

**THE INTEGRATION OF BLACK AND COLOURED SISTERS IN  
THE CONGREGATION OF THE KING WILLIAM'S TOWN  
DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CATHARINE OF SIENA - THE  
PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.**

**by**

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**The Integration of Black and Coloured Sisters in the Congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters of St Catharine of Siena - the Past, the Present and the Future**

by

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**Degree: Master of Theology**

**Subject: Systematic Theology**

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**SUMMARY**

**The Dominican Sisters of St Catharine of Siena arrived in South Africa in 1877. White women joined the congregation. In 1928 the first black woman entered the congregation but because of the policies affecting the different race groups in South Africa, the full integration of black and coloured women was not achieved until 1983. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the integration of the black and coloured sisters. Chapter 2 traces the origin of the congregation and looks at its development. A brief overview of the story of the black sisters is given in Chapter 3. In the next chapter archival sources are used to understand what happened. Interviews that were conducted with some of the sisters involved in the story are given in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 there is a look at the current situation and some of the implications for the future as the process of integration continues.**

**KEY TERMS**

admissions policy for black sisters  
apartheid  
changes in religious life  
church history  
criteria for final vows  
diocesan congregation  
Dominican sisters  
gender roles  
Group Areas Act  
hierarchy  
integration of different cultural groups  
language differences and problems  
organic governance  
patriarchal system  
pontifical congregation

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I declare that The Integration of Black and Coloured Sisters in the Congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters of St Catharine of Siena - the Past, the Present and the Future is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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19/9/2002

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**THE INTEGRATION OF BLACK AND COLOURED SISTERS IN THE  
CONGREGATION OF THE KING WILLIAM'S TOWN DOMINICAN SISTERS OF  
ST CATHARINE OF SIENA - THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE.**

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

**THE AIM OF THIS STUDY**

The aim of this study is to try to understand within their historical, cultural and sociological contexts the events that occurred with the requests of black and coloured women to become members of the Congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters of St Catharine of Siena. White girls had difficulty in becoming religious sisters, but young black and coloured women in South Africa had even more of a struggle not only to join the ranks of the sisters, but also to be accepted fully once they had become professed sisters. Various factors, not the least of which was the apartheid era, and the Catholic church's response to it, affected the situation. Nevertheless even before apartheid began, different cultures, customs, languages and attitudes among sisters of different ethnic groups hindered the integration process. Today apartheid is over, but the struggle towards the integration of the various cultural groups continues. It is my belief that there were then and still are now several factors which make the integration of the different ethnic groups of women in the congregation difficult.

It is my hope that an exploration of the history of events and factors will provide a learning to enable us to cope better with the future integration of black, white and coloured sisters. At present young black and coloured women continue to join the ranks, but it is my experience that differences in lifestyles, cultures, languages, levels of education and expectations continue to hamper the integration of all racial groups into our congregation. What must change, what must we let go of, so that the integration that is supposed to be happening in society also happens in religious life? If we are to be relevant and if we are to be a sign to others, we shall have to continue to find more successful ways of integrating the various cultural groups that make up religious life.

This study aims to show what has and what has not worked, what still presents problems and what we can possibly do about the future.

## BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to explain that the King William's Town Dominican sisters, the "Kings", were not the first Dominican sisters to arrive in Southern Africa. They arrived in the Eastern Cape in King William's Town on 22 October 1877 (Gouws 1977:17). A group of Irish sisters, the Cabra Dominican sisters, had arrived in Cape Town in 1863 (Boner 1998:31). By 1900 three other congregations viz. the Rhodesian Dominican sisters (Gouws 1977:40-41), the Oakford Dominican sisters (Gouws 1977:66) and the Newcastle Dominican sisters (Gouws 1977: 81) had been established. The founding members of the Rhodesian sisters and the Oakford sisters were King William's Town sisters who had been asked by bishops in Rhodesia and Natal to give their assistance to the church in these areas. The Newcastle sisters in their turn were originally Oakford sisters who moved to Newcastle to provide help to the church in the Newcastle area. Because Bishops in the various vicariates needed sisters to help with the work of evangelising, teaching and nursing and because the sisters were unwilling to refuse to go and because distances from the original motherhouse in King William's Town were so great and travelling by ox wagon so difficult, the Oakford and Rhodesian sisters very soon became independent of their founding "King" sisters. The stories of the separations show that the sisters who left the founding King congregation to start new houses did so with mixed feelings. They did not always want to leave their founding group, but women in those days did not easily refuse the requests of the patriarchal, ecclesiastical authorities made to them through the person of the Mother General or Mother Superior.

At the turn of the century there were thus five different Dominican congregations of women in Southern Africa, one in Rhodesia, the present day Zimbabwe, and four in South Africa. What is of interest is that subsequently three more congregations of Dominican women were established in South Africa. The first of these, consisting mostly of black sisters, was established in 1939 and came to be known as "The Congregation of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary of Montebello (Brain & Denis 1999:60-61). The second was a group of Contemplative Dominican women or nuns, as opposed to sisters, who came to South Africa and settled in Senekal in 1985 (Brain & Denis 1999:95). The third group consisted of only three sisters who came from the USA in 1993. These sisters are called the Adrian Dominican sisters (Brain & Denis 1999:96).

Dominican men had been present in Southern Africa since the last decade of the fifteenth century. Eventually black and coloured men also joined their ranks and they in turn became involved in the training of indigenous clergy (Denis 1998:202-237).

This thesis deals specifically with the story of the black and coloured sisters in the King congregation.

#### THE UNIQUE OUTCOMES OF THIS STUDY

Gouws has written briefly about the integration of black and coloured sisters into the congregation of the King William's Town Dominican sisters to which I belong. Her book, *All for God's People* was completed in 1977, the year the congregation celebrated its centenary. Although much progress towards integration had happened by then, I am not aware that a critical analysis of events up to that time has been made. Certainly much has happened since 1977 and those events too need to be recorded and analysed. At present young black and coloured women are still joining our ranks and I hope that this study will prove fruitful in not only learning from the experiences in this field in the past, but also in providing healing for those whose lives were deeply affected by the hurts of the past.

#### SOURCES:

##### 1. INTERVIEWS, INTERVIEWEES AND INTERVIEWER

I have interviewed black, white and coloured sisters who were part of the integration process. Sisters were affected in different ways e.g. some of our white sisters never ever had to live in the same convent as black sisters. This happened if, for example, a group of white sisters ran a white school in a particular area. We will see that most of our black sisters for various reasons stayed in certain convents in the Eastern Cape. This meant that it was very seldom that some of the sisters of the different racial groups came into contact with each other. Some times an elderly sister who had worked all her life in a Transvaal convent would retire to a convent in the Eastern Cape and so come into more contact with our black sisters, but until then she would not really have come into much contact with our black sisters.

Some of the stories the sisters tell cannot be verified, but many can. Hopefully through the story

telling, the process of healing which started in the congregation some five years ago will continue. Already there exist at least seven story telling groups in the TOZ Region of the congregation<sup>1</sup>. Sisters of all ages, races and ministries meet in facilitated groups of about six to eight at monthly to three monthly intervals and tell their stories to each other. It is our experience that this sharing bonds and heals the sisters. Hurts that occurred through the years were not only between sisters of different colours. In the past rules in convents were very strict and sisters who were postulants, novices or in temporary profession could be sent home for health reasons or for reasons that were not disclosed to the other members. When this happened the other sisters in formation often feared that they too could be sent home and had very little idea of what offence might cause such a step. Lack of information meant disempowerment. Today women trying their vocations are asked to be tested for AIDS and there is a question about the legality of such a procedure in South Africa where having AIDS is now being seen as a disability and not something that can stop someone from being employed. Congregations of religious persons, however, do not see themselves as employers but as people who follow a way of life. Canon Law demands that people be healthy to follow religious life. There is obviously a clash with Civil Law here and research is currently being done and dialogues held about this painful but real issue.

It is not only between blacks and whites or between coloureds and blacks that hurts were experienced. The Kings still are predominantly German speaking, but although there are sisters belonging to 15 different language groups in the congregation, the German culture has for a long time dominated the others. This has caused many unhappy times to some e.g. some of the Irish sisters who joined the King ranks. The Irish sisters had a different cultural mind set from that of the German sisters. The Dutch sisters suffered too and there are stories of their painful

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<sup>1</sup> The Congregation of King William's Dominican Sisters is divided into five regions. The sisters in Bolivia and Ecuador make up the South American Region. The sisters in Germany make up the second region. Theoretically, for legal reasons, the German region is classified as a province. The sisters in England, Ireland, Switzerland and Holland make up the West European Region, known as the West European Area. In Southern Africa there are two regions, the Cape Region in the south eastern Cape and the TOZ region in the north. The TOZ region is made up of sisters in what was the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and Zimbabwe. The first letters of the latter places gave rise to the abbreviation, TOZ. In some regions there are very few sisters, in others there are more. At present the congregation has about 353 sisters in the five regions.

experiences at the time of World War II. What happens in the story telling groups is confidential, but that black, coloureds and whites suffered greatly because of colour and cultural differences is very evident. Some of the interviews will deal with this matter. It is not always easy for sisters to tell their stories. Fear of recrimination, of being disloyal or of bringing discredit into the congregation still exists. Like so many other women, most sisters accepted their sufferings as part of their life. The theological ideal of suffering the way Jesus did was very much part of their thinking and experience (Brain & Denis 1999:265-275).

The wonder of it all is that in spite of the hardships they endured, they accomplished so much. Their establishment of schools, a teacher's training college for black women at Village Main in Johannesburg and for coloured women in Cradock, hospitals, mission stations and clinics is well documented in the book by Gouws. Their entering into the fight for open schools and their new apostolates once most of them moved out of the schools and hospitals, needs yet to be recorded.. Many had become too old to teach or nurse, others moved into pastoral work. There was an increasing trend which continues today to study theology, spirituality, catechetics and psychology among other disciplines and to join tertiary institutions as lecturers. Sisters also moved into fields such as massage, podiatry and facilitation of leadership work in both their own congregation and in others. Sisters have become increasingly computer literate. They also act as catalysts in the parishes where they work e.g. in the parish of St Francis Xavier in Martindale, sisters speak up for the rights of women and keep on agitating for the language of the liturgy to be inclusive.

At present, 2001, there are three black King sisters who are in the stage of temporary profession before they eventually make their final vows. There is also a young coloured King sister and a young black King sister in the FEDOSA (Federation of Dominicans of Southern Africa) novitiate in Vanderbijlpark.. This novitiate, established in 1996 in Geluksdal, near Brakpan, and moved to Vanderbijlpark in 2000, is a common one for members of the King William's Town, Oakford, Newcastle and Cabra Dominican sisters. It is called the FEDOSA novitiate although there are at present neither Cabra nor Montebello novices in it. Cabra has at present no novices but the reason for the separateness of the Montebello novices needs to be discovered and an explanation of the situation it represents attempted. The novices of the men or Brethren as they called are in a separate novitiate although the two groups do meet regularly for input and reflection.

The Kings also have two black pre-novices in their pre-novitiate in Eldorado Park. All seven of the young sisters in initial formation have stories to offer and it is my hope that these will throw more light on the current situation.<sup>2</sup>

I myself am presently engaged as a formator to the three King sisters in the stage of temporary profession and although I have taught black children for many years, it is only in the last four years that I have had an opportunity to work as a formator of young black women. I ask myself what the correct stance is for me to take. Is there a correct stance? These young women are not children and a patronising, overbearing stance will not do. The three sisters belong to various cultures viz. Shona, Ndebele and Xhosa. As a white South African, I come to my work as a formator carrying the baggage of a past spent in a country where I too accepted the status quo and did not challenge apartheid enough. My interaction with sisters in temporary profession, not only those belonging to the Kings, but also to the Oakford, Newcastle and Montebello congregations and my interaction with their formators who are both black and white is a valuable source of information towards this study.

An interesting development began in the King congregation in 1986 when leadership decided to institute what was called the Process Approach to Planned Change or PAPC. I was one of the original 12 sisters who underwent training to go among the sisters in their various communities and attempt a process of change by empowering the sisters through facilitating the sharing of their feelings and dreams and helping them to plan together for their community life and apostolic life. Our white sisters were always very task directed in their approach to work but the sharing of feelings and the development of the relational side of our lives needed attention. It is interesting to note here that our black sisters come from cultures which uphold ubuntu values, cultures where the relational side of life is all important.

Leadership underwent separate training which was similar to but different from that of the 12 sisters who were sent among the ranks as catalysts. Many changes came about in the

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<sup>2</sup> There are four stages to formation: discernment of a vocation, pre-novitiate, novitiate and temporary profession. There is an Initial Formation Team which has five members. Each of the above four stages is headed by a formator and the fifth person is an adviser to the team.

congregation as a result of this step. One of the most visible, though not the most important, was that many sisters abandoned their veils! All the sisters in the congregation were affected by the changes that were instituted in the late 1980s and the result was that every sister, irrespective of her race, age, colour, work, language or ability was empowered. Differences were embraced as a sign of strength, in theory at any rate. Today we still use many of the learnings of the PAPC e.g. meetings start with what is known as Presence and Prayer, a time where sisters share their feelings about how they come to the meeting and what they hopes are for the outcome of the meeting and they then share about the particular extract that has been chosen for prayer. Prayer readings are no longer only scriptural. Symbols and rituals have been developed to capture moods of celebrations. Purposes for meetings are set up before the time and an overview and time frame of how they are to proceed is made. At the end of a meeting or function an evaluation is made by all, not only orally, but also in writing when necessary so that mistakes can be turned into learnings. In short through group work and minutes, a great deal of sharing of feelings and facts occurs and of course this is very different to the so-called “blind obedience “ of the past. What’s more, I think it is much more in keeping with the way Jesus empowered the women of his time.

## 2. ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

The archives of the “King” congregation in Johannesburg have provided me with some information. Each house of sisters has over the years since 1877 kept annals. These do not always deal with the reality of what happened, especially if the event being written about reflects something unpleasant in people’s characters. Also in the archives are the Council Minutes relating to the integration of black and coloured sisters with the white sisters. This process and its various incidents covered the years from the time the first postulant entered the congregation in 1928 to the time of final unity in 1980 (Brain & Denis 1999:60).

## 3. PUBLISHED SOURCES

Gouws in *All for God’s People* has briefly covered the story. She was aware when she was writing her book in time for the centenary in 1977, that the apartheid regime was very much in full swing. The fact is that on the whole the Catholic Church, like many other churches at the time, was reluctant to rock the boat and speak up against the gross injustices being perpetrated.



Stuart Bate's chapter, *The Church Under Apartheid*, tells the story of how it was not until the 1970s that the Catholic Church became more united in its opposition to apartheid (Brain & Denis 1999:151-186).

Kathleen Boner's book, *Dominican Women, A Time To Speak*, covers the history of St Rose's Congregation (Boner 1998:269-280). The latter was a congregation of Coloured sisters whom the Cabra sisters had trained and with whom they had worked. Full amalgamation of the white Cabra sisters and the Coloured sisters of St Rose's Congregation was achieved in 1974.

In the book on the history of their congregation, *Being driven forward*, we learn that the Newcastle Congregation started a novitiate for black sisters in 1934 but the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda decided that all "such Native Sisterhoods should be diocesan under the jurisdiction of the Local Ordinary" (Cleary, Murphy & McGlynn 1997:100). The result was that the 14 black sisters, made up of 7 temporary professed sisters, 4 novices, 2 postulants and 1 candidate were handed over to Bishop Delalle, Vicar Apostolic of the Diocese of Natal. They joined the Montebello Sisters, whose proper name is The Congregation of African Dominican Sisters of the Holy Rosary. Sr Paula Hinxlage has written a thesis on the Montebello Sisters (Hinxlage 1990).

Brother Denis Philippe O P tells the story of a similar integration of black, coloured and white brothers and priests in his book, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa* (Denis 1998). Useful information on the topic is also available in *The Catholic Church in Contemporary South Africa* edited by Joy Brain and Philippe Denis.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the topic of the integration of black and coloured sisters in the King congregation of Dominican sisters. (pp 1-9)

Chapter 2 traces the origins of the congregation and makes an attempt to show the spread of the congregation. (pp 10-45)

Chapter 3 is a brief overview of the story of the black sisters. (pp 46-57)

Chapter 4 is a look at the story of the black and coloured sisters from archival sources. (pp 58-101)

Chapter 5 is a record of some of the interviews that were conducted. (pp 102-109)

Chapter 6 looks at the current situation and the implications for the future and concludes the work. (pp 110-118)

The list of works consulted is at the end of this mini dissertation. (p 119-122)

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### AIM OF CHAPTER

This chapter briefly traces the history of what the King congregation has accomplished in South Africa since their arrival from Germany in 1877. Gouws in *All for God's people* had dealt with the history until 1977, the centenary year of the congregation. Her book is not a comprehensive academic study but is nevertheless a valuable source book told in a narrative style.

At times in this chapter I have given my own comments on what has happened. My opinion has been formed from informal conversations with the sisters about the past as well as by ongoing formation I experience by attending talks and lectures and workshops where sisters interact with each other and talk about the past.

My work in the archives of the congregation has taught me much of what went on behind the scenes. I shall endeavour in later chapters to incorporate some of the events and emotions which went with the congregation's acceptance of black and coloured sisters. I shall also refer in later chapters to what has happened since the centenary year in 1977.

### THE START OF THE CONGREGATION OF DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CATHARINE OF SIENA OF KING WILLIAM'S TOWN

The first members of the Congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters arrived in South Africa in 1877 and settled in King William's Town. Before 1900 two other congregations had sprung from them, viz the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart established in 1891 in Rhodesia and the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St Catherine of Siena of Oakford, Natal established in 1989. A group of the Oakford Sisters under the leadership of Mother Rose Niland became the Congregation of St Catherine of Siena in Newcastle in January 1986.

The first members of the King congregation were all white sisters and so they remained until the first young black women approached them and asked to join them in the late 1920s.

In 1923 the Oakford Dominican Sisters established a separate novitiate for black girls. Although this was not intended to be a move towards establishing a separate independent congregation, it eventually resulted in one when the black members and their white formators broke away from Oakford in 1939 and started a diocesan Dominican congregation called The Congregation of the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary of Montebello. It is helpful for this study to remember that the King sisters would have been aware of developments in the Oakford and other congregations and would have been trying to learn from their experiences.

Today the Congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters has members in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, England, Ireland, Ecuador, Bolivia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is thus an international congregation.

