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## JOURNEY TO THE NEW WORLD

by Sister Mary Cecile, H.H.C.J. and Sister Mary Vincent, H.H.C.J.

It was in 1961 that we first heard that the Holy Child nuns in America had very kindly awarded scholarships to two Sisters of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus to study in their college at Rosemont, Pennsylvania.

The news was very exciting. Until then our Sisters had always been sent to study in England or Ireland. Now, two of us were to cross the Atlantic! Who would be the lucky ones? We wondered and wondered...

Sister Mary Cecile knew that she would never be asked to go because she had just returned from spending two years at Digby-Stuart College in England. And Sister Mary Vincent said to herself, "Not *you*. After all, you have not the necessary qualifications for it." So, on Reverend Mother General's Feast, when the first hint was given that she was to go to America, she thought they were joking and gave it no second thought. When Reverend Mother General repeated

it after some weeks, she was shocked. She had no idea what life was like outside of Nigeria among strangers and far away from home. But a talk with Reverend Mother calmed her and she saw it as a privilege she did not deserve.

We kept telling ourselves that Reverend Mother might have to change her mind. But when we started to make our grey travelling habits, we realized that our going to the United States was certain.

On the first of September, 1962, we left Port Harcourt by air for Rome, the first Handmaids to have this opportunity apart from those going to Rome as pilgrims. The fortnight we spent in this city at the Mother House of our Holy Child Mothers - how can we describe it? They made it so wonderful for us, arranging for us to see the Holy Father and receive his blessing... to visit the great churches and historical monuments... and even to see the Convent where



Mother Cornelia Connelly was a postulant more than a hundred years ago. The days went too quickly in Rome, but at the same time we were very anxious to see the New World.

From Rome we flew to London and from there it took us only seven hours to fly to New York. All we remember of that great place are the air terminals for we took another plane to Philadelphia. It was almost midnight when we finally arrived at Rosemont College. Reverend Mother and all the nuns were waiting for us and oh! the joy of that happy welcome! It was like being home once more, for life is the same everywhere, especially for a religious. All of Sister Mary Vincent's fears vanished and Sister Mary Cecile knew she would never forget this welcome.

We both felt that the nuns had been waiting and anxiously longing to have us with them, and each day we realize more and more how true this is.



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Our impressions of Pennsylvania (we will not say America for we have not seen other places) is that it is a country rich in natural resources and the people know how to make good use of them. Life is very fast compared to Nigeria; we think people there have reasons for going fast.

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*Rome... At the Trinità dei Monti where Mother Cornelia Connelly was a postulant more than a hundred years ago...*

1. A view of St. Peter's from the entrance to the Sacred Heart Convent.
2. In the beautiful garden where Mother Connelly must have walked so often.
3. A visit to the shrine of *Mater Admirabilis*.





At Rosemont College... 'All settled in'

Rosemont is really a very busy place. The college is like a big family where individual students receive every care and attention, sometimes more than what they must have at home. From our experience, the Holy Child spirit is at its best here; the girls are friendly and helpful so that we have nothing to fear now. There are 550 students in the college and each one gets as much attention as if she were the only one. We really have learnt a lot by this.

On the first of October our American Sisters helped us to celebrate the second anniversary of

Nigerian Independence and shared in our joy. Then we shared in theirs on October fifteenth, at the Mass which opened the festivities of the Centenary of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in America. It's a nice coincidence that their Centenary Year is the Silver Jubilee Year of the H.H.C.J.

After our first experience of a "white Christmas" and all the joys it brought, we feel more than "settled in". Sister Mary Vincent now thinks of her four years' stay here as years of adventure. Sister Mary Cecile finds it a special blessing that while she is here in the United States her brother Michael is in Rome studying for the priesthood.

These four years will enable us to help our own people much more when we go back, to lead them in the way of Truth and the knowledge of God. For our Congregation it is a great help in furthering Christ's Kingdom in Nigeria, which is fast progressing. With the progress comes the demand for higher education. As teaching Sisters, we need better qualifications to take our stand in the education of Nigerian women; for it is chiefly through education that we get to souls.

#### A POSTSCRIPT FROM THE COLLEGE

*This account of the impressions of Rosemont which Sister Mary Cecile and Sister Mary Vincent have written for The Pylon needs to be complemented by the impressions that Rosemont has been forming of them. It was indeed with anticipation and great sisterly longing that the Rosemont community waited for them. The students, too, who had shared from the year before the secret of their coming, gave them a round of applause when they were first introduced. By their strong religious spirit, their eagerness to enter into every aspect of the life at Rosemont - helping in the sacristy, engaging in all the academic activities, and sharing in the spiritual joy of the Feasts of the Church - they are bearing witness to the strength and vigor of the new Africa, to the apostolic spirit of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, and to the Good News of Christ.*