of their Christmas play, "One Night in Bethlehem." Mother M. Romana provides a vivid behind-the-scenes account of it. "The performance took place on our front verandah beginning at 8 p.m. Our house was the 'Inn', our path the street in Bethlehem. The men had erected a palm tree shed on the right for the 'cave' and at the proper moment two palm branches were removed to reveal the Nativity Scene. Bush lamps painted red



After laying of the
cornerstone ... Bishop
Thomas McGettrick and
Fr. Walsh visit the
convent.



Everywhere the plea was the same... "Please, Reverend Mother, give us more Sisters... give us more schools..."

and hidden in mango leaves substituted for footlights. It was quite effective and somehow strangely moving."

Another event of touching significance occurred when a deputation of Holy Child lay teachers called on Reverend Mother General - just as a similar deputation had at Afikpo for the same reason. They asked if they might give an offering toward the expenses of the Cause. "We, your African children," they said, "would like to feel that we have had some small share in the great work, and we hope to live to see the glorious day on which our dearest Reverend Mother Cornelia Connelly will be canonized."

(In 1858 Mother Connelly wrote to her brother from St. Leonards, "I have offered to go on the missions

to Japan - if Our Lord will let me - I so much wish to go if possible." How her heart would have gone out to these African Missions!)

Back to Ifuho

Three events of major importance at Ifuho provided the climax of the Visitation.

In late December delegates of the Handmaids began coming to the "mother compound" for their first General Chapter. After Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, they met again in the Chapel under the presidency of Bishop Moynagh to elect their first Superior General. Strains of the *Te Deum* announced that the election was over the

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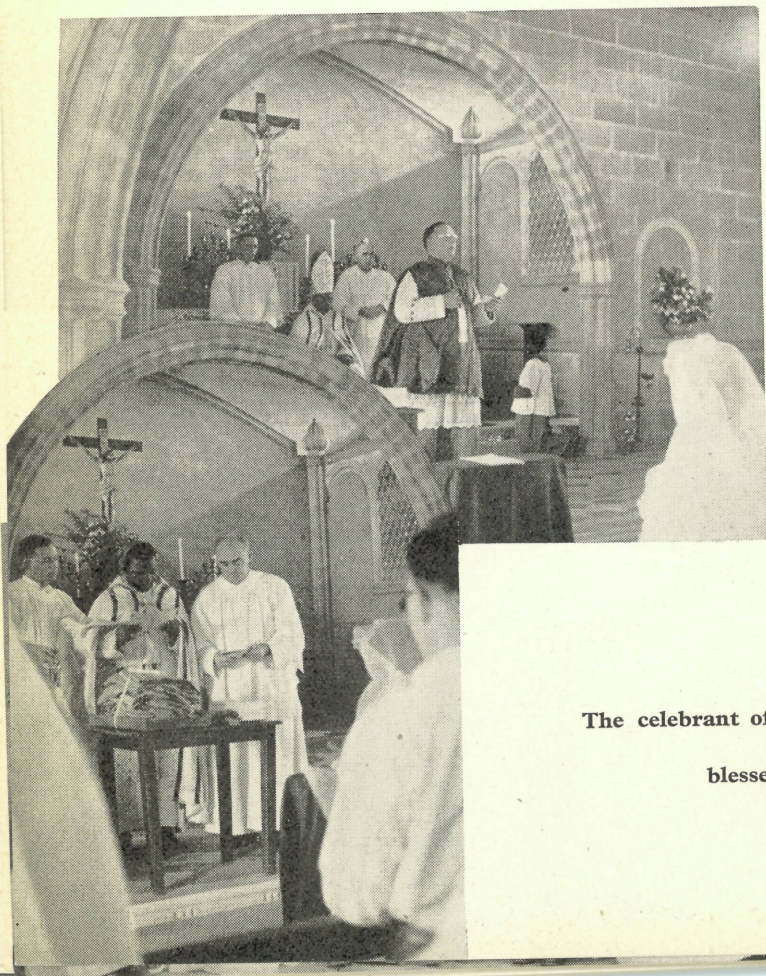
After the first General Chapter of the Handmaids... Bishop Moynagh and Rev. Mother General with the newly elected Superior General, Rev. M.M. Gertrude, H.H.C.J. The Council members are: Rev. M.M. Thérèse, Rev. M.M. Aloysia, Rev. M. St. John, Rev. M. Elizabeth.



**Clothing Ceremony at Ifuho...
The Postulants in their bridal
gowns before receiving the
religious habit.**



**The procession
of Sisters
with lighted candles
enters the Chapel.**



**Bishop McGettrick
delivers the
address.**

**The celebrant of the Mass, Bishop Ekandem,
blesses the gray habits.**



The Heart of the Missions... The Prince of Peace Chapel where the Handmaids dedicate their lives to God...

...Relatives and friends at breakfast following the ceremony.



A work of art... Cutting the beautiful four-tiered cake made by the Novices presents a pleasant problem.



A happy occasion... Bishop Moynagh and Reverend Mother General with their associate of long ago, Reverend Mother M. Gertrude, who has just been made the first Superior General of the Handmaids.

Nuns learned that Rev. Mother M. Gertrude had been chosen.

Nothing could have given more joy or been more appropriate as part of the grand finale of the journey than this evidence of autonomy, this "coming of age in Christ" of the Handmaids' Society.

The second event occurred two days later in Calabar. It was the opening of the new Convent at Marian Hill - and the installation of the Handmaids in the old Calabar Convent. In his beautiful address Bishop Moynagh gave the keynote of the day, "The formation of this African Congregation is perhaps the greatest achievement of the S.H.C.J. It will be a lasting memorial to Mother M. Amadeus, a saintly woman who in 1930 sent Nuns to work in this diocese, amongst whom was the present Reverend Mother General who is with us today."

Fresh lustre was added to that memorial on January 10th in the Prince of Peace Chapel at Ifuho. On that day the Handmaids held three great ceremonies connected with religious life: some of them made their Perpetual Vows, the Professed Elect took First Vows, and the Postulants were clothed in the distinctive gray habit. In the afternoon a new Postulant received the hood.

When Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother M. Frideswide boarded the plane to fly back to Rome on the following Tuesday, it was with keen appreciation of the work of the Nuns, and a deep sense of gratitude to God for all His Blessings.

Students of Marian Hill wave good-bye to Reverend Mother General and Reverend Mother M. Frideswide at the end of a memorable visit.