The sisters in both Zimbabwe and South Africa began to receive vocations from young black women who wanted to join them. The sisters in South America are also receiving indigenous vocations and although they too experience the problem of the meshing of different cultural groups, it seems to be on a much smaller scale than occurred and continues to occur here. The sisters who first went to South America in 1971, like those who first came to South Africa and Rhodesia, were chiefly white German sisters. They went to work among Spanish-speaking people. The congregation in South Africa, however, has sisters of 15 different nationalities (Horizons 2000:13). Those sisters who have gone to work in South America have learnt Spanish and speak it to the people and to those sisters who have joined them all the time. Would it have helped I wonder if more of the white sisters here had learnt to speak the languages of black people with whom they worked and who wanted to join them? It would have been difficult as among our South African sisters there are 12 different ethnic groups (Horizons 2000:13).

The first sisters, really nuns who lived an enclosed life, came to the Eastern Cape from the Dominican Convent of St Ursula's in Augsburg in Germany in answer to a call from Bishop Ricards of the Eastern Vicariate of the Cape Province. Their task was to be the teaching of the children of the German settlers of the Eastern Cape. A large portion of these were Catholic and in 1852, there were about a 1000 Catholics in King William's Town. On 22 June 1869 Fr John Fagan, an Irish priest, was put in charge of the mission in King William's Town. He supported

the idea of Bishop Ricards that a convent school be built in King William's Town and was responsible for the building of the convent, the so called motherhouse, and the attached school.

#### COMING TO SOUTH AFRICA FROM GERMANY

Seven sisters arrived from Augsburg to answer the call to teach the children of the German settlers. They were:

Sister Mary Tiefenboeck - Prioress

Sister Mary Euphemia Koffler - Sub-Prioress and Music Teacher

Sister Mary Eleanora Petitpierre - Headmistress

Sister Mary Clare Huber - Teacher

Sister Mary Reginald Fischer - Mistress of Needlework

Sister Mary Gertrude Walter - Lay-sister

Mis Marie Zirn - as yet only a postulant and assistant music teacher

It is important to understand that these seven women, all German speaking, and all qualified in one way or another to perform a specialised task, set a standard that all those who have followed in their footsteps when entering the King sisters have somehow or other tried to emulate. These seven women were described by Mother Hyacinth Schippert of Augsburg as the "most accomplished nuns in her Convent" (Gouws 1977:9). It seems to me that the standards that operated in the congregation even in these early years were high and new members somehow or other not only had to, but wanted to conform to them.

#### NORMS THAT IMPACT ON CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

With the congregational culture came norms that were implicit rather than direct and sisters entering the congregation took on the practice of such norms e.g. when I entered the congregation in 1977, a way of saving on the washing up after meals was that one of the sisters whose "charge" or task it was would place at strategic points on the refectory tables bowls of soapy hot water and small dry cloths. As the bowl and cloth were passed from one to the other, each sister would wash and dry her own knife, fork and spoon and place it back in her linen serviette in her "set bag", a little leather zipped bag like, but a bit bigger than, a pencil case that one of the sisters would have made. This is a very simple and very efficient way of cleaning the cutlery after a

meal, but both the custom and the words “charge”, “set bag” and “set” i.e. one person’s cutlery, were totally foreign to me. Our congregation was not the only one to have this particular norm which still exists in some of our South African convents today. In fact many of our more senior sisters have practised this particular norm all their convent lives, but it was nevertheless somewhat of a surprise to me when I first encountered it. Our black sisters must have been as surprised as I was. Now such useful norms are not meant to harm but to help. It seems to me, however, that when there are several of them all at the same time, it is hard for anyone new to adapt. I thought adapting was an exciting new challenge and was surprised when I first heard grumblings from older sisters, both black and white, about having to adapt to customs or norms which seemed to be perceived as being predominantly German. As I grew older I at times also grumbled. But changes were to come.

#### GOVERNANCE STYLE TODAY

In 1986 a new dynamic entered the congregation in that accepted norms were challenged and changed, although even today there are places where the old style religious life is still very prevalent. Black sisters entering the congregation would have been expected to obey these norms. Interviews show that the norms for black sisters were adapted so that they fitted in to both convent life and to the expectations of white South African society at the time. This is not to say that there was not a great deal that was very positive in the lives of all sisters, black, white and coloured in the congregation. The accomplishments of the King sisters over the years since 1977 have been prolific. There was an ethic of hard work and dedication and this is still the case, but it is also true that the particularly German stance still prevails to a certain extent. As I have indicated above it seems to me that problems arose when sisters who were either white and not German or black or coloured found their own cultural norms at variance with the dominant ones of the congregation they had entered.

#### THE FIRST SCHOOL

With the help of Bishop Ricards , Father Fagan and the Catholics of King William’s Town and through their own courage and hard work, the sisters were soon organised and opened a school on 23 January 1978. They could not speak English, the language they needed to teach their pupils, white Catholic children of chiefly German, Irish and British descent, and so the

Assumption Sisters who were established in Grahamstown sent one of their ablest sisters, Sr Lucy Manley, to teach them English and administer the school for two years.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN INTERESTED IN A MISSIONARY VOCATION

After 1877 the sisters increased in number. The first South African to join them was Miss Mary McConville, a young white woman who joined them on 8 January 1879 (Gouws 1977:23). There were others too, both English and Irish, and more young German women. The King William's Town sisters had become independent from St Ursula's in Augsburg in 1878, but this convent and its branch house in Wettenhausen continued to send young women interested in a vocation out to the Kings in South Africa. By 1884 there were 42 sisters.

#### MORE CONVENTS AND MORE SCHOOLS

The white people of East London kept asking the King sisters to start a school for their children and so the leader of the sisters, Mother Mauritia Tiefenboeck, opened the first branch convent in 1882. The new school in East London opened on 23 January 1883. Other convents and schools followed e.g those at Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Cradock and Belgravia in Johannesburg. Because parents were impressed by the high standard of education offered by the sisters, many children who were not Catholics attended the convent schools.

#### A PATTERN OF TEACHING IN WHITE SCHOOLS

Thus a trend of providing high quality education to white children was started and continued to develop. In my opinion this is where the congregation put most of its ablest teachers. There were also sisters who went to teach in black schools but they were in the minority. Some of the sisters were also nurses but in casual conversation with the white nurses, I learnt that some of them thought that teaching was given more prominence than was nursing.

Some of the sisters who come from various countries in Europe told me that they joined the congregation to come to the missions, but have all their lives been in schools which until the mid 1980s had only white children. It seems to me that the education of whites became a very

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<sup>3</sup> The Assumption Sisters arrived in South Africa in 1849, the first religious women to come to the country.

important part of the King congregation's work in South Africa and so for some sisters, though by no means all, there was a constant association with white people and their values.

The result it seems to me was that it was not easy to adjust to accepting black children and black sisters and their ways. Money was always a problem and the white schools struggled, but when they did have some money over, some of it was sent to help finance mission work among black people.

#### ORPHANS AND THE DEAF

In 1884 a financial depression struck the Cape Colony and Mother Mauritia was helped by donations from both overseas and South African benefactors to take in and educate 15 orphan children who became known as the "Rosary Children".

Another important step was that an attempt was made to help deaf children. Two well known schools for the deaf, St Vincent's in Johannesburg, originally for whites, and Woodlands, originally for blacks, are the fruit of the initiative to the deaf.

#### THE FIRST ATTEMPTS TO TEACH BLACK CHILDREN

The first schools were all for white children, but in 1885, an attempt was made to reach out to black children when two daughters of one of the convent workers were given lessons. For whatever reason, the project did not prove successful and was abandoned (Gouws 1977:36).

#### SCHLEDORF

One might wonder where the sisters who continued to be needed came from. While there were a few South African vocations, all of them white, young German girls continued to arrive. Interestingly enough this happened although the Sisters in South Africa had become independent from their Mother Convent in Augsburg in 1878, the year after they arrived in South Africa. In 1904 Mother Jacoba Zirn, the Prioress General at the time, bought a disused monastery in the village of Schledorf from the Sisters of Augsburg. It was to become a recruiting house for sisters who wanted to come out to join the King William's Town Dominican Sisters in their work in the missions. In spite of the fact that most of the convents and schools that had been established in



South Africa served whites only, the young sisters who came from overseas saw themselves as going to the missions. Some of the sisters who entered the convent in Schledorf remained there.

#### RIEHEN

During the Second World War the sisters were subjected to very trying times and young sisters could not be sent to South Africa. After the war more branch houses of Schledorf were opened in Germany and a house was also opened in Riehen in Switzerland.

#### THE VERSATILITY OF THE KING SISTERS

During the times of the Boer War, 1899 - 1902, and the Spanish Flu, 1918, the sisters came out of the schools to nurse the wounded, both English and the Boers, and the sick, but teaching remained the focus of the Sisters' apostolic work.

#### CHINESE, INDIAN and COLOURED PUPILS

Mother Clare Huber became Prioress General of the King Dominicans in 1911. In 1913 she was instrumental in sending her sisters to open two schools, one in East London and one in King William's Town, for Chinese, Indian and Coloured children. Thus we see that in spite of the success being achieved in white schools, the King sisters were also working among people who did not belong to the privileged white group. We have two Chinese sisters in the congregation

#### GOING TO UNIVERSITY AT RHODES

In 1917 Mother Clare opened a convent in Grahamstown to serve as a hostel for her sisters and others of the Dominican Order who wished to obtain degrees at Rhodes University, then known as Rhodes University College. Some of the sisters were also nurses and clinics and hospitals were also established.

#### LAY SISTERS RAISED TO THE STATUS OF CHOIR SISTERS IN 1924

The lay sisters were the ones who performed most of the manual labour in the congregation e.g they milked the cows, removed the honey from the hives, built, plastered and painted the buildings and did the carpentry. There were even sisters who had learnt how to shoe horses. They baked and cooked and worked in the fields. As a child at the Klerksdorp Convent School

in the 1950s, I loved these working sisters now no longer called lay sisters, who were not as educated as the ones who taught me, but who impressed me with their enthusiasm for woodwork and delivering the calves and making butter in the dairy. On 1 July 1924, the lay sisters were raised to the status of choir sisters. The lay sisters had made religious profession just as the choir sisters had, but they were exempt from most of the religious services and studies required of the choir sisters. They did not recite the Divine Office, but were told to pray simpler prayers such as the "Pater Noster Office" or the Rosary as they went about their tasks. Mother Jacoba Zirn began to teach the lay sisters Latin so that they could join in the celebration of the Divine Office.

#### THE HURT OF BEING SEEN AS DIFFERENT

One can only imagine the feelings in the lay sisters up to then and even after this change was introduced. When a young woman entered, she had little say about what work she would go into once she became a professed sister. From my own experience I am aware of the "inferiority complex" carried by some of the working sisters fifty and more years after the 1924 changes.

It seems to me that just as there was a bridging of the perceived divide so there had to be a bridging some years later of the perceived divide between the black sisters and the white sisters. Did the gap close? I don't think such a gap ever closes completely and interviews conducted with black sisters during research for this work show that some of the black sisters still feel ostracised and looked down upon as inferior while some of the white sisters still betray their prejudices by their tone of voice or behaviour. The situation in the congregation, it seems to me, is a microcosm of what is happening to South African society now as we start the new millenium. It is, I think, more controlled. Sisters are not as a norm outwardly aggressive to each other, but the attitudes are still there.

I think the gap between the choir sisters and the lay sisters has to some extent been romanticised away by Gouws (1977:148 - 149). It seems to me that it became a pattern in our congregation, and also in others, to hide problems and to deny them. Hinxlage in a doctoral thesis maintains that unless conflict is dealt with, it will resurrect itself and appear over and over again in later years(Hinxlage 1990). However in 1924, in theory at any rate, the divide between choir sisters and lay sisters was abolished.

## ARRIVAL OF VERY REV. FATHER BERNARD JORDAN GIJLSWIJK O.P. IN SOUTH AFRICA AND CONSEQUENCES FOR THE KING CONGREGATION

A man who played an important role in the history of the King congregations and also of other congregations was Very Rev. Father Bernard Jordan Gijlswijk, O.P., the first Apostolic Delegate. He arrived on 30 April 1923 and chose to reside in Bloemfontein.<sup>4</sup> He brought the news that the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, a committee of cardinals in Rome who are in charge of the foreign missions, had taken under its immediate jurisdiction as from 6 January 1923, all the Dominican Sisters of South Africa and had appointed him as its representative. It will be remembered that at this time in South Africa in addition to the congregation of the King Sisters, there also existed the congregations of Cabra, Oakford, and Newcastle.

The Oakford congregation first accepted black women into their congregation in 1923. Hinxlage (1990:pp 224 - 225) writes that Bishop Delalle had urged the Oakford Sisters at their General Chapter in 1922 to reach out for "Native Vocations". It was Rome who was urging religious congregations in South Africa to accept black priests and sisters. The laws of the South African government forbade blacks and whites to live together and work together and so although the black sisters belonged to the same congregation, they were separate from the white sisters and did not participate in the government of the Oakford congregation. Later the black sisters formed a separate diocesan congregation, that of Montebello.

The arrival of an Apostolic Delegate meant that the various groups of Dominican Sisters in South Africa now had to give their obedience not to the Local Ordinaries or Bishops in those parts of South Africa where they had convents but to Archbishop Gijlswijk. It also meant that the King novitiate house had to be situated in Europe and so the existing novitiate at the motherhouse in King William's Town was closed.

Gijlswijk had it in mind to unite the Dominican Congregations in South Africa into one. The Sisters had gone through very painful times splitting from King William's Town into the congregations of King William's Town, Oakford and Newcastle and now there came a movement

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<sup>4</sup> The present Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Blasco Francisco Collaço, resides in Pretoria.

which seemed to take little cognisance of all that had happened in the earliest history of the congregations. In spite of the Apostolic Delegate's efforts the congregations did not re-unite, but first the sisters in the various branch houses of the King congregation were simply told that there was going to be re-unification. They were not consulted but told. The process of dialogue between Apostolic delegate and the leadership of the congregation and between the leadership and the sisters in the various branch convents had a long way to go.

#### HIERARCHICAL AND AUTHORITARIAN ATTITUDES

I have told the story of the above paragraph because it seems to me that lack of consultation between the authorities in church organisations to those seen to be "under" them was a norm and remained so for many years. I like to think our congregation has in the last fifteen years improved dramatically with regards to consultation with sisters before decisions are made but prior to that in the dealings with all sisters, the style of governance was such that sisters were expected to obey. Of course there were always rebels and of course there were superiors who did dialogue with their subjects, but they were in the minority. One way to protect superiors was that rules were made and then a sister would be obeying the rule or system rather than the superior.

Because the congregation had become a pontifical one, it was no longer a diocesan congregation and the motherhouse in King William's Town and other convents in the Eastern Cape Vicariate were no longer directly responsible to Bishop MacSherry, Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern Cape. The latter took it as a personal insult done to him by Mother Lucy Kaltenstadler who tried to heal the breach but to no avail.

The above story is important because years later when it came to dealing with the black sisters and the part of bishops and priests in the events that occurred, it was sometimes very difficult, for the sisters, both white and black, to go against ecclesiastical authority.

#### MORE EXPANSION AMONG BOTH WHITES AND BLACKS

In the meantime the King Congregation continued to expand and convents and schools for whites were opened in Witbank (1924), Potgietersrus (1925), Ermelo (1927), Stutterheim (1929), Springs (1930) and Cambridge in East London (1933).

At this time more work among black people began and in 1926 and 1927 mission schools, albeit very poor and small, were started in Makapan near Potgietersrus and in Noodshulp.

#### TRAINING TEACHERS

Mother M. Eleonora Petitpierre opened the first class of pupil teachers at King William's Town Convent in 1882. This move marked the inauguration of training teachers in the Eastern Cape.

#### ENGLAND

In addition to the missionary activity in South Africa the King congregation opened three convents in England. Mother Augustine Geisel thought it possible that the King convent established in Schledorf in Germany might be jeopardised by the Nazi Regime and so she decided to send three sisters from South Africa to England to establish a convent there.

#### WORK AMONG THE DEAF BOTH WHITE AND BLACK

The King William's Town Convent School for the Education of the Deaf was opened in 1888 (Gouws 1977:207). In the Cape there were other schools for the deaf and so in 1933 the school moved to Johannesburg and opened in 1934 as the St Vincent School for the Deaf. From 1976, one of the sisters started travelling out to Lenasia to help deaf Indian children. At Woodlands near King Williams Town the sisters established a school for deaf black children in 1961. It was called St Thomas' School for the Deaf.

#### WORK AMONG THE MENTALLY CHALLENGED

It became apparent that there was a need to open a home for the mentally challenged and on 7 July 1936, San Salvador was opened.

#### CONVENTS IN HOLLAND AND IRELAND

Because of the imminence of war, the King Sisters decided they needed a place of refuge outside Germany and after much difficulty acquired a house in Holland where they arrived in 1939. Some sisters went to work in Ireland in 1946.

## NURSING

In 1899 when the Rhodesian Sisters became independent from King William's Town, about twenty sisters decided to remain in Rhodesia where the sisters were heavily involved in nursing and eight returned to the motherhouse. These eight nurses began to work in South Africa among both blacks and whites. Some became tutors in teaching hospitals for black women. Many of the black King sisters are nurses by profession

Initially in the history of nursing in South Africa, black women did not undergo professional training as nurses. They received on-the-job training as elementary nurse-aides. Reasons given for their lack of training seem to include that they did not have the necessary background, the necessary education or a sense of vocation. Apparently there were also tribal prejudices and the fact that black parents preferred to educate their male children.

## UMLAMLI - TRAINING OF BLACK NURSES

A hospital was opened at Umlamli near Aliwal North in 1933. The King sisters managed to have the hospital registered as a second class training school for State Registered Nurses in 1936. To have been a first class training school the hospital would have had to have more beds. In this way the young black women who were helping as nurses became properly trained and registered. By 1964 the united efforts to improve Umlamli hospital resulted in its status being raised to that of a first class training school for black medical and surgical nurses.

## THE EFFECT OF THE POLICY OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT ON UMLAMLI

The South African Government, because of the policy of separate development at the time, had well before the time notified all mission hospitals which were in areas destined to be Homelands, that the State intended to take over mission hospitals. The State declared its willingness to compensate the church bodies for buildings and equipment that had been obtained by the hospitals through private resources. The State had already been subsidising the hospitals to a certain extent, later paying for maintenance costs and the erection of some buildings. At first the Umlamli district belonged to the Ciskei, but then became rezoned to be part of the Transkei. When the Transkei gained its independence, the hospital was handed over to the Transkei government in Umtata and from the 1 August 1976, the hospital became severed from church

property and administration. The King sisters had been told that white staff of the hospital would be replaced by black nurses and administrators. The congregation had sent a black sister, Sr Bernard Fantisi to be trained and she became the Matron of Umlamli hospital under the new regime. Thus the King sisters did not desert the project they had helped to build up ever since 1931. Two white sisters, Sr Pirmin Brislin who ran the operating theatre, and Sr Mary Joseph Mueller, nurses' tutor, also remained, but the other white sisters left Umlamli. What, one wonders, were the feelings of the white sisters when government policy forced them to leave the place they had worked so hard to build up. Also, what were the feelings of the black sisters when the white sisters left?

#### MATER DEI HOSPITAL

In East London the King sisters opened a maternity home, the Mater Dei Nursing Home, in 1940. In 1945 it expanded and became the Mater Dei hospital which was eventually sold in

#### GLEN GREY HOSPITAL

Four King sisters were sent as pioneers to Glen Grey hospital near Queenstown in July 1941. The hospital was inspected by the South African Medical Council and Miss B.G. Alexander, R.R.C., recommended that it be registered as a first class training school for general nurses. Thus the King sisters were again involved in the training of black nurses.

#### AN IMPORTANT REQUEST IS PUT TO SMUTS

Mother General Augustine Geisel had the good of all groups of South Africans at heart. Apparently when there was the possibility that the German sisters in her congregation be interned in South Africa during World War II, she asked the Prime Minister, General J.C. Smuts, for her sisters to be exempted from the provisions of the Aliens Registration Act of October 1939. Permission was given and the sisters continued their work without being interned (Gouws 1977:261).

Why is this important? A theory of a white sister to whom I spoke to is that the above exemption put the white leadership of the King congregation under an obligation to the South African government with the result that any opposition to the government's policies within the

congregation was not encouraged. It was only in the 1980s that the opposition became more vocal and that sisters began to join the Black Sash in silent placard bearing demonstrations, attend gatherings where the government was criticised and take black children into their schools.

The black sisters must have been aware of the reluctance of many of the white sisters to come out openly against the system of racial oppression.

#### TRAINING COLLEGE FOR BLACK WOMEN TEACHERS and CLINICS, SCHOOLS AND ORPHANAGES and TRAINING OF TWO SISTERS AS DOCTORS (SR AIDAN QUINLAN)

During her time as leader Mother General Augustine Geisel opened 25 different convents. In addition to the school for the deaf, St Vincent's, in Johannesburg, she established a school for backward children and a training college for black women teachers. The latter was in Village Main in Johannesburg where the railways container depot is today and was called St Thomas's College. She also saw to the establishment of a vocational and secondary school for coloured girls, as well as orphanages and schools for black children, clinics and dispensaries for black patients and the nursing of the sick, and of mothers and babies in maternity homes. She also sent two sisters to qualify as doctors at the University of the Witwatersrand the first women religious in South Africa to qualify as medical doctors. One of these was Sr Aidan Quinlan, mission doctor of St Peter Claver Mission, Duncan Village, East London who was murdered in a riot while carrying out her duties on 9 November 1952 (Delany 1953).

#### THE GENERAL COUNCIL MOVES TO JOHANNESBURG

In 1955 the South African convents were divided into two provinces and the headquarters of the General Council were moved to Johannesburg. In 1963 they moved from their house in Valley Road to 19 Rockridge Road because of the building of the present Ben Schoeman highway. I can remember being in the latter house in 1981 when I was studying. Two Dominican priests had arrived to perform the Easter services at this house and upset the sisters very much because their sermons were all about the rich property we occupied in Rockridge Road, an area on the ridge overlooking Parktown where the gold mining barons had also built their homes. Their words expressed the feelings among our leadership in the 1980s because the General Council moved again in 1988, this time to Mayfair, to show their solidarity with the poor. Many of our sisters



did not approve of the move.

### ORGANIC GOVERNANCE

Since 1997 the congregation has been moving into organic governance. There has been a change of names. Thus the highest body in the congregation is no longer the General Council Team but the Congregational Leadership Team. Titles such as "Mother General" were considered very militaristic. Many more teams have been formed and there are black and coloured sisters in most of them.

At the time of writing the congregation is in the process of further developing this form of organic governance so that once again there will be only one region, not two, in Southern Africa. The equality of all is the value underlying the process. Responsibility and accountability for her own growth, spirituality, and way of conducting her daily living are expected from each sister, but changing to the new more democratic lifestyle is taking time. Much like what is happening in the South African government as its practices evolve into those of a democracy, so we too are making mistakes and learning from them. The ideal is the freedom, responsibility and accountability of each sister, but in practice boundaries are overstepped and then there are repercussions and some sisters wonder whether any changes have in fact happened at all.

### MORE DEVELOPMENT

Places where King sisters went to work include Hillcrescent school in East London, the hostel for working women in East London (1948), the convents at Keiskammahoek (1949), Rustenburg (1950), Zeerust (1951), St Mary's Maternity Home in Springs (1951) and the convent and school in Welkom (1951). A small nursing home for black patients was opened in Peddie on 8 May 1952 but the people really needed a bigger place, a mission hospital, and the sisters needed were not available and so in 1960, the nursing home at Peddie was closed.

A small convent staffed by two sisters was opened in Groblersdal in 1976.

### EFFECT OF CONTACT BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE SISTERS

I mention these places and others where the King sisters lived and worked because almost inevitably there were converts to Catholicism and in some cases vocations to religious life. Most

of the women and men and girls and boys who came into contact with the sisters did not become sisters or priests but they began to lead lives where God was important to them. Sometimes it was the children born into families who practised their religion who entered religious life.

Recently a coloured sister told me that she had not gone to the convent school but had met the sisters who came to teach catechism on Saturdays and she loved them and decided when only a teenager that she wanted to be a sister. To this day she is one of our sisters.

I was a novice in Brakpan in 1977 when the sisters had to stop teaching catechism to white children in government schools because there were too few sisters. Some parents were extremely hostile. I do not think the plight of black children who did not even have any schooling at all occurred to them.

#### CONVENTS AND SCHOOLS BEGIN TO CLOSE

In the 1960s one after the other of the convents and schools began to close because of a lack of sisters. Then in 1962 came the Second Vatican Council which brought with it many a positive movement throughout the Catholic Church. The Council ended in 1965 and then as its decisions took effect, there came the shock of the exodus of a great many religious men and women from religious congregations throughout the world. For those who left, the changes in the Catholic Church were disastrous and many chose rather to leave than accept them.

By now it had become evident that there were fewer and fewer vocations and one after the other schools and convents owned and run by the congregation began to close.

#### SPREADING THE CATHOLIC FAITH AMONG BLACK AND COLOURED PEOPLE - MISSION WORK

According to Gouws (1997:298) the first King sisters came to South Africa to help the priests maintain the Catholic faith among the scattered white colonists. It seems that already before any Catholics from Europe arrived at the Cape, a large number of religious sects existed in South Africa. It strikes me that although, especially in the earlier years, the annals of convents in black, white and coloured areas reflect the annual number of baptisms, first communions and

confirmations, there was more to the sisters' work than just an amassing of numbers of people who had been successfully recruited to the ranks of Catholicism. There was a concern for the terrible plight of poverty and sickness and illiteracy that was rife and the sisters really tried to address the needs of the hungry, sick, poor and illiterate. People were never turned away from the clinics or schools because they were not Catholics.

Mother Mauritia Tiefenboeck, the foundress, opened a boarding school for black girls in 1893. Because they were so poor, some children were admitted free of charge. Some of the sisters began to learn Xhosa and taught the people the prayers in the vernacular.

#### KEILANDS AND NO TO HANDOUTS

From August 1894, sisters who had learned Xhosa worked at the mission school at Keilands. In 1909 they handed over the mission to the Marianhill Sisters of the Precious Blood. In 1922 some King sisters returned. It seems that it took some time for both the priests and the sisters to realise that it was no good just to give the people handouts. The debts of the mission were very high. Eventually the people were told that material support for all but the most destitute would stop. Resistance from the people was high but the mission finances began to recover. By 1946 two men belonging to the Tembu tribe were ordained as priests. The last two King sisters, old and exhausted from years of hard work, left Keilands Mission on 8 September 1958. One of their former pupils, a Miss Walburga Mguda, who had been trained as a teacher, became the principal and took charge of the boarding house. The King Sisters thus in many ways empowered their former pupils.

#### WOODLANDS, LEARNING THE XHOSA LANGUAGE

Maria Hilf Mission at Woodlands was started in 1906. The sisters who came to work at the mission learnt Xhosa. The sisters were engaged in works of mercy, spreading the faith, teaching and running the convent farm. Initially lessons were outdoors under a large mimosa tree. In 1927 on the same property the sisters opened Fairview School which was for neglected white children.

#### BLACK POSTULANTS AT WOODLANDS, DOMITILLA DLAMINI

In 1933, one of the large huts at Woodlands was turned into a temporary novitiate for potential

black postulants. Mother General Augustine Geisel had by this time received several applications from young black women who wanted to enter religious life and become sisters belonging to the King congregation. The first black woman to become a postulant was Domitilla Dlamini who had come into contact with the King Sisters at Vleeschfontein in 1928. Because of health problems, however, she had to give up religious life but kept in touch with the King sisters.

The next two postulants were Caroline Mabentsela and Coletta Mfaladi who were received in June 1933. Their novice mistress was Sr Benigna Osterberger, a white sister. Caroline Mabentsela became Sr Mary of the Holy Rosary and Coletta Mfaladi became Sr Anna of the Holy Cross. They made their final profession of vows in 1938. It is recorded that among the postulants of this time there was also an Indian girl called Rose but it became apparent that she was not suitable for religious life. Perhaps it should be explained that becoming a sister is a lengthy process.

#### A TRIAL PERIOD BEFORE ENTERING RELIGIOUS LIFE

Even to this day a woman who wishes to enter religious life has to undergo a trial period before she can be accepted. The current practice in the congregation is that a young woman will first spend at least a year in the pre-novitiate, then two more years in the novitiate and then three to six years in the stage of temporary profession. Only when she herself and those who have lived and worked with her in her formation are satisfied that she is really ready and suitable for religious life, does she make final vows or as it is known, final profession.

#### LELIEFONTEIN - NEW HOME OF THE NOVITIATE FOR BLACK SISTERS

A new convent, called the Convent of Our Lady of Fatima, was built at Leliefontein in 1950 to accommodate the increasing number of black sisters. The women who wished to join the King Sisters were representative of the various groups of black peoples in South Africa including the Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, Tswanas and others. Some of them left their homes to become Sisters against the wishes of their families because the loss of a daughter meant the loss of lobola.

## BLACK SISTERS BECOME A DIOCESAN CONGREGATION UNDER BISHOP GREEN

In 1938 Rome was urging that indigenous clergy and sisterhoods be established, but the South African Government was trying to implement the policy of the separate development of the various races. Eventually in 1958 the King Congregation was forced to part with its black sisters who became established as a separate Diocesan Sisterhood known as the Sisters of Saint Martin de Porres under the Bishop of Port Elizabeth, Right Reverend E.A. Green, D.D. The official beginning of the congregation and instalment of the Mother Vicar took place on 16 July 1958. Sr Mary Mabentsela was appointed the first Mother Vicar of the new congregation and her highest superior was the bishop of Port Elizabeth, in this case Bishop Green. Three General Councillors assisted the Mother Vicar. They were Sr Fidelia Grohe (a white sister), Sr Dilecta Kley ( a white sister) and Sr Mary Stella Hlatshwako ( a black sister). It was agreed that the buildings and part of the farm at Woodlands be handed over to the new congregation but that the property be loaned to the diocese of Port Elizabeth. Sr Fidelia who until then had been superior of the Woodlands mission was to stay on for a period of time to help them with the running and financing of the place.

## DIOCESAN AS OPPOSED TO PONTIFICAL CONGREGATIONS

In order to understand the events that follow better it is important to know the differences between pontifical and diocesan congregations.

A diocesan congregation falls under the jurisdiction of the local bishop while a pontifical congregation is directly responsible to Rome. The Bishop decides what work the sisters in a diocesan congregation are to do. A diocesan congregation might be financially independent but if its work does not bring in enough money, the sisters will be dependent on the bishop to whom they are responsible. In a pontifical congregation on the other hand courtesy dictates that the leader of the pontifical congregation informs the bishop in the diocese where her sisters work of matters which affect the parishes of the diocese e.g. a regional leader of a pontifical congregation might ask the local bishop if one of her sisters who has just qualified to work in the AIDS ministry might work in his diocese. A pontifical congregation is on the whole fairly independent of the Bishop of the diocese where the sisters have their convents and is directly responsible to Rome.

## LELIEFONTEIN, MOTHER ANNA KUGELMANN AND EDUCATION OF YOUNG SISTERS

Of the 46 Sisters who belonged to the Diocesan Congregation of St Martin de Porres, 19 were trained teachers and two were trained nurses. The King congregation ensured that the new establishment at Leliefontein was equipped with boreholes, tanks, outbuildings etc. Guiding the establishment of the new convent at Leliefontein was a white German sister, Sr Anna Kugelmann, who spoke the Xhosa language fluently. Her task was the instruction of the young black postulants and novices. This she did through the medium of English. She not only taught them the matters of religious life but also saw to it that they received an ongoing education. The young sisters did correspondence courses and went to colleges to be trained as teachers and nurses. This custom of further education of all sisters, whether finally professed or not, is still practised in the King Congregation today. The responsibilities of the black sisters included the education of the black children of the neighbourhood.

## THE DIOCESAN CONGREGATION REJOINS THE KING CONGREGATION BUT AS A PROVINCE

In 1970 it became clear that the Sisters of the St Martin de Porres congregation wanted to be reunited with their mother congregation of King William's Town and they accordingly sent a petition to Rome asking for permission for this step to take place. A special chapter or meeting was convened at Woodlands Convent. The Apostolic Delegate, Most Reverend Archbishop John Gordon, D.C.L. attended the opening of the official session on 5 January 1971 (Gouws 1977:312). It was decided that the black Sisters would from now onwards form a separate autonomous province of the King Congregation. It would be known as the Province of St Martin de Porres. Thus it would no longer be a diocesan congregation under the Bishop of Port Elizabeth but be part of the King Congregation which was a pontifical congregation directly responsible to Rome.

The Prioress Provincial of this province was Mother Regula Schelle who was assisted by a council of four sisters.

According to what Mother Regula told me, she not only needed someone who could drive her to places when necessary but also someone who would be a support to her in her new post. She asked that Sr Beatrice von Felten with whom she had worked in Berejena in Rhodesia be allowed

to join her and this was granted. Sr Beatrice told me that she was on home leave in Switzerland when she received the news and at first felt very angry about it because she did not wish to leave the Berejena mission which she loved. Thus it happened that Sr Beatrice replaced Mother Anna Kugelmann as novice mistress of the black sisters and that the novitiate moved back to Woodlands from Leliefontein.

It is interesting that when the novitiate moved to Leliefontein in 1950, the cold and misty Woodlands climate was given as the reason. Now when the novitiate moved back to Woodlands, the climate did not seem to matter. It seems to me that the other factors such as the Bishop's wish to put sisters in Leliefontein were stronger than the annals might lead one to believe. The sisters who arrived there were extremely poor. Water, milk, eggs, food for hens that had come as gifts, food for three pigs and a two year old jersey bull that were also gifts, came from surrounding white farmers and some of our other nearby convents. Eventually they established a garden and conditions improved, but that Mother Anna had the courage and strength to answer the Bishop's request to undertake the formation of his diocesan sisters must be acknowledged.

#### ESTABLISHMENT OF ST THOMAS'S SCHOOL FOR BLACK DEAF PUPILS

The St Thomas's School for the Deaf was opened in Woodlands in September 1961 and was run by the black diocesan Dominican sisters, formerly the black sisters of the King congregation.

After the return of the black sisters as a province in 1971, the Maria Hilf Mission at Woodlands was renamed the Convent of St Martin de Porres and became the headquarters of the black sisters belonging to the King Congregation. In 1977 it had four distinct departments:

1. The private school and hostel for black children which was helped financially by the Welfare Organisation of Pretoria.
2. The creche which was founded because of the many abandoned black children. It was built by benefactors. It was under the Social Welfare Department and was not only an orphanage but a Home for Committed Children.
3. The clinic run by two black sisters trained in both nursing and midwifery.
4. The St Thomas's School for Deaf Xhosa Children which was officially opened on 1 October 1962. A white teacher, Sr M Conrada Foerg, especially trained in the teaching

of the deaf, was freed from St Vincent's in Johannesburg to become the principal. Another white German sister, Sr Guzman Gforeis, joined her as an assistant teacher. Several black sisters and lay teachers received on-the-job training and simultaneously did correspondence courses for the Diploma of Teachers of the Deaf. By 1977 this school was fully subsidised by the Bantu Education Department.

The Sisters of St Martin de Porres also staffed the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Swartkops and the Convent of St John Bosco in Kwa Zakhele on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth.

#### TEACHING COLOURED AND BLACK CHILDREN IN "WHITE" KING WILLIAM'S TOWN

In King William's Town the white boys of a school called St Joseph's Hall moved to a place called Glendower House and King sisters opened a school for coloured children in the vacated premises. Both black and coloured children arrived for lessons, much to the disapproval of the white people of the town. After some time the black pupils were moved to their own school in the black township and St Joseph's was reserved for coloured children only.

#### SHARING RESOURCES STOPPED

One cannot help wondering what riches of shared skills, talents, relationships and other factors were destroyed by the moving of the different sectors of the South African population into the separate areas allocated for them. The variety and richness and joy of Sophiatown, in spite of its poverty, crime and overpopulation, before it was destroyed by the movement of its people by the Nationalist Government in the 1950s, has been well documented. Unless human beings have been deliberately socialised into non-acceptance of each other, it seems to me that we do grow to understand and build relationships with each other irrespective of the differences.

#### TEACHING COLOURED, INDIAN AND CHINESE CHILDREN IN EAST LONDON

One of the white King sisters taught in a small school for Coloured, Indian and Chinese children in East London. In 1921 the Indians and Coloureds were moved to St Francis Xavier Mission School in Mc Lean Street. The Sisters taught here too and although initially they commuted to the school, within 10 years eight of them lived there too.



The Chinese children were eventually transferred in 1941 to a new school of their own in St Peter's Road. Although this school did not belong to the King Congregation, two sisters from the Convent in Albany Road used to go there each morning to teach.

#### A NOVITIATE FOR COLOURED SISTERS

The St Francis Xavier Mission in East London flourished and over the years hundreds of Indian and Coloured children attended it. On 17 June 1971 the Sisters of the St Francis Xavier Mission moved to new and bigger premises at 41 Beaconsfield Road, near the North End. The new Mission of St Francis Xavier became a centre of social and educational activity for Catholic Indian and Coloured people in East London.

On 1 July 1959, permission was obtained from Rome to open a novitiate for Coloured sisters at St Francis Xavier Convent. Sr Veritas Strasser was appointed Mistress of Novices. Sr Julitta Einweg taught the novices sewing and Sr Ulrich Stephan helped them with their studies. Most of the pupils in the school went to State schools when these were provided for Coloureds and Indians and eventually a very small junior school was all that was left.

#### COLOURED SISTERS MOVE TO CRADOCK

On many occasions young women came to St Francis Xavier Mission to try out their vocations, but many left. Eventually on 20 December 1975 the Coloured Sisters moved to the Convent of St Rose of Lima in the township of Michausdal outside Cradock. Apartheid meant that they too could not live with the white sisters or the black sisters although they too were fully professed members of the King Congregation. The establishment of St Rose of Lima consisted of a convent, a nursery school and a creche.

#### CRADOCK

In 1922 King sisters went to work in a mission school for Coloured, Indian and Chinese children in Cradock. In 1929 Sr Gonzaga Ziegler arrived in Cradock and opened a private Catholic Training School for Coloured Teachers (Gouws 1977:323). Unfortunately the school had to close in December 1937 when the Government opened a Teacher's Training College at Parow near Cape Town. Sr Gonzaga then started a private secondary school with boarding facilities. By

1940 this school had become the largest school for Coloureds in South Africa. The mission school continued to grow in spite of great opposition.

I think the resourcefulness and determination of the sisters needs to be commended. Although apartheid had not yet been written into the statutes, there were nevertheless great attitudes of disapproval among whites, among them many Catholics, for the work the sisters were doing.

#### A MISSION AMONG THE BLACK PEOPLE OUTSIDE POTCHEFSTROOM

In Potchefstroom, the St Louis Bertrand Mission was started in 1921 by Mother Dympna Doyle, the Prioress of the Sacred Heart Convent in the town (Gouws 1997:325). In 1935 five Sisters moved into the small convent that had been built. The mission produced vocations, a priest and three Dominican Sisters. Because of the Law of Separate Development, the people were moved to their own township where the State had opened schools staffed by teachers of their own race and the King sisters closed St Louis Bertrand Mission in 1970.

#### A "WHITE" ATTITUDE TO "LOCATIONS"

Like many other white children, whether Catholic or not, the whole experience of the locations and what went on there, whether good or bad, was not part of my experience. Perhaps the nearest I ever came to it was when my father took Lizzie or Jeanette or Elizabeth, some of the women who helped my mother and grandparents over the years, home to the location called Jouberton. I never ever knew their surnames. It was exciting because I half feared that on the trip to the location, we would be robbed or attacked, that was what I had somehow been led to believe. We never were. I remember staring fascinated at the little poor tin-roofed houses where the only address was a number as my father drove the Kombi carefully around the potholes in the muddy roads. It was raining and that was the reason for taking Lizzie home in the first place. I grew very close to these women who were so closely connected with me and cared for my hygiene and cleanliness and that of my brothers and sisters over the years, but of them and their families and how they lived I knew very little. To this day I do not know their surnames. I would ask them about how they lived, that I remember, and was horrified to hear that they had no inside bath or toilet or tap. I don't think I felt anything except amazement. I thought that this horrendous situation was normal for all black people. It did not occur to me that it should be otherwise.

### M'PHATLELE AND SUBIACO

On 11 November 1924, the King Sisters were asked to take over the St Maurus Mission at M'Phatlele which was 42 miles from Pietersburg (Gouws 1977:328). Here there was a clinic and dressing station for black people. When in 1929 the Prefecture of Pietersburg inherited a large piece of ground at Subiaco, 23 miles from Pietersburg, M'Phatlele Mission and the sisters moved too and they began to nurse the sick and educate the children there. Black diocesan sisters called the Handmaids of Christ the King took over the mission in 1957. These sisters had been at a place called Bethany Mission in Pietersburg but because of the Group Areas Act they had to close their house and were glad to take over Subiaco where the King sisters were old and worn out and ready to retire.

### GENDER ROLES

At many of these missions sisters had to be carpenters, nurses, shopkeepers, gardeners, cooks, teachers and many other things. Somehow I think religious life attracts adventurous people. There are those of us who pray, study, teach and work in well equipped environments, but there are also those who over the years have worked among the poor people and usually these have been the black people of the country. Always there has been among the sisters the striving to improve not only their own environment, but also those of the people with whom they work. I do not think it ever occurred to the sisters that society might have thought that carpentry, shoeing horses, building or bee farming were men's jobs. The sisters saw the work needed and simply learnt how to do things by doing them. In their own way and without knowing it, I think some of our sisters ignored stereotyped gender roles. They were protected from the scorn of society by the fact that they were seen as sisters. I can remember as a child being fascinated and amazed by the accomplishments of these so called working class sisters. Unfortunately I later learnt that these sisters were often seen as inferior by the more educated sisters. They did lack social graces and they did lack education, but they were glorious creators of furniture and buildings and they could commune with the animals in their care. They produced the vegetables for the convent and its boarders and I found them anything but boring.

### QUEENSTOWN AND FORT BEAUFORT

In Queenstown, in addition to the school for whites, St Theresa's School for Coloured and Black

children was started in 1926. The King Sisters continued to staff the school until they were replaced by the Schoenstatt Sisters in 1945.

In 1922 in Fort Beaufort the Sisters went to help to teach the Coloured children and so St Joseph's Mission School started. One of the pupils of this school was Eva Maria Gysman who joined the congregation and became Sr Eva Maria Gysman.

#### VLEESCHFONTEIN

In 1880 the Jesuits had founded a mission station at Vleeschfontein 160 miles north west of Johannesburg (Gouws 1977:335). On 2 July 1928 four King sisters arrived and worked in the area until 1950. The local Tswana chief was called Chief Mokoko. One of his daughters became a Holy Family sister and one of his nieces entered the King congregation, but because of ill health did not stay. A dispute arose over the land on which the mission was built and there was a court case. It was found that the Mokoko people had no right to the land and apparently the Government ordered that they move to an area assigned to their tribe. There was thus no further need for the mission which closed down in 1950.

#### INDWE NEAR ALIWAL NORTH

Another mission where the sisters worked was at Indwe near Aliwal North in the Cape Province. Two King sisters arrived in July 1929. The black children and coloured children had to be taught separately, not easy when there were no suitable buildings! Within months both schools were moved into the townships. The sisters travelled to school and in the afternoons continued to work among the people, visiting and comforting the sick. In 1953 the Holy Cross sisters from Aliwal North took over the mission at Indwe.

#### MAGOEBASKLOOF AND ST SCHOLASTICA'S MISSION NEAR SOEKMEKAAR

Four King sisters arrived at St Benedict's Mission, Noodshulp, near Magoebaskloof on the 25 July 1927 to answer a call to take over the school and boarding school from the Newcastle Dominican sisters who had been withdrawn. The King sisters and their 60 boarders were moved to St Scholastica's Mission, 80 miles north of Noodshulp in 1940 where King sisters had been since 1929. In the face of great difficulty the sisters established a little school there and began to teach both children and adults about the Christian faith. The sisters visited the sick and a clinic

was established in 1957. Black teachers were employed in the school and they received a great deal of help and encouragement from the sisters. The local chief transferred 100 of the pupils from the mission school to the local government school at Mulima in 1962. In 1970 the school, as well as the orphanage which had been established there, had to be closed down because according to the Government's Group Areas Policy, the mission and the surrounding land was declared to be part of the Venda Homeland. Then the missionaries were allowed to reopen the school provided it was attended by Venda children only. From now onwards it was compulsory that the Venda language be taught in the school. In 1972, the school was registered as St Scholastica's Catholic School. For many years there was no electricity, but the biggest problem here was the lack of water. Eventually engineers who wanted to do charitable work ensured a water supply. At present Sr Lauda Hoppman is the only King sister left at this mission. She runs the clinic and is involved in various self help schemes for the people<sup>5</sup>.

#### UMHLANGA NEAR ALIWAL NORTH

In July 1930, two King sisters were transferred from the mission at Indwe to the new mission at Aliwal North. At the end of 1956, the King sisters were withdrawn from the mission which was taken over by the Coloured sisters of the Sacred Heart from Aliwal North but these sisters were forced to close the Convent because of lack of personnel. In 1975 three King sisters from Woodlands, Srs Bernadette Mohlaphing, Clementia Buqwana and Michael Shude once again reopened this mission. One of the first things the sisters did was to attend a course on how to train adults to instruct their children. In addition to visiting the people, the sisters continued to run the clinic and helped with the many administrative details involved in running a mission.

#### ST PETER CLAVER MISSION NEAR EAST LONDON

Dreadful conditions prevailed in the East Bank Location outside East London and so in 1928, Mother General Augustine Geisel established St Peter Claver Mission here. The sisters travelled from East London to this mission until 1929 when they obtained permission to live in Duncan Village. In 1949 the Sisters opened a clinic here. The mission grew. Both white and black sisters lived here and some of the staff in the school were black secular teachers.

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<sup>5</sup> The writer spent two years working in this area and living at the mission and can testify to the many hardships encountered in trying to help the people here.

## A KING DOMINICAN IS MURDERED IN THE 1953 RIOTS IN DUNCAN VILLAGE, EAST LONDON

Sr Mary Aidan Quinlan was a white Irish sister who had been trained as a medical doctor at the University of the Witwatersand. On the afternoon of Sunday, 9 November 1952, she was brutally murdered in Duncan Village by a mob. Sr Aidan had been working in Duncan Village for three and a half years when she died. She had established a clinic there and had been assisted during this time by her medical orderly, Sr Gratia Khumalo.

There had been riots in the weeks before Sr Aidan's death in Port Elizabeth and in Kimberley and there was some fear in the sisters at St Peter Claver Mission, but Gouws records that it was more the fear among the sisters that either the Government authorities or Religious Superiors might move their convent away from the people because of danger (Gouws 1977:349). Political unrest had been occurring in the country, but Sr Aidan worked with the people in the township all the time and considered them her friends. Unsuspectingly she drove into an area where there was a meeting and her car was stoned and she was burned to death. The convent, school, church and priest's cottage were burnt to the ground.

When the black sisters became independent and the diocesan congregation of the St Martin de Porres Sisters was established, the convent at Duncan Village was handed over to the new congregation by the King Prioress General, Mother Aquilina Spiegel.

I asked Sr Stella Hlatshwako about Sr Aidan's death. She said that she was teaching at Woodlands at the time. The white sisters at Woodlands had heard the news but said nothing to the black sisters. The next morning the white priest at the mission asked her if she had heard the news. She asked, "What news?" The priest led her into her empty classroom and told her Sr Aidan had been murdered. She was absolutely shocked. She then told the other black sisters. I can understand the feelings of shock, grief, fear, mistrust, anger and blame that I think the white sisters might have felt. I can also understand the feelings of shock, grief, fear, anxiety and uncertainty that the black sisters must have felt. If ever there would have been a time for a moment of reconciliation, this would have been it. Instead it was a time of riots, fear, lack of information, suspicion and misery.

### QOQODALA - SHOPKEEPING TO EVANGELISE

20 000 black people lived in the area of QoQodala from where there was a cry for sisters to help at the small mission which existed there. In May 1929, four white sisters arrived. Because the mission was in the African Reserve, no whites except traders were allowed to settle there so one of the sisters became the chief saleslady in the shop which existed on the trading station which had now become a mission. The sisters taught and ran a clinic. A problem was the Sisters' ignorance of the Xhosa language, but then Sr Anna Kugelmann who was fluent in Xhosa arrived. The King sisters were recalled in 1959 and their work was then taken over by a local diocesan group of sisters who had been founded by Bishop Rosenthal of Queenstown.

### LUMKO - BACK UP STAFF FOR THE STUDY OF MISSIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

At present there is a house of theological studies at a place called Lumko in Germiston, but the first Lumko was a mission about seven kilometres from the village of Lady Frere. Three King sisters were sent there to help with the mission work. In 1966 the mission was converted into the Missiological Research and Training Institute and the Missionary Priests of the Sacred Heart took up their residence there. The King sisters were then recalled. Today some of our sisters, both black and white, are themselves lecturers at seminaries.

### THE POOR COLLECT TO SUPPORT THE SISTERS

In 1929 the first church was built at Klipspruit which was later called Nancefield and then Pimville. A primary school opened in January 1930 and two King sisters travelled by train from Belgravia convent every day to teach. The trains were often late and so the timetable of the school would be in chaos and this meant that the mission school could not be registered until 1934. To overcome the problem the King congregation bought an old house about a mile from the school. The house was in dreadful disrepair, but the Sisters attempted to fix it up. A third sister joined the two teachers to cook for them and keep house for them while they went off to school each day. The life of these King sisters was a very hard one and their health deteriorated and they had to give up their work. Other sisters took their place.

The sisters were always very much part of the Nancefield community. A Mrs Ester Mkize saw how poor the sisters were and organised the collection of money among the people and each

Monday morning the sisters were given a donation. The work of these kind people spread to looking after sick and poor families in the community. In 1951 the Group Areas Act was passed in parliament and part of its effect was that the South African Government took over all the mission schools in South Africa. All state subsidies to mission schools ceased. This was very hard for the parents and teachers in such schools because it meant that the maintenance had to come from private sources.

Donations were received from the Diocese of Johannesburg, the Congregation and organisations such as the Catholic Women's League and the St Vincent de Paul Society but the financial struggle continued. Eventually the land surrounding the mission was declared industrial and all the shacks, houses and buildings were demolished. Gouws records that from Pimville began the missions of Evaton, Meyerton, Benoni, Germiston and Alberton (Gouws 1977:359).

#### KLIPTOWN - NO BIRTH CERTIFICATE, NO SCHOOL

There was also a little convent and school in Kliptown. In 1973 a project of teaching backward children was begun. Apparently these children did not have birth certificates and so were not allowed to enrol at any school (Gouws 1977:361). When the birth certificates were obtained, the children moved to recognised schools. Some of the sisters at Kliptown also assisted the Holy Cross Sisters who used to go to Diepkloof to teach people who were studying privately for their Std 8 Certificates or their Matriculation Examinations. In 1976 the riots interrupted the latter work.

#### CHINESE CHILDREN AND CHINESE POSTULANTS

The South African government's racial policies meant that Chinese people were not classified as whites. A school for Chinese children living in Kliptown was begun in 1948 and some of the King sisters gave lessons there. By 1969 many Chinese people had moved away from Kliptown and it was decided to close the school.

#### CHINESE WOMEN STRUGGLE TO JOIN A "WHITE" CONGREGATION

There was also a difficulty in accepting young Chinese women as postulants:

"In an interview accorded to Rev Mother General and Mother Aquilina on 5



December, the Apostolic Delegate approved our acceptance of Chinese postulants should any apply. He suggests they should be trained in South Africa.” (Archives 1959:File LI:Vol XI:160)

In June 1960 there was a prospective Chinese postulant and it was decided that although the woman in question was as yet too young, Chinese postulants would be accepted and could be sent to the noviciate in Hinckley in England. In this way the Group Areas Act implications could be overcome.

#### EVATON - DECLARED BLACK IN 1956

There was also a mission at Evaton near Vereeniging where three white King sisters went to work. By 1945 there were seven teachers on the staff of whom two were sisters, two black male teachers and three young black women who had qualified at Village Main, the Teachers' Training College for black teachers which the King sisters had established. Some of our black sisters also worked at Evaton, where they shared a house with some of our white sisters.

In 1965 Evaton was declared a Bantu Area and the white sisters were obliged to leave the township while Srs Peter Pakose, John Masibi, Cabrini Motsuenyane and Agathe Manne remained for a while longer. In 1966 the Department of Community Development offered to buy the ground because the mission was located in an area that was reserved for other development. The mission was closed down and the black sisters left Evaton in 1967.

#### STUTTERHEIM, SPRINGS, PAYNEVILLE AND KWA THEMA

From April 1936 two King sisters the mission clinic in Stutterheim. The work at the clinic continued for twelve years when it was closed because the State had made provision for black people at the town hospital.

Black men who worked on the mines used to come to Springs, to a little tin church, for mass on Sundays. There were also black people living in the Payneville Location where Dominican priests worked. One of the white King sisters used to travel from Springs convent to Payneville to act as sacristan. Two white sisters from Springs Convent travelled to Payneville every day to begin what was called the St Louis Bertrand Mission. Two black King sisters and some black secular

staff joined them. The Dominican priests, however, decided in 1954 to see if this mission could do without the white sisters and so they asked Mother General Aquilina Spiegel to withdraw them and replace them with black sisters. By 1957 the school had eight teachers three of whom were sisters. Because the school did so well, it opened a filial school in Kwa Thema Township. Sr Pius Phelelo travelled to Kwa Thema each day and took with her one of the secular teachers. Some of the children who lived nearer to Kwa Thema left the Payneville school and enrolled at Kwa Thema. Because of the Group Areas Act, the Payneville convent and school were eventually both transferred to Kwa Thema.

#### MIDDELBURG, CAPE AND ZIGUDU NEAR QUEENSTOWN

In 1933 four King sisters were sent to Middelburg to open a white kindergarten in town and the mission school in the location. Until 1947 the sisters lived in a series of rented houses, but they then obtained their own house and called it the Convent of St John.

King Sisters also worked at the mission in Zigudu in the district of Queenstown. In 1958 the King Sisters were withdrawn from the district of Zigudu and were replaced by a community of black Diocesan Sisters called the Daughters of the Mother of Divine Love. The latter group had been founded by Bishop J.B. Rosenthal, S.A.C.

#### LEIGHTONVILLE NEAR KING WILLIAMS TOWN

In 1940 two white sisters responded to the call to start a school in Leightonville township. Walking to the township was not easy and Sr Oliver contracted angina and died. To help the situation Mother General Demetria Hemmer bought property next to the church and erected a school on it. Eventually this school was taken over by black lay teachers. In 1977 Sr Agatha Manne was the principal and the last of the King sisters left on the staff.

#### ST THOMAS'S TEACHERS TRAINING COLLEGE, VILLAGE MAIN

The King sisters responded to the invitation to open a training college for black teachers. The College, St Thomas's, opened on 23 January 1939 with nine students, but by 1941 this number had risen to 61. The place it was situated in was called Village Main which is where the rail transport container terminal is today. By 1958 St Thomas College in spite of its 620 students in

the Primary Lower, Primary Higher, Secondary School and Training College was closed because of the Group Areas Act. The sisters hoped to reopen the institution in a private capacity but all their applications were refused. Within seven years the stately buildings were razed to the ground.

There are still many hundreds of South African black women who have risen through the ranks in professional areas and who were educated at St Thomas's, Village Main. One of them is Albertina Sisulu. There are some who have entered religious life themselves, either with other congregations or with the Kings e.g. Sr Theresita Motadinyane and Sr Stella Hlatshwako.

#### RHODESIA

When it became apparent in 1957 that it was going to be increasingly difficult for the King sisters to do mission work among the black and coloured people of South Africa, the sisters looked to countries north of here and were welcomed at Berejena Mission in the Gwelo Diocese of Zimbabwe.

Near Berejena Mission is the Matibi Mission. Two King sisters came to establish a clinic here but first went to the Driefontein Mission about 250 km to the north to learn the Shona language. The sisters arrived on 1 August 1963. The sisters also did parish work and taught homecraft and reading, writing and arithmetic to illiterate adults.

#### MARAPYANE AND RAMANCHAANE NEAR MARBLE HALL

Marapyane Mission is situated near Marble Hall. In 1964 three white King sisters arrived to help the priests who were already there. Financially the mission was supported by several of the other King convents and by benefactors in Europe. A small clinic which also treated maternity cases was established on the mission. The sisters also became involved in parish work and assisted Fr R. Webber, O.M.I. by giving lessons to the young black male postulants who were to go to the seminary. A King sister, Sr Catherine Owens, is still doing this kind of work, but is at present working at the preparatory seminary in the Welkom area.

Just 10 km from Marapyane is Ramanchaane. On 15 July 1974 Srs Goretti Donga, Dominica Twalingca and Theodora Dlamini moved into the newly-built Convent of 'Mwe we le Thabo at

Ramanchaane<sup>6</sup>. The sisters did parish work, taught catechism and visited the people in their homes. Sr Theodora ran the clinic and started a Chiro Youth Club. Gouws (1977:381) reports that this convent was also to serve as a collecting house for black girls in the Transvaal who wished to try their vocations to religious life.

#### BOLIVIA AND ECUADOR

In April 1971 in answer to a request from Dominican priests three King sisters arrived in Santa Cruz in Bolivia to do catechetical work and run a primary school and clinic. Sisters were also needed to run a school and clinic at Forestal which is 38 km from Santa Cruz and so some of the King sisters went to work there.

At the Dominican Order's First International Congress of Dominican Missionaries there was a desperate request for help in Ecuador. On 17 November 1975 four Sisters arrived in Puyo and two more followed within a month.

#### A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE INTEGRATION OF BLACK PUPILS

That the congregation did great mission work there can be no doubt. At the same time schools and hospitals for whites were the areas where white people at any rate acknowledged the excellent work done by the sisters. Black pupils started entering the white convent schools in the early 1980s but it was not an easy process for the sisters who were the principals. I myself served as a principal in one of our schools from 1988 until 1996. The sister whose place I took had been forced to resign from her position because of the opposition she experienced from the white Board of Governors, parents and teachers at the school when she took black pupils into the Grade 0 classes. Since then I have heard some of the same members of the Board, parent body and staff express their pride in what that school is accomplishing now. It is multi-racial and one of the very best schools in its province. The white parents were simply not ready for integration. When I arrived in 1988 much of the difficult preparation for integration had been done by my predecessor, Sr Sofie Sirch, to whom I would like to pay tribute. I remember the fear our staff lived in when we were asked to fill in forms disclosing the pupils' race. Later on as we approached 1994, things improved but I remember being told by the Education Department that unless at least 50% of our pupils were white, we would lose our subsidy. We struggled to survive financially. Many of the

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<sup>6</sup> 'Mwe we le Thabo means Our Lady, Mother of Joy

white Catholic parents took their children out of our school because we were too black! The staff were committed and I shall never forget their loyalty and excitement as they watched the black pupils learn and progress. Ironically it was the Convent School that the government approached about giving our hall as a venue to host the 27 April 1994 elections. We did and I remember people standing in long queues reaching outside the grounds. Many had never ever been to the school and many did not even know that a convent existed in the town.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 shows us that work among all the different ethnic groups in South Africa started very soon after 1877 when the sisters arrived. There can be no doubt that white people saw the excellence of education given by the King sisters and so the convent schools for whites enjoyed a certain importance. The sisters themselves were aware that some of their number were working at the mission schools and clinics and supported them through prayer and interest. There was also a system where any convent that had any excess money, seldom the case, would send it to the missions. The sisters from overseas enjoyed the support and interest of their families and parishes at home. Benefactors from Europe, chiefly from Germany, would send money meant specifically for the poor and work among the poor.

In this chapter it is evident that there are many places where the sisters worked. One can see a great mobility in the sisters. They moved whenever required to do so. The leadership kept on trying to respond to requests from priests and bishops that convents, schools, mission stations, clinics and even hospitals be opened. That the sisters were adaptable and willing there can be no doubt. That they suffered physically and emotionally in their attempts to discern what they believed the will of God was for them is also clear.

There is also some evidence in this chapter of the hierarchical style of governance in the church. Sometimes the sisters suffered because bishops and priests were authoritative and controlling in their demands. Unfortunately some sisters in leadership positions used the same style of governance over the sisters under their authority. More of this will emerge in the chapters that follow.

Some of the gaps and differences within the congregation have surfaced in this chapter e.g. the gap between choir sisters and lay sisters, the gap between educated sisters and working class sisters, the differences in cultural norms, the differences between nurses and teachers, the differences between black sisters and white sisters, and the differences between black sisters and coloured sisters. One of the biggest problems to my mind was then and remains now that of language. With the exception of a few sisters who had learnt to speak Xhosa, white sisters could not in the past and still cannot now, understand the languages of the black sisters.

The above chapter also attempts to show the outreach not only to whites but also to blacks and coloureds. In the case of the blacks and coloureds, the work was especially difficult. Not only were poor roads, a lack of facilities such as clean water and food, a lack of buildings and often a poor knowledge of the language of the people huge obstacles, there were also insurmountable problems when the government shut down missions and schools and clinics through the Group Areas Act. Another great problem was the decline in the number of able bodied sisters.

In spite of the problems the sisters showed initiative. When their work among the people resulted in a request from young women that they be allowed to join the congregation, the sisters tried to accommodate the requests, but there could not be one entry point. Whites, blacks and coloureds, each group had its separate noviciate, even before the apartheid system was enforced. The next chapter will deal with the topic in more detail.

### **CHAPTER 3: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE STORY OF THE BLACK SISTERS.**

#### **AIM OF THIS CHAPTER**

This chapter will briefly tell the story of the black sisters from the time they first entered the congregation of the King William's Town Dominican Sisters until the present day.

Sources used in the research include:

- ◆ the annals and council minutes which deal with the topic of the black sisters in the archives of the congregation
- ◆ interviews with black, white and coloured sisters who lived through those times
- ◆ a report of an interview with Fr Oswin Mc Grath O.P. who assisted the sisters with legal knowledge pertaining to the setting up of structures.

#### **THE ORIGIN OF THE CONGREGATION**

The Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St Catharine of Siena of King William's Town was originally a group of seven white German sisters who came to the Eastern Cape in 1877 in answer to a call by Bishop James David Ricards who needed help in ministering to the settlers, many of whom were German, in the Eastern Cape Vicariate.

The sisters who came to the Cape in 1877 had been living an enclosed life as second order Dominican women, or nuns, who did not go out to work among the people. Their descendants, the sisters of King William's Town were given permission to change this status in order to become third order sisters in 1923, but already in 1878 the sisters opened their first school in King William's Town and so the people came to them. Wherever a school or clinic or convent was established, the people would arrive to be taught or nursed or helped in some way. The people also helped the sisters who were poor and they would be given a variety of gifts such as bread or milk or a cow.

As the congregation spread and more and more convents, schools, clinics and mission stations were opened by the King sisters in South Africa, more and more black people worked not only for the sisters but also with them.

### THE FIRST BLACK VOCATION, DOMITILLA DLAMINI

In the Transvaal the King sisters had in 1928 taken over from the Holy Family sisters the convent and school at Vleeschfontein, not too far away from Rustenburg in the Northern Transvaal. Among the teaching staff was a Zulu woman from Natal whose name was Domitilla Dlamini. When she became very ill, there was no doctor to be had because of the remoteness of the place and she was nursed back to health by Sr M. St James Bildstein, the superior of the small group of King sisters.

When Domitilla was better, she returned to Natal and told her mother what had happened. The mother in thanksgiving to Sr St James who had nursed her daughter, wrote a beautiful poem in Zulu. The translated version reads as follows:

#### A Zulu Lyric

My little Sister, my child, my daughter quite white. The works of the Almighty are great and marvellous on the earth. I do not know how I can thank you. What I shall say to my Sister, quite white as snow, I do not say in your face only, but I say in your heart. You are also quite white. I thank you a thousand times. Again I say, I cannot thank you enough my child, so great and admirable in what you have done in my place to my child who is an orphan in a country I do not know. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who has robbed me of my child, and has made her an orphan while I still live, reward my little Sister with gifts most precious to body and soul.

To Sr St James the mother wrote the following letter:

Dear Sr St James, and all you Sisters worthy of veneration, I know what immense love you have shown to Domitilla my daughter whilst she lay ill with fever in Vleeschfontein. I have learned how you nursed her just like a child, lifting her up in your arms in order to give her some rest. I know that you washed her and cared for her. You have done all to my child, who is an orphan, for the sake of the love of God. Oh, I express what I feel very badly. I have learned that my child is not orphaned., she has numerous fathers and mothers,



who love her dearly, with love like a mother's, a love like that is equal to mine. I suffered and cared and feared for her before she was born, when she entered the world and since. May God who rules Heaven and Earth, with his graces bless you for the work of your good, white hands.

Oh my sister, if I could be near you, I would kneel on both knees before you, and I would beg for your hands, one by one. Amid tears I would kiss them to thank you and so to show my delight, because of your holy works.

It is I and my children, who live here with me, that speak to you thus. In spite of the cough that from time to time racks me, numberless are the divine favours in my regard. Mary Magdalene, my second daughter, has been very ill. God Almighty has shown mercy on me, for now she is better and able to walk. Mary whose chest is weak, can nevertheless do her work. Jean, the youngest of all, has also been ill for some days. Tell Domitilla, my own little little queen, that this is why I delayed to send you this letter, for she had to write it for me. (Presumably Jean was the scribe.) Oh my Sister, I beg you to read this letter to all for I wish to thank all: the Sisters, the Fathers, the Brothers. May Jesus Christ ever be praised.

I am the grateful mother of Domitilla.

Agnes Dlamini.

Domitilla Dlamini applied to Mother General Augustine Geisel (in office from 1928 - 1946) in January 1929 to enter the congregation. Until this point no other black person had asked to enter the congregation. Domitilla's request meant much soul searching on the part of the sisters who were asking themselves if God's will for them was to expand their membership beyond the white, Western world. The question of accepting black vocations was put to His Excellency, Archbishop B.J. Gilswijk O.P., Apostolic Delegate to Southern Africa, and to Right Reverend Bishop MacSherry, the local ordinary of King William's Town. Both men were in favour of having a black sisterhood but advised that the group of black sisters be established as a quasi-diocesan Dominican institute, thus not having full membership of the King William's Town Congregation. It seems, however, that the sisters thought it would be more to the glory and honour of God if

black sisters would become full members of the King William's Town Congregation and so they told the Apostolic Delegate that this was what they wanted. In the end Mother General and the Council decided to have a joint sisterhood where both black and white sisters belonged to the same congregation.

#### A SEPARATE NOVITIATE FOR BLACK SISTERS

The Holy See was asked for permission to have a separate novitiate for black sisters and this was granted on 23 April 1932. The first novitiate for black sisters was established at Maria Hilf near Woodlands Mission, about 20 kilometres from King William's Town.

The first three black postulants were received on 22 July 1932, feast day of St Mary Magdalene, patroness of the Dominican Order. These three women were Domitilla Dlamini, Caroline Mabentsela and Coletta Mfaladi. Sr M. Benigna Osterburger was appointed to be the Mistress of Novices. Sr Benigna was helped in the task of teaching the young women the Dominican way of life by the Prioress of Maria Hilf Convent, Mother Cassiana Rohrmeier.

Unfortunately it was Domitilla who was unable to stay. Her health was simply not good enough to take the austerity of convent life and so on medical advice she left the convent. Both Domitilla and the sisters were sad and regretted that Domitilla could not stay. She went to join the mission at Witbank where she helped to instruct people in the Catholic faith.

Caroline Mabentsela, a convert from Anglicanism and a teacher at the mission school at Woodlands, and Coletta Mfaladi, whose parents lived at the mission in Vleeschfontein, received their habits on 23 June 1933 after attending a retreat preached by Bishop MacSherry to prepare them for the reception into the novitiate. Bishop MacSherry and Fr P. Graeff officiated at the ceremony. Caroline was given the name, Sr Mary of the Holy Rosary and Coletta became Sr Mary Ann of the Holy Cross. It is interesting that Caroline was 36 years old, considerably older than most other young women who entered religious life, when she became a postulant. Coletta was 30 years old. In an informal interview Sr Stella Hlatshwako told me that the black sisters, just like the white sisters, had to have a dispensation to be permitted to enter if they were over 30 years of age. Nowadays the tendency is to discourage anyone from entering at too early an age and 20 or

21 years of age would be considered very young.

Caroline Mabentsela, Sr Mary of the Holy Rosary, died on 17 May 1981 at the age of 85 at the Mater Infirmorum Convent for sick and frail Sisters. She had been professed for 46 years. Coletta Mfaladi, Sr Mary Ann of the Holy Cross, died on 15 October 1997 at the Emmaus retirement home in East London. She was 95 years old and had been professed for 63 years. These two sisters were to be the pioneers among the black sisters of the congregation. They made their first profession of vows on Rosary Sunday, 1934 and their final profession of vows on 5 January 1938. The two white sisters who had guided them, Mother M. Cassiana and Sr M. Benigna both died in 1938, but not before they had seen the two sisters become full and official members of the Congregation at their final vows ceremony.

#### CURRENT DISCERNMENT PRACTICES BEFORE ENTERING RELIGIOUS LIFE AND RELIGIOUS LIFESTYLES IN TRANSITION

Today women of a variety of ages continue to ask to be accepted into the Congregation. Sometimes the person is in her early twenties and at other times she might be in her forties or even fifties. Still today a great deal of discernment goes on about how best to deal with the person as she is integrated into the process of living religious life. Before a young woman joins our congregation, she makes contact with a sister who has the portfolio of vocations ministry. At least a year of visits from the vocations ministry director to the woman's home and from the woman to the convent takes place. There are so called Come and See workshops. The person will spend an occasional weekend in a convent to see what happens there. She is encouraged to upgrade her education until she has at least a Matric.

Once a young person commits herself to enter the pre-noviciate, she spends a year in a convent where she is accompanied by the pre-noviciate director. We are always glad if she is not the only pre-novice, but sometimes she has no companion. The pre-noviciate is a convent where there are two or three professed sisters. The pre-novice joins in their common life and also has special classes to upgrade both academic knowledge and that of religious life and the Catholic faith. During this time counselling sessions from a psychologist and spiritual direction also take place.

After a year, although some people spend two years in the pre-noviciate, two years of noviciate take place. At present four different Dominican congregations share a common noviciate in Vanderbijlpark. In addition to the novice mistress, there are three other professed sisters who help the novice mistress with the formation of the novices. Here there is much more in-depth training in the prayer life and spiritual life religious sisters lead. The novices also participate in the normal life of the community. One of the two years is called the canonical year and the novice concentrates on her interior spiritual life. The second year is called apostolic and during this time, she will go out of the noviciate for three months and live in one of the other communities in the congregation and do some work e.g. she might go to one of our schools and help there in an informal capacity.

When she has been accepted for first vows, there is a ceremony at which she makes her first profession for a year and she will then join a community and study. Most of the present young women have done no tertiary study and so it is at this stage that they are sent to teachers' training colleges or universities or nursing colleges. They are accompanied by a sister who sees that they are coping with community life and their study. Often psychological counselling occurs during this stage. The sisters will also have spiritual direction. They are also encouraged to obtain their drivers licences and skills in computer literacy. After at least three years of temporary profession, the sisters may apply to make final profession, a commitment for life. (Guidelines for Initial Formation 1997)

It will be seen that it is a long and complicated process to become a sister. Guidelines are set out in detail in the Guidelines document which the Initial Formation Team, a group of five professed sisters, are continually updating to ensure its relevance.

In the past the structures for initial formation existed but were not as detailed as they are now. Religious life has changed drastically since the Second Vatican Council and there have been many debates about the right lifestyle for the current situation. In South Africa there are many cultural differences among the sisters. It is not just differences between blacks and whites that come into question, but also cultural differences among black peoples of the different language groups. The problem is very challenging and we are struggling to deal with it, but let us return to the past.

### A MULTI-CULTURAL AND MULTI-LINGUAL GROUP

A steady flow of vocations continued. Most of them came from families who had not been Catholics for more than one or two generations. The young women were sometimes converts from mission schools. The language and culture of the women were very different from that of the white sisters of the congregation they wished to join. The King congregation consisted of mostly German speaking white women who had learnt to speak English. Many could also speak Afrikaans and indeed some of them were fine Afrikaans scholars. Many learnt Venda or Xhosa or Zula or Tswana depending on where their mission was situated, but nevertheless the fact that the white sisters were of a European background accustomed to different ways of understanding and practising the teachings of Catholicism, presented huge difficulties to the sisters trying to train the black recruits. Of course throughout South Africa in other congregations and parishes the same struggle ensued. Today we continue to struggle to live out just ideals as we deal with all the problems of living together multi-culturally.

### LILYFONTEIN

In December 1949 during the time of Prioress General Mother M. Demetria Hemmer, the novitiate was moved from Woodlands to Lilyfontein, also called Leliefontein. The permission of the Holy See was first sought and obtained. It was said that the climate of Lilyfontein was better for the health of the novices especially, many of whom came from warmer parts of South Africa, but we shall see that the church authorities wanted black sisters to be placed among the people there.

The noviciate at Lilyfontein was called the Convent of Our Lady of Fatima and Reverend Mother Anna Kugelmann was put in charge of the novices. Apparently it was not always easy for some of the young black women to join the King sisters and some actually ran away from home.

### THE GROUP AREAS ACT

In 1954 the Group Areas Act was introduced into the country by the South African Government. The Act ruled that people of different races could not live together as equals. Apparently it also meant that as long as the congregation had black members, it could not acquire or sell property, something which was very much part of the congregation's activities as it either opened a new house where there was a need or closed one because it was better to relocate to another site in the

town. Sometimes an existing house would be expanded as the demand for education from all race groups continued to grow. There were no integrated schools or hospitals at the time, but groups of white sisters were already living in some of the black and coloured townships in order to teach the people. The white sisters were also catechists and some ministered in clinics. Among these white sisters were at times black sisters, but for the most part these groups of sisters were white. The Group Areas Act presented a big problem to the sisters. Apparently the law of not acquiring or selling property was later amended so that it applied only if black sisters were members of the congregation's highest level of governance structures.

As I look back, it does not seem to me that there were opportunities for black sisters to go into leadership at the top level of governance structures in any case. It seems that the same sisters stayed in general leadership, i.e the highest level of leadership, and in local leadership of communities for year after year with only old age or sickness removing them from their positions. The way of governance at the time was modelled on the hierarchical system of the patriarchal Church. It is only in the last fifteen years that our congregation has been moving to a more participative, democratic type of governance where a transition towards empowering every sister is in process. In the 1950s, Vatican II had not yet arrived and the norm was obedience to the Mother General and her Council and the local superior or Reverend Mother by all. The "average" white sister never became a superior or prioress so it seems to me that there was little problem in ensuring that black sisters were not in positions of governance.

To return, however, to the problems of the Group Areas Act, the law meant that if the black sisters did live with the white sisters, they could not do so as equals. The only alternative was for the black sisters to live with the white sisters as servants. This was very degrading and brought with it great heartache and humiliation.

#### AN INDEPENDENT DIOCESAN SISTERHOOD

A solution to the problem was sought and on 12 October 1954 a letter was written to Rome in which it was stated ".....that in view of the recent change in legislation which prohibits any social contact between European and Non-European in the Union of South Africa, the Non-European members of our congregation be formed into an independent Diocesan Sisterhood." (Archives

1954:3)

Apparently it was felt that the sisters concerned were capable of directing their own affairs under the temporary guidance of a white sister and that they “would have greater scope to develop within the framework of their own traditions, culture and environment.” (Archives 1954:3)

Also it seems that the black sisters themselves were not satisfied with their situation and the way they were being treated. They sat at the back of the church, received communion after the white sisters and had their food in the kitchen instead of in the dining room with the white sisters. (Munzhedzi, T [1997]. Interview with O McGrath)

On 6 May 1956 a conference was held in Lilyfontein. Bishop E.A. Green D.D. of Port Elizabeth announced the possibility of forming a separate diocesan congregation. Many sisters both black and white had not been aware of all that had been happening and this conference came as a shock. At the time there were 41 black sisters of whom 26 were finally professed, 9 were in temporary profession, 5 were novices and one was a postulant. Of these 41 sisters, 9 were qualified teachers and 2 were qualified nurses.

The final separation took place in July 1958 and the black sisters took on the name of Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of St Martin de Porres of the diocese of Port Elizabeth. By this time Reverend Mother Aquilina Spiegel was Prioress General of the King William’s Town congregation. This was a sad time for both black and white sisters. The first Mother Vicar of the black sisters was Sr Mary Mabentsela.

There was a fear among some of the black sisters that one of the tribal groups might dominate over the others and make life miserable for them and so some of the sisters were not in favour of being separated from the white sisters (Munzhedzi, T [1997]. Interview with O McGrath). However from 1958 to 1966 the Congregation of St Martin functioned very well with the help of Sr Fidelia Grohe, a white sister who remained a member of their community and who was a member of their general council. Vocations continued to come in steadily and receptions and first profession ceremonies were held every year.

## THE DIOCESAN SISTERS ASK TO RETURN TO THE KING CONGREGATION

In 1966 the sisters of St Martin de Porres held their first general chapter. Most of the black sisters wanted to remain an independent congregation and the sisters of the King congregation tried to respect the autonomy of the black sisters. It seems, however, that some individuals in the new diocesan congregation kept writing to the King General Council asking for help. One of the sisters who wrote felt help was needed because the council was not functioning properly.

An interview with the Apostolic Delegate was held on 2 August 1968 and the following reasons for amalgamation with the King congregation were brought forward by the sisters of the St Martin de Porres congregation:

1. Most of the sisters had originally entered the King Congregation
2. Their novitiate and novice mistress were still at Lilyfontein.
3. The legal difficulty about the King Congregation's not being able to buy or sell property if some of their members were black had ceased to exist because the South African Government's rule now was that the King Congregation could not buy or sell property only if black sisters were members of the governing structures of the congregation.
4. The separation had come too suddenly and the black sisters had not been prepared for self-government and could not cope.
5. Many letters had been received from black sisters who told of their great insecurity and asked to be re-admitted to the King congregation.

On 20 August 1968 King Mother General wrote a letter to Bishop Green pointing out that the King congregation did not wish to take over the congregation of Sr Martin de Porres but wished to assist them since they needed help.

Another meeting was held on 6 September 1968 in Woodlands. The meeting was presided over by Bishop Green of Port Elizabeth and Mother General Fromunda Zimmermann, the then Mother General of the King congregation. At this meeting it was resolved that the Martin de Porres congregation be affiliated to the King Congregation as a province. The Bishop of Port Elizabeth accepted the decision. In this way the black sisters could keep their autonomy but still have the



material and spiritual benefits of the King congregation.

On 7 November 1968, Mother General Fromunda Zimmerman sent the black sisters a letter saying that the initiative for the amalgamation should come from the black sisters themselves. On 27 February 1969 at a meeting in Woodlands, a vote was taken among the St Martin de Porres Sisters to determine whether the majority of sisters were for or against amalgamation. Sixty sisters voted and the results were as follows: 54 yes, 4 no and 2 invalid.

#### AMALGAMATION OF THE BLACK SISTERS WITH THEIR ORIGINAL CONGREGATION

The date of the decree of amalgamation of the Province of St Martin de Porres and the King Congregation was 25 April 1970. Sr Regula Schelle, a white sister born in Germany, was elected as provincial of the Province of St Martin de Porres in December 1970 and the actual re-union took place on 5 January 1971 at a meeting in Woodlands. Present were the Apostolic Delegate, His Excellency, Archbishop John Gordon; the Vicar Capitular, Monsignor John Murphy; legal adviser and lecturer to the conference, Fr Oswin Magrath, O.P.; Prioress General of the King congregation Mother Fromunda Zimmermann and sixty four sisters of the St Martin de Porres congregation who declared of their own free will that they wished to become members of the King congregation.

Why was there not full re-union but only re-union as a province? According to Father Oswin Magrath the reason was "to leave the future open to a variety of possible developments, very necessary in such a shifting situation as that of the Church in Southern Africa" at the time. Fr Oswin Magrath also said that the separate province placed both groups in a position where some degree of interchange and multi-racial interchange could be sought according to the possibilities of time, place and the capacities of the individuals by transferring them from one section to the other. There was also the idea of leaving room for freedom of initiative, diversification and local difference.

It can be seen from Father Oswin's words that multi-cultural enrichment was a value in the process of amalgamation which took place in 1970 and 1971. There was an awareness that the amalgamation was the start of a long dialogue in which both groups would have to learn much

from each other and in which difficult calls would be made on both groups and individuals. The step was seen as an act of faith in the call of Christ to Religious Life and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit in history.

Although the two congregations were now amalgamated there were further developments after 1971. The two became completely re-united into the one King Congregation in 1982 with the falling away of the Province of St Martin de Porres. One novitiate where sisters of all races were trained became the norm.

From 1982 to 1993 only one black sister joined the congregation but from then onwards a steady though small number of sisters began to enter the pre-novitiate and from there to go on to the stage of novitiate and temporary profession. At present, 2001, there are seven sisters in initial formation in the King Congregation.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER 3

This chapter has attempted to give a brief overview of the story of the black sisters and some of the major events that occurred from the time they first asked to join the sisters until the present time. First they were full members of the King congregation, then in 1958 they left the King congregation through no fault of their own and became a diocesan congregation under Bishop Green, then they asked to return to the King congregation and were allowed to do so in 1970 but were made into a province of the King congregation and then in 1982 the Province of St Martin de Porres was disbanded and the black sisters were once again fully part of the King congregation.

That the constant changes were difficult to understand is clear. That most of the black sisters had no idea of what was happening will become clearer in the next chapter. I do not think that the average white sister knew a great deal of what was going on in 1958 and 1970. By 1982 decision making in the congregation had become much more consultative and information and questionnaires were sent out and returned so that all sisters became much more involved with what was going on.

The chapter also includes information on both past and current discernment criteria used before allowing a woman to become a fully professed sister.

## **CHAPTER 4: A LOOK AT THE STORY OF THE BLACK AND COLOURED SISTERS FROM ARCHIVAL SOURCES**

### **AIM OF THIS CHAPTER**

The room where the archives of the congregation are kept have been to me until recent years out of bounds. When I undertook this study, I was allowed to peruse the archival material relating to this story. The reason for such precautions is that many of the sisters and people involved in the stories are still alive and there is a fear of exposing them to unnecessary hurt. At the same time I believe that it is only through trying to find out what was really going on that hurts can be mended. This chapter uses archival material to discover what was going on. Of course annals of convents and minutes of meetings were written by the sisters themselves and the discretion and interpretative abilities of each scribe are still filters through which any study must sift. I trust that those involved in the story who are still alive and who are interested will benefit in some way from the work in this chapter. I found that when I interviewed the sisters, there were often contradictory stories. There are no doubt sisters who will feel that some of the work in this chapter tells a different story from what they themselves experienced. Nevertheless an examination of archival material on the topic is what follows.

### **UNCERTAINTY ABOUT BLACK SISTERS**

If one looks at the minutes of the meetings of the General Council at the time when the first black sisters approached the congregation with a view to becoming members, it seems clear that the move was met with uncertainty and confusion on the part of the congregation. One can only imagine what was going on in the minds of the white sisters who had until now never had any membership except that of the white race. The first time there is any record of discussion of the matter at general council level is in August 1928.

“The question of training postulants of the native races was considered, and the opinion expressed that should the work be begun, the Mission at Keilands was a suitable place in which to begin it. As these Sisters would not be part of our Congregation, they would be diocesan, and hence it was thought that there was no need to obtain leave from Rome to make the venture as the permission of the local Ordinary would probably suffice for the beginning.” (Archives 1924:File

XLIX:Vol II:131)

In 1928 Domitilla Dlamini had approached the sisters to ask if she could join the congregation.

Four months later in December 1928, the General Council Meeting minutes record:

“It was resolved to follow the advice given to Mother General by the authorities at Rome and to establish a separate diocesan congregation of Native Sisters on the lines followed by Right Reverend Bishop Fleischer of Marianhill. The girls should be received as candidates or secular tertiaries and gradually formed to the religious life.” (Archives 1928:File XLIX:Vol II:49)

By contrast white postulants from Ireland and England were to be received at the mother house in King William’s Town:

“ It was resolved that postulants from Ireland or England should not be required to go to Schledorf, but should be received at the novitiate for English speaking sisters now established at the Mother House.” (Archives 1929:File XLIX:Vol II:154)

#### SOUTH AFRICAN BUT DIFFERENT

Why could young women not of South African birth be received for training into the novitiate at the mother house in King William’s Town, while young women of South African birth, but of a different colour and race, could not? How much was the congregation already in the late 1920s influenced by the attitudes towards black people so prevalent in South Africa at that time and in time to come? How free was the congregation to disregard the influence the attitude of the Catholic Church and the government in South Africa? Is it not true that already then as now still there was a tremendous conflict and confusion about the correct attitude to take towards black people? It seems to me that the sisters knew the injustice of discrimination against black people, but like so many other white people in South Africa and indeed elsewhere in the world, both inside and outside the Catholic Church, in practice they did indeed discriminate against what was other or different.

## RULES FOR A FUTURE NATIVE CONGREGATION

At the same Council meeting of 25 January 1929, it is recorded that since Domitilla wanted to enter the congregation, it was now the right time to draw up a set of rules for a future native congregation:

“Domitilla, a young native teacher at the Witbank mission, has asked to be admitted to the Religious Life. It was accordingly considered a fitting time to draw up some provisional rules for a future native Religious Congregation, to be known as “The Daughters of Our Lady of the Rosary, or, in a shorter form, Rosarian Native Sisters.

The following regulations were agreed upon as a preliminary:

### Period of Probation

The period of probation should extend over the following years:

- (a) Candidates or Aspirants: Two years
- (b) Postulants: One year
- (c) Novices: Two years
- (d) Annual Temporary Vows for a period of six years
- (e) Temporary Vows renewed for a space of three years, to be repeated for a second triennium, and then followed by Final Vows. All this of course, subject to the approval of the Bishop in whose Vicariate the Novitiate House should be established later on.

### Age of Admission

The age of admission as postulants to be not less than 18 years.

### Places

Candidates to be received at any House.

Postulants to be received at a special House. Novices, at another. These to be decided on when necessity arose.

### Costume of Candidates

Candidates should wear a simple, modest dress, perfectly dark in colour, a small black cape, a short white veil of a special pattern, a large medal of Our Lady of the Rosary, on a black cord.

Companionship

Candidates should never be alone, even with the Priest unless when going to Confession. This rule to apply to Postulants and Sisters later on. They must always at least be two together.

Beds

Candidates should sleep on mattresses laid upon the floor.

Footwear

Candidates may wear shoes or sandals. Postulants and Sisters should go barefooted.

Costume of Postulants

It was suggested that Postulants might wear a navy blue costume of washable material.

Affiliation to the Order

The affiliation to the Order of Saint Dominic should be secured by inscribing the members of the Congregation in the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary.

Spiritual Exercises

Candidates should perform the following spiritual exercises:

1. Daily Mass
2. A quarter of an hour's meditation and five decades of the Rosary before Mass
3. Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Particular Examen, and five decades of the Rosary at midday
4. Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and five decades of the Rosary before Supper
5. A quarter of an hour's spiritual reading daily. Books to be selected by the Superior, to be simple, and of solid doctrine
6. Twice a week or oftener, a short instruction by the Superior will take the place of spiritual reading.
7. Weekly Confession, and Communion as allowed by the Priest
8. The Catechism to be well studied..

Visits and Correspondence

Candidates are not allowed to go home during the two years of aspirant life.

They shall not receive visits without the approval of the Superior.

All correspondence is to be controlled by the Superior.

#### Pension

If a Candidate receives a salary, part of this will be taken towards her support.

The rest will be saved for other expenses e.g. clothing, and part will go towards a dowry. Those who cannot pay a pension will do work instead.

#### Laundry

Candidates should do all their own washing and cleaning.

#### Day's Order, Meals and Sleeping

Candidates will rise and retire at the same time as the Community of the Mission House.

Meals may be taken with the native boarders, if any, and Candidates may sleep with these, or in some other place approved by the Superior.

#### Domitilla

At Vleeschfontein, Domitilla may sleep in the room near the kitchen and may have access to the room through the kitchen, when necessary." (Archives 1929: File XLIX:Vol II:154-157)

The above rules seem very strict to me, but in those days the rules for not only those in formation, but also for the professed sisters, were very strict. Strict rules applied to the white sisters too, though there were differences e.g. they would not have had to sleep in beds on the floor and they would not have had to go barefooted once they were postulants or sisters.

### BEDSTEADS BUT NOT PART OF THE KING CONGREGATION

The minutes of a meeting a few weeks later read:

"It was thought better that Native Sisters should sleep on bedsteads or stretchers - this being more healthy, more cleanly and more economical than sleeping on mattresses on the ground. A bedstead and bedding might form part of what each Sister should be required to provide with her outfit.

It was also decided that these Sisters should in no way form part of our Congregation, though they might be constituted as Sisters of The Third Order

of St Dominic should this seem advisable later on.” (Archives 1929:File XLIX:Vol II:162)

#### PROCEEDING CAUTIOUSLY

The Congregation proceeded very cautiously in this work of training black sisters. The minutes of April 1929 relate to the matter of black postulants:

“Mother General gave a favourable account of Domitilla, the first candidate for our proposed Native Sisterhood. Bishop MacSherry had written to Mother, to say that his approval was given to the project, but that we should proceed slowly profiting by the mistakes of others. Mother General had found her visit to Cala of use. She had had valuable advice given her there.” (Archives 1929: File XLIX:Vol II:170)

The Holy Cross congregation had black sisters at Cala in the Eastern Cape. I understand the wisdom of being cautious, but I cannot help but wish that we had been a bit more daring at the time. The same pattern of caution and treading carefully shows itself later on in the apartheid era.

#### EDUCATION STRESSED

From the very beginning it is evident that it was important to the Sisters of the King Williams Town Dominican Congregation that the future black Sisters be educated, irrespective of whether they were to be part of the Congregation or not:

“Caroline at the Pirie offered herself as a candidate for the future Native Sisterhood. Another girl at the Pirie and one at Vleeschfontein also applied. It was suggested that intending teachers, whose primary education had not been completed, would best be sent to Marianhill, though Std VI might be taken at Keilands.” (Archives 1929:File XLIX:Vol II:201)

#### COLOURED VOCATIONS

It seems that the question of vocations from the Coloured population represented yet another problem which was first discussed at a Council Meeting of May 1930:

“Mother General brought forward the necessity of considering the question of a noviciate for Coloured Sisters. It was decided that the matter should be



discussed between Bishop MacSherry and Mother General on the occasion of His Lordship's impending visit." (Archives 1930:File XLIX:Vol III:17)

#### OPPOSITION TO BLACK VOCATIONS

Opposition to black vocations came from all sides including parents. The June 1930 minutes record the following:

"The native teacher at the Pirie, Caroline, who wished to be a religious, was being hindered from following her vocation by her mother, who refused her consent on financial grounds chiefly. Mother General proposed that a settlement might be arrived at by allowing Caroline, in the event of her reception, to give her mother £2-0 per month out of her salary. The Council agreed to the proposal." (Archives 1930:File XLIX:Vol III:18)

#### MORE UNCERTAINTY ABOUT BLACK AND COLOURED VOCATIONS

Further discussions concerning black and coloured postulants were raised at the Council Meeting of July 1930:

"Mother General said that she had spoken to Bishop MacSherry with respect to beginnings of Congregations of Native and Coloured Sisters and His Lordship had consented on one condition, namely such Sisters were not to belong to our own Congregation, but to form special sisterhoods under our direction. He also thought that the period of probation should be long. It was decided to apply to Rome for written approval of the step, verbal permission having already been granted to Mother General on the occasion of her late visit to Rome. The question of a place of postulancy was discussed. Very Reverend Father Vogl suggested the 'old shop' at Keilands as a suitable house. The Council thought the position of Keilands too much out of the way to permit the frequent visits by Mother General. The Bishop (MacSherry) thought the Pirie or Izeli might be selected. It was finally though best to put Native postulants at Izeli and Coloured ones at Queenstown." (Archives 1930:File XLIX:Vol III:22)

A look at the above passage tells us that the leaders of the Congregation consulted the local Bishop but were in fact caught in a kind of compromising position between what they thought it best to do and pleasing the Bishop. Why did the Mother General broach the matter in Rome? Was this not bypassing the authority of the Bishop? Although the King William's Town Congregation was not to accept black or coloured sisters into its own ranks, it is clear that it took the matter of preparing the candidates for other sisterhoods very seriously. Rules and regulations were drawn up and the Mother General paid regular visits to the candidates. The rules of separation into black, white and coloured people in South Africa were carried over into the congregation.

#### WHITE SISTERS UNAWARE AND UNINFORMED

I spoke to a white sister who wishes to remain anonymous. She said that in a conversation with an academic, Canon Trevor Verryn, who had conducted research among the white sisters, she had been told that he had found them extremely unaware of what might have been politically just. His opinion was that they were not so much aware and unwilling to change as almost oblivious of the injustices being inflicted on the black people even before apartheid was legalised.

We know that in 1912, the South Africa Native National Congress was formed in Bloemfontein and eventually became known as the African National Congress. Its goals were the elimination of restrictions based on colour, obtaining a universal vote and the enfranchisement and parliamentary representation for blacks. Despite these efforts, the government continued to pass laws limiting the rights and freedoms of Africans. A long struggle followed and in the 1960s the appalling Sharpeville massacre led to the banning of the party and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and many other anti-apartheid activists. In May 1961, South Africa relinquished its dominion status and declared itself a republic. (Internet:Tourism World.com, South Africa - A Brief History, African World, Tours and Safaris, South Africa History Nelson Mandela, ANC, FW de Klerk, Apartheid. Anions Search Engine.)

#### APARTHEID DIES SLOWLY

It was only in 1994 that black, coloured and asiatic people gained legal recognition of their full status as equal to and with whites. It was only in 1994 that enfranchisement and parliamentary

representation came. In the same way it took many years for the black and coloured sisters to be accepted as legally equal to the white sisters. Even today in 2002 some of our sisters maintain that apartheid in the convent is not dead, but then throughout all parts of South Africa the same cry is still heard though it seems to me that is not as urgent as angry as it was throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Let us see how the story continued to unfold.

#### PROCEEDING VERY CAUTIOUSLY

In October 1930, it was decided that "native postulants" should be housed at the Pirie and the training of black women teachers was considered at a General Council meeting in November 1930. In the minutes of the General Council meeting of 7 March 1931, mention is made of a meeting which Mother General had with the Apostolic Delegate:

"His excellency was deferring the application to Rome for the approbation of our proposed Native and Coloured Sisterhoods until a decision was made on the above matter. He did not think these congregations should be diocesan, They should certainly be Dominican in spirit and in dress - a white habit, not a black should be given. His Excellency advised the use of the term 'aspirants' instead of 'candidates'. He thought no mention of these should be made in the proposed constitutions of these Sisterhoods. This would leave us free to keep them any length of time before admitting them as postulants, when they would at once take up a canonical position. The periods of probation after this should be according to the Dominican rule." (Archives 1931:File XLIX:Vol III:49)

What does the above say about the attitude to black vocations? There must have been great uncertainty as to whether to let the black sisters who wanted to join become diocesan under the bishop or part of the Dominican congregation under the Mother General. It seems the Apostolic Delegate was trying to be extremely diplomatic. He knew that if Rome were to make a ruling on the matter, there would be little hope of reversing the decision and it seems he was waiting for more clarity to emerge on whether to allow the black sisters to become diocesan under the bishop of the Eastern Cape or to become part of the King Dominican Congregation under its Mother General.

### ADMISSIONS POLICY STRICT

The Congregation was very strict in its admissions policy. Irrespective of the woman's colour, enquiries were made about the potential sister's character e.g it is recorded in the General Council Minutes of 19 April 1931 that a coloured girl from Aliwal North had written asking to be admitted as a postulant and that it was decided to make enquiries of Monsignor Desmond. The enquiries were made and it was found that the woman was not suitable for religious life.

### NECESSITY OF ECCLESIASTICAL APPROVAL

The following note from the General Council Minutes shows us how afraid the Sisters were to do anything new without the approval of the Apostolic Delegate:

“Mother General said she thought some step should now be taken for the admission of the three native aspirants at the Maria Hilf Mission to the postulancy. It was decided to ask advice of the Apostolic Delegate concerning the matter.” (Archives 1931:File XLIX:Vol III:81)

The Apostolic Delegate replied that he would make application to Rome for the establishment of a novitiate as soon as he heard the name of the proposed place and was assured of the suitability of the buildings. He also advised that the congregation should make a separate application to Rome for permission to open a novitiate house for coloured sisters.

### THE CLOTHING OF THE BLACK SISTERS

At this time queries arose as to what the black sisters should wear. Some of the white sisters were at the time training to be nurses and their clothing too was the object of discussion. Until now the sisters of the congregation had always worn a white habit, a white scapular over the habit and a black veil. Teaching could be done in this attire but nurses need less bulky clothing. There was a great deal of uncertainty about the clothing of black sisters, as the following record in the Council Minutes shows:

“After some discussion concerning the material to be used for the habits of Native Sisters, it was resolved that Mother General should ask Mother Cecilia of the Oakford Congregation what she used.” (Archives 1931:File XLIX:Vol III:86)

### APPROVAL FROM ROME

At the General Council Meeting of 30 April 1932, Mother Lucy informed the Council that Rome had approved of the establishment at the Pirie Convent of a Noviciate for Native Sisters. She continued that she would arrange for the postulancy of the three candidates to begin on 22 July 1932.

### NOVICES AND TEACHING

The General Council Minutes of 3 December 1932 deal with what to my mind is a serious matter. When a novice enters her canonical year of novitiate, she is, according to Canon Law, withdrawn from normal apostolic work e.g. nursing or teaching. Yet here the following is recorded:

“It was thought advisable to apply for leave for Native Sisters to continue to teach during the year of noviciate owing to the serious inconvenience which might occur if they were withdrawn from the school at the Pirie.” (Archives 1932:File XLIX:Vol III:125)

If the above request applied to the canonical year of the novitiate, a serious step was being taken in the training of black novices.

### DOMITILLA TAKES ILL

The very first black woman to approach the Congregation with a view to becoming a member of it was Domitilla Dhlamini who in early 1933 was a postulant. At an informal meeting of the General Council on 13 February 1933, Mother General informed the other councillors that a doctor had examined Domitilla and found that she was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. The doctor had said that the climate of the Pirie was very bad for her as it was too damp. This was in spite of Domitilla having just returned from a six week stay in a dry climate as the doctor had advised earlier. Mother General said she was going to visit the Pirie to see what could be done, but that if things continued in this way, Domitilla would not be allowed to be received as a novice. Mother General also said that Domitilla herself had indicated that she did not wish to stay in her present condition of health.

### HIV/AIDS

Perhaps a parallel might be drawn here between Domitilla's condition and that of modern day

young people who wish to enter the religious life but have HIV/Aids. Such young people may not enter religious life. The South African government's legislation forbids discrimination in the work force against any one who is a victim of HIV/Aids. However one does not enter religious life primarily as a worker, but as a member of a family which one joins for life. Because of the vast emotional issues tied up with the pandemic currently devastating South African society, there are many problems about how to handle the issue should such young people make application to enter the religious life.

#### THE FIRST TWO POSTULANTS ARE ACCEPTED

In the Council Minutes of 12 March 1933 we read that Domitilla was obliged to leave the postulancy on account of her ill health. She apparently went to Witbank. There were two other native postulants, Caroline Mabentsela and Coletta Mfaladi, who had written and asked to receive the habit. The Prioress of Maria Hilf Convent, Mother M, Cassiana, had given good reports of the two postulants who both showed good will and earnestness. Each of the two postulants was voted for and each received the full five votes of the Council members. Thus admission to reception was secured for these two postulants. Mother General also informed the meeting that she had written to the Apostolic Delegate explaining the difficulty of getting substitutes in the school, and asking whether the native novices might not teach in the school during their period of noviciate. The response from His Excellency had been negative as it was contrary to Canon Law for such a step to be taken. Although Canon Law can be very difficult to agree with, it seems to me that in this case the right decision was taken. I cannot help wondering whether such a request was ever made with regard to the novitiate period of any other novice in the Congregation.

Now that the two black sisters were to be received, they had to be clothed and it was agreed at the Council Meeting of 12 March 1933 to give them "white flanelette underclothing, grey petticoats, white habits and black mantles of cotton material, brown rosaries and loose guimps, with the veils tied round the head as we formerly wore them." (Archives 1933:File XLIX:Vol III:132)

## INTERESTING NAMES AMONG BLACK PEOPLE

The minutes of July 1935 record:

“On the recommendation of Rev Father J. Fonlonneau, a Basuto girl, Eusebia, was accepted as a candidate for our native Sisterhood. Her parents were strongly opposed to her baptism.” (Archives 1935:File XLIX:Vol IV:37)

The names of the prospective candidates are in many cases fascinating. The name, Eusebia, is a hint that the girl must have come into contact with the sisters when she was younger. I suspect Eusebia is the name of a German saint and the King German Sisters were often named after German saints. There was a white Sr Eusebia Karrer, a German sister, professed in 1910. The candidate's parents probably knew Sr Eusebia and gave their daughter her name as a sign of honour.

## WHITES IN CHARGE IN THE NOVICIATE

As far as I am aware there has never been a black novice mistress or black candidate mistress. Those in charge of the temporary professed group of black sisters were also white: “Sr M. Maxentia Kramer was appointed Mistress of Native Sisters under temporary vows with Sr M. Osburga Wunsch as assistant.” (Archives 1937:File XLIX:Vol IV:104) I imagine that it was tough for the young black sisters to make their culture understood. The white sisters who cared for them knew nothing else but how they themselves had been cared for whilst under temporary vows.

## VOTING

Black sisters, just like white sisters, had to receive positive votes in order to be accepted as postulants, or to be allowed to make their first profession of vows. Just like with the white sisters, some were not accepted and were sent home. The person had to show by the way she behaved that she really wanted to be a member of the community. In the following cases the voting was positive:

“The two Native Sisters - Caroline Mary of the Holy Rosary Mabantsele and Anna of the Cross Mafanduli received full votes in favour of their being admitted to final profession.” (Archives 1938:File XLIX:Vol IV:140)

### AN INTERESTING CASE

There was a white sister who had been kept back from making her vows because of her conduct which had now improved and immediately after the above entry which records the giving of permission for the two black sisters to make their profession there is an entry saying that the General Council thought it possible that the probation of the white sister might be shortened and that she could be admitted to profession with the two black sisters. The white sister apparently asked to make her vows and all the members of the General Council voted in favour of her admission. Now this entry provokes at least two questions:

1. To whom did the respective sisters make their vows? A sister entering profession makes her vows to God and to the Mother General of the Congregation she joins. What happened here? Were the declarations of profession different for the two black sisters and the white sister? After all we have seen that black sisters were not to be members of the King William's Town Congregation whereas the white sister would be a member of it.
2. What feelings were there in the two black sisters, in the white sister and in the other members of the congregation at this joint ceremony, to my knowledge the first of its kind? The profession ceremony was to be held on Rosary Sunday, 1 October 1939.

### CONFUSION ABOUT MEMBERSHIP

There seems to have been confusion around whether black sisters were allowed to be members of the King congregation or not. A note in the annals of 1939 reads:

“Mother General informed the Council that six native girls had offered themselves as postulants for our Congregation.” (Archives 1939:File XLIX:Vol IV:187)

Why is there the reference to “our Congregation” when the black sisters were not to become full members of the King Congregation?

It seems that in spite of the black sisters not being considered full members of the congregation, they were treated as though they were full members: “The Native Sister, Teresa, a postulant who was very ill was anxious to receive the holy habit before death. Mother General authorised Rev Mother M. Lucy to receive her when the time came.” (Archives 1941:File XLIX:Vol V:22)



### FAIR TREATMENT

The Bishop and Vicar Apostolic of Port Elizabeth, James Colbert D.D. passed through King William's Town on 15 April 1941 and discussed several matters with the sisters. Among other things he asked if the native sisters at the Pirie - Woodlands Mission were properly housed as he had heard some opinion to the contrary. Mother Lucy assured the Bishop that these sisters were housed in a very dry and good building.

### BLACK AND WHITE SISTERS AGREE

The following entry is interesting:

“.....Four votes were also cast in favour of the reception of the Native postulant X who was favourably reported on by the mistress of Novices at Woodlands. The report on Y, (another candidate for the postulancy), was not favourable . She did not ask for the habit with the others, but, later on, did so. It was thought better to refuse her request and give her a lesson that would be salutary. The Native Sisters were of the same opinion.” (Archives 1941:File XLIV:Vol V:52)

The unanimity of the decision is what interests me. The entry shows that the finally professed black sisters were being consulted, this in spite of the turmoil in the white leadership as they tried to walk the tightrope strung between the laws of religious life and those of the country.

### NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF SOME BLACK SISTERS

As we can see from the following entry, the sisters did try to meet the needs of the families who were willing to give up their daughters:

“The native girl Z begs leave to enter our Congregation as a postulant. Her father and brothers have given their consent, but the father asks for some monetary compensation. It was decided that a small grant might be made to him for one or two years out of her salary as a teacher.” (Archives 1941:File XLIV:Vol V:61)

### CHINESE PEOPLE OSTRACISED

Chinese people were also not acceptable in South African white society. The following entry was recorded in 1942:

“Bishop Kurz asked Mother Ignatius to admit a Chinese girl as a pupil at the School in Johannesburg. As Asiatics like the Chinese are not usually admitted to European schools, this being contrary to the law, the Council did not approve. (Archives 1942:File XLIX:Vol V:104)

The congregation found it difficult indeed to go against the government and its laws. When I was at a school run by the King sisters in the 1950s, there were at least a dozen Chinese girls who were boarders. Whenever there was supposed to be a visit from the school inspector, these girls stayed in the boarding house for the day and did not come to the classrooms. I also remember that the dormitory in which they slept was near but separate from that of the white girls.

### NOT UPSETTING THE BISHOP

The congregation seems to have been ever cautious against provoking trouble of any description:

“The Council thought it preferable to call the suggested postulancy at St Louis Bertrand’s, “a House of Probation” in order to avoid any apparent rivalry with the Bishop’s sisterhood and others.” (Archives 1943:File XLIX:Vol V:114)

Bishops had their own Diocesan congregations of black sisters. The attitude of not wanting to incur the displeasure of the ecclesiastical authorities was strong and it seems to me that bishops and priests often took advantage of this.

### FRICTION AMONG NOVICES

Sometimes there was friction among the sisters themselves. In one incident one of four novices seems not to have been accepted by the others and the situation is described as follows:

“There was a lack of charity among them and a want of submission at times. Sister A., who seemed to be out of sympathy with the rest and they with her, came into town and appeared before the Council. Mother General spoke very seriously to the novice, who said she could scarcely live with the others. She is of mixed Zulu and Indian blood and superior to them in intelligence. There was some jealousy on this score, as the Professed Sisters who were not teachers

expressed themselves as desirous of studying since to be merely “working Sisters” was “rubbish”. Mother General wrote a strong letter of reprimand to the Native Sisters. After further deliberation the Council thought it best to prolong the noviciate of the four novices.” (Archives 1943: File XLIX:Vol V:127)

This quote shows that the sisters, both the white leaders and the black sisters, were aware of differences and were influenced by them e.g. one’s ethnic group, the degree of intelligence one was supposed to be born with and the type of job one was doing. I do not think the situation has changed very much. Even though people in society and in the convent are better educated than they were then, it is still differences of one type or another that keep people apart from one another. The letter that Mother General wrote would only have served to temporarily quieten the rumblings that were being expressed among the sisters. Nowadays the tendency is to dialogue with the person who is unhappy about a situation, but I too was told by a leader that she had heard I had complained about something and that she did not want to hear another word about the problem from me or anyone else. Many sisters, both white and black, were simply silenced. I do not believe that it was ill will on the part of the leadership, I do believe that they had not learnt the skills needed to deal with conflict and it was a kind of helplessness that caused them to give orders to either silence sisters or move them to another convent. Today our leadership is very much more skilled, but at the same time there are still genuine and seemingly impossible difficulties to overcome when dealing with some of our sisters.

The sisters tried to find a way of solving the above problem by sending Sr A to join the coloured noviciate in order to see how she would get on there. There must always have been people of mixed blood in our society and there are probably even more examples of people marrying across the so called colour groups than ever before. There are no longer any laws to prevent such marriages and we have progressed in removing apartheid from the statute books. But have the attitudes of condemnation and disapproval of such marriages gone? I don’t think so. As a congregation we continue to educate our new members who are mostly black, we continue to share with them in talks and workshops and we try to find a way to reconcile the differences. But that what are perceived as differences still exist even today there is no doubt and whether we like

it or not, our attitudes of disapproval at someone's difference from ourselves still exist.

Not so long ago I lived in the same community as a black sister who simply would not put her washing in the same washing machine as did the rest of us, all white, in the community. I asked her why she washed all her clothes by hand, trying to point out the waste of time and water involved. She told me she had once been made to feel by a white sister that she was dirty. She had never since put her washing in the machine with that of the white sisters in her community but always, for years, washed it separately by hand.

#### NOVICES AND TEACHING YET AGAIN

That the noviciate was supposed to be a time of formation and not going out to a job was well known to the sisters in leadership. Sometimes it happened that a sister, although a novice, was desperately needed in e.g. a teaching job and so she was sent to do it. It seems Mother Lucy was uneasy about this arrangement because it was not allowed by Canon Law and so she contacted the Apostolic Delegate. She did not hide the fact that the sister should not have gone out of the noviciate to work. I do not know if the novice herself was ever involved in the discussion about what was happening to her. The General Council Minutes read:

“To ease the mind of Mother M.Lucy regarding the irregularity in the Noviciate of Sr B who spent the last three months of it in teaching in the Native School at Woodlands, His Excellency sent a telegram satisfying the irregularity and afterwards confirmed this in a letter of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1944 No. 13/384.” (Archives 1944:File XLIX:Vol V:146)

That the sisters were caught in a dilemma between the rules of Canon Law and the desperate need for a teacher had probably happened before and would also happen afterwards. Nevertheless it was not something the congregation liked to do. I do not think the situation was the norm and that it worried Mother Lucy is quite clear.

#### BEING RATHER THAN DOING

Cripples and those with severe physical deformities or illnesses could not be accepted. The idea behind a vocation was to dedicate yourself and your life totally to God and that meant you were engaged in the service of God's people. Disabled people could simply not do the required work.

Later on in the late 1980s, a phrase that was new to my ears became important. The phrase was: "It is more important to be than to do." Being was advocated over against doing. This did not mean that life was about doing nothing but rather that it is important to recognise your own self worth before God, irrespective of what work you do or do not do. In our congregation there is a particularly strong ethic of hard work and I suspect that sisters who until quite recently had little help from e.g. counselling or other groups where the development of the self was encouraged, put a great deal of stress on their work. It was their work which gave them life. We still work hard but there is much more balance in the way we live out our lives.

Women coming to enter religious life were usually allowed to pursue the work for which they were already fully or partly trained or for which they showed an aptitude. What did cause problems among both black and white new members was any display of laziness or neglect of the tasks that had been allotted to a sister.

#### REACHING OUT TO BLACK PEOPLE

There was always an interest in the congregation in trying to reach out to black people. In 1944 the following happened:

"During a visit to Pretoria, Mother General was asked by the Department of Social Welfare whether the Congregation could take care of committed Native children at Izeli. Putting the matter before the General Council on her return, Mother General proposed that accommodation be provided for Native girls between the ages of five and sixteen in a building erected on the small farm across the river, where it was intended to transfer the Native mission church and school as soon as practicable. The Council agreed to the proposal and Mother M. Pachomia, Prioress of Izeli, was instructed to write to the secretary for Social Welfare at Pretoria, accepting the charge of committed native girls provided the Department could obtain the necessary permit for the erection of the buildings. This letter was duly forwarded on the 29<sup>th</sup> June." (Archives 1944:File XLIX:Vol V:151)

At Izeli, about 20 km from Woodlands, our congregation had a convent on a farm. In later years many orphaned children were also raised at Izeli by our sisters.

## MORE VOCATIONS

It seems there were candidates for the congregation in various places in South Africa. The Rev Father Nicholas Humphreys, parish priest at Potchefstroom Mission, wrote on 31 October 1944 and among other matters made the suggestion that the Native Candidates at Potchefstroom might be received as Secular Tertiaries, wear the little scapular, attend meetings and recite the Office. Fr Nicholas was a Dominican and loved the people with whom he worked. He had a real pioneering spirit and he probably had in mind that these candidates would eventually become Dominican sisters. The General Council had no objection to the suggestion provided that the habit was not worn publicly. It needs to be pointed out that Council's ruling was perfectly justified as only those sisters who had made their first vows and thus become affiliated members of the congregation were allowed to wear the habit.

## DOUBTS ABOUT ACCEPTING CERTAIN WOMEN

The following shows the anxiety the Sisters had about accepting anyone who was mentally unstable or of dubious character:

“ Letters were received, in answer to enquiries concerning the family history of D., the Native postulant, from Sr M. Ursula and Sr M. Fabiana. From these it appeared that the father's infirmity during the last three years of his life, attributed by the Native mentality to “witchcraft”, was due to physical weakness, culminating in fainting fits and to confusion of mind - not to insanity proper. The votes were then taken and D. received permission to get the Habit. (4 votes).

The Mother Provincial of Aliwal North sent, as requested, a statement on oath concerning the reason why Sr E. was dismissed after 5 years as a Sister of the Holy Cross. As the report was not a good one, it was resolved not to admit this applicant to reception of the Habit. This showed the need for closer enquiries before accepting a Native applicant as a postulant, both for her own sake, and that of the Congregation. This girl seemed to be the best of the three postulants who had asked for the Habit. The Novice Mistress, however, in her report had spoken of “moodiness” as one of Sr E's faults. We regret the need to refuse her while realising the risk of retaining her. Besides, a papal dispensation would

be necessary for this, which under the circumstances we would not ask. (4 negative votes).” (Archives 1948:File L:Vol VI:166-167)

The paragraphs above show that careful inquiries were made before one was accepted as a candidate or accepted into the noviciate. Today still potential candidates are screened because experience has taught us that some young women think they want to be sisters but often enter for the wrong reasons e.g. they might be seeking a place of refuge from a dysfunctional home situation or want to follow a particular career such as teaching rather than want to live out a vocation to religious life. In the case above we see that when it was established that there was hunger and as a result fainting fits rather than witchcraft in the family of the sister, she was accepted.

The second case involved asking the Holy Cross congregation why the sister had left. Again the decision to refuse the person was not easy. Today too there are cases of sisters leaving one congregation to enter another. It would be irresponsible of any leadership not to consult the leadership of the congregation from which the sister has left before accepting her. The sentence “this showed the need for closer enquiries before accepting a Native applicant as a postulant, both for her own sake, and that of the congregation” is unfortunate as it sounds as if such inquiries were made only if the person was black. The same inquiries were also made for white and coloured women who had left other congregations and then applied to join the King congregation. One might ask if it is common for difficult people or those who are in some way misfits in society to join religious life. It seems to me that religious are just like other human beings. There is a good cross section of all temperaments. There have been some interesting studies which show that on the Enneagram Personality Test profile, most religious are Sixes, that is they tend to be dutiful, law abiding and hard working, but that is not to say that there are not plenty of the other eight personality types among religious.

#### WOODLANDS NOT A SUITABLE PLACE FOR A NOVICIATE

The black candidates, postulants and novices were evidently in the wrong place at Woodlands - they were overworked - their health suffered and contact with the committed Native girls was unwholesome for them. Mother General suggested their removal to Lilyfontein under Sr M.

Fidelia as Sister-in-charge. The Council was in favour of the change and voted for it unanimously. During an informal interview with a black sister, I was told that one of the problems was that these young sisters were constantly being asked to do tasks for some of the white sisters at Woodlands and so they were moved away so that they could go through the initial stages of formation without interference from sisters who were not their formation personnel.

It seems that the postulancy of three young black women had been inadvertently prolonged beyond the canonical and constitutional six months. This disorder had arisen out of circumstances at Woodlands viz. no accommodation for aspirants and not enough contact with the proper authority. As a result it was resolved to ask the Apostolic Delegate to approach the Holy See to condone the matter since Canon Law had been infringed. (Archives 1949:File L:Vol VII:68-69)

#### STYLES OF DECISION MAKING

From the above it seems that the leadership of the congregation would have needed to be free without continually having to go to the Bishop and Apostolic Delegate and Rome. The structure of authority was so hierarchical that in many cases going through the proper channels meant people were neglected. Still today, although there is a big movement towards participative governance, the structures are such that matters have to go through the proper channels before they can reach the highest authority. The present structures do mean that less important matters are filtered out before they go to the highest authority but still today there seem to be levels of authority ranking in order from highest to lowest. The lower levels have very little decision making powers.

The material from the archives continues that Sister M. Anna's report on the postulants had brought the above irregularity to light. In addition another postulant, J, should have had a dispensation as a recent convert as she was admitted to the postulancy the day after her baptism without the necessary dispensation.

Although our congregation has greatly improved its decision making processes, irregularities still occur and sometimes people suffer because as we work with the problems that occur in the daily running of the congregation, mistakes happen e.g. a sister might be absent from a meeting and



although the intention is to acquaint her with what went on the meeting, the communication is forgotten as we move on to the next issue.

#### PROGRESSIVE THINKING BUT A FINANCIAL BURDEN FOR THE CONGREGATION

The following shows a progressive way of thinking by a Dominican priest and its subsequent influence on the King sisters:

“Rev Father Finbar Synott writes that all is in order with the Native Affairs Department, the Mining Company and the Commissioners etc. to cover mission buildings and residents of all sorts and even a hostel for girls. Further the Manager of Native Affairs has expressed his willingness and the Location Superintendent his enthusiasm for the project.

So he considers that an experiment should be made of a mission station run by Native Sisters without a European other than a priest.

(It was resolved) to fall in with the project and to replace Sisters Bernadette and Nicola by Native Sisters. We should draw a sketch plan for the project and Father Synott will ask the Native builder for an estimate of cost.” (Archives 1953: File L:Vol VIII:109)

Inevitably it was the congregation that bore the cost of such projects. In fact over and over again the congregation has supported bishops and priests financially in all sorts of supposed “mission” projects. Sometimes there has been abuse of such generosity by bishops who have resold property sold to them for much more than they paid for it. It has also happened that money meant for the poor has been abused by priests. To actually prove what I have stated here is no easy task because to come out in the open against such practices would have meant incurring the wrath of the bishops and priests on whom the sisters were dependent for mass and the sacraments. The hierarchical mode of government was operational in the church and women were at the bottom end of the ladder. Black women were even lower. To a certain extent there has been a change in the authoritarian patriarchal structures of the church but in my opinion there is still a far way to go and it seems to me that most of our older sisters would never dream of questioning a priest’s wish with regard to anything.

## BRIDGING THE CULTURAL DIVIDE

The following quote shows the growing awareness that efforts had to be made to bring about better understanding between the black and white sisters. It shows an awareness that cultures differ, but at the same time an effort is being made to understand the black sisters and their culture better. It also shows Mother General's confidence in Sr Alcantra's ability to make a difference to the situation. Village Main was the Training College for Black teachers and it was run by our congregation until it was closed down in 1958 because of the apartheid laws. Some of the students there joined the ranks of our sisters and became members of the King congregation:

“Mother General said Rome had accepted the resignation of Mother Demetria who therefore ceased to be first Councillor. She suggested that the three Councillors should move into new positions and that a fourth should be chosen. She further said she found it difficult to cope with the exigencies in dealing with our rising African communities and thought it would be advisable to appoint as fourth Councillor a Sister who was conversant with Native affairs and who understood the Native mentality. She thought that, though Sr Alcantra did not speak any of the Native languages, she knew many individual Sisters who had passed through her hands at Village Main. It was agreed unanimously that Sr Alcantra Pauli should become the fourth Councillor.” (Archives 1953:File L: Vol VIII:119)

At the same meeting the status of native and coloured sisters was again on the agenda:

“The Archbishop has expressed a wish that native and coloured sisters have meals and sleep with the European Sisters. He wants no separation into White and Coloured. If we continue to have two separate divisions, then the Natives and Coloureds would be placed under diocesan control.

The main arguments against the suggestion were: (1) Such procedure is against the law of South Africa and (2) as the ethical code of these people differs entirely from ours, the councillors felt that the whole Congregation would object to co-habitation. Mother General said she would speak to the Bishop about the matter.” (Archives 1953:File L:Vol VIII:119)

I do not know what the connotations of the word "co-habitation" were in the convent context of the mid 1950s but reading the above paragraph today, I think it is rather strong language. The resistance to sleeping in the same quarters or eating together is very marked.

How to treat the black sisters must have been a worrying issue. The leadership consulted other congregations who were in the same process of accepting black sisters in spite of the growing opposition from the government:

"The status of the Native Sisters was again discussed. Mother General said she would visit convents that had native sisters in Bethany(N.Tvl) and Glen Cowie. Nothing could be done till she returned from the Tvl." (Archives1953:File L:Vol VIII:133)

#### LOST STORIES

Mother Anna Kugelmann was in charge of the novices at Lilyfontein. She seems to have been interested in the history of the black people on the missions because after an entry asking for new water tanks for Lilyfontein, there is an entry in the General Council minutes which reads:

"Mother Anna Kugelmann requested that her stories of the Bantu Missions written previous ly for America should be translated into German. Mother St John said she would translate them." Archives 1953:File L:Vol VIII:138)

As yet no trace of these stories have been found in the King William's Town Dominicans' archives, a pity because I am sure they would give an interesting perspective into Mother Anna's own outlook..

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE

The status of the black sisters was again discussed at the General council meeting of 19 September 1953:

"The question of the status of the Native Sisters was discussed. Mother General expressed her earnest desire to do as the Apostolic Delegate wished. She regarded him as the Representative of the Pope and so wished to obey him. (Archives 1953:File L:Vol VIII:141)

There is a question mark in pencil next to this entry. Some later reader of which there have not been too many because the archives are not easily open to perusal must have wondered about this statement. It could even have been the current Mother General i.e. Mother General Aquilina Spiegel herself. She had, however, signed the minutes after they had been written. The secretary of the meeting was the General Councillor, Sr M Joseph Sweetnam. It seems to me that the Mother General must have had some thoughts on the matter and that Sr Joseph's report put her role in a somewhat subservient light.

#### A JUNIORATE FOR COLOURED SISTERS

As regards coloured sisters there was a wish to establish a juniorate for coloured sisters. Junior sisters are sisters in temporary profession. They have yet to make their final vows. The project of establishing a juniorate for coloured sisters was not an easy one because of the apartheid rules.

#### THE RESULTS OF SEGREGATION

Below we read of the problems that segregation brought:

“The question of the status of Native and Coloured Sisters was discussed. The Apostolic Delegate would have wished these races to live in our own communities, but according to apartheid strictures from the Government every affidavit must state that we do not associate with these races. Hence it is thought best to make these races diocesan. We have between 30 and 40 Natives: Xhosas, Sesothos and Zulus and these will have to be placed under the Bishop. The secretary was told to ask the Bishop for the ruling with regard to those Natives who are working in the diocese of other Bishops.

There will be many additional details before the arrangements are completed. Some knotty points will be the alienation of Congregational property, legal aspects where land is divided, informing the Congregation, the loss to the Congregation of those Europeans who will be needed to guide the Natives.

Hence at present the matter is remote.” (Archives 1953:File L:Vol IX:13)

I wonder what the word “remote” implied. I am sure it meant that the matter would not be too urgent just there and then, but I also think that it meant a time of anxiety and prayer for the

General Council members who would have treated the matter with great caution and secrecy. It is apparent that the General Council and indeed most of the sisters found it difficult to oppose the Nationalist Government's laws.

One of our sisters told me that her theory is that the congregation, consisting chiefly of German sisters, had been allowed to stay in South Africa because of permission granted when the Mother General had approached General Smuts and asked for it. The favour granted the sisters became a terrible burden because it meant that they felt forever afterwards deeply indebted to the government and did not want to go against any of its laws.

#### APPOINTMENT OF A BLACK SISTER

The following quote proves that the white sisters recognised leadership ability among black sisters:

“The native Sister Stella Hlatshwako was appointed Superior at the Louis Bertrand Mission at Springs.” (Archives 1953: File L:Vol IX:16)

Ironically the sister concerned told me that she was not consulted in this matter.

#### EDUCATION UNDER PRESSURE

An example of the pressure the government was putting private education under at the time follows:

“The Mother Vicar of St Mary's, Cape Town wrote saying that the first step towards implementing the Bantu Education Bill had been to withhold travelling grants of all new applicants to their school at Wittebome for the Coloured deaf. She asked if we would open a school in the Pretoria location, Atteridgeville, where there is a possibility of getting a suitable site. The Council said owing to shortage of staff this is not possible.” (Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:47)

The Convent of St Mary's in Cape Town belonged to the Cabra Dominican Sisters and they were anxious to obtain help for their deaf students who were now stranded in the Transvaal because of the withdrawal of their travelling grants to the Cape. The King congregation had and still has St Vincent's School for the Deaf in Johannesburg, but at that time of course it was for whites only.

Teaching the deaf needs specialised training and the King sisters simply did not have sufficient teachers to open another school for the deaf in Pretoria. I cannot imagine that it was easy for the General Council to refuse this request, especially in the light of their knowledge of the impending splitting off of the black sisters.

#### THE CONGREGATION ASKS FOR LEGAL ADVICE

In the meantime the sisters were making inquiries of their legal advisers as to the implications of the Group Areas Act. The General Council Minutes of 16 February 1954 read:

“Mr Joiner of Squire Smith & Laurie said that in reply to our telephonic message, he enclosed a form of affidavit required to be completed under the Group Areas Act in respect of the acquisition of any immovable property . He adds that previous to 1952 instead of setting out in the affidavit that ‘all the members of the Congregation are members of the White Group.....’, the form read: ‘the Congregation is controlled by members of the White Group’.

He continues: ‘The change in wording had to be made in terms of a ruling by the Register of Deeds to the effect that the Congregation was not a body corporate and therefore could not have a controlling interest and the affidavit must state that all its members were of the White Group’.

Mother General said the Apostolic Delegate should be informed that this ruling threw out the possibility of a Native Province in the Congregation and so we would have to revert to the Diocesan Convents for Natives. A copy of the affidavit and of the letter written by Mr Joiner must later be sent to the Apostolic Delegate. There must be a covering letter to solve the extremely delicate crisis.” (Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:58)

#### A SUGGESTION ABOUT STRUCTURES FOR THE BLACK SISTERS

At the same meeting of 16 February 1954 Mother Fidelia made the following suggestions with regard to Native Sisters:

“There should be two Diocesan Congregations, one in the Port Elizabeth Diocese, the other in the Johannesburg Diocese. The first would consist of Lilyfontein, St Peter Claver and Woodlands. Certain buildings should be handed over to the Bishop and the Native Sisters should occupy the wing that

contains the kitchen. Native Sisters would do the cooking, washing and tending the pigs and fowls in lieu of rent.

With a few teachers' grants and the income from the boarding department they should:

1. Purchase their own clothing.
2. Pay £80 per annum to the Bishop.
3. Supply the necessities for the hostel kitchen.

The European Sisters would use the existing Community Room as both Community Room and Refectory. They supply all that is needed in the Conventual kitchen.

The above is purely suggestion. It is open to further discussion." (Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:60)

#### EDUCATION OF THE BLACK SISTERS CONTINUES

The education of the black and coloured sisters continued in spite of the problems presented by the Group Areas Act..

#### DISCUSSING THE APOSTOLIC DELEGATE'S LETTER

Further developments in the matter of what to do about black and coloured sisters included a letter from the Apostolic Delegate. The General Council Minutes of 15 April 1954 read:

"The letter from the Apostolic Delegate was read. Three points, (1,4 & 5) were mainly stressed.

1. We record that Natives and Coloureds should have separate Congregations i.e. a Province of an African Congregation. Their numbers are too small and they must be guided and trained by Europeans. There is not, at Cradock, the potential novitiate, even one finally professed Coloured Sister. Under par. 1 also it will be against the law of the land for a Coloured group to form part of an African Congregation. There is also among all Africans the idea that the Coloureds are a race inferior to their own.

Further if there is only one Congregation, will the Xhosa, Zulu, Amazulu, Sotho, Tswana and their numerous descendant tribes live together when they

are radically opposed?

In paragraph 4 we all agree the accommodation is not ideal but owing to restrictions from the Group Areas Act we consider it the best arrangement at present.

In paragraph 5 we would like to point out that we can arrange for the African Sisters to cook for themselves next to the hostel. We could at great inconvenience see that they would have accommodation at the same place for a dining room and recreation room. However they will still have to sleep at the European quarters where also their Mother General will be accommodated.”

(Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:86-87)

#### PROBLEMS ABOUT THE ORGANISATION OF THE COLOURED SISTERS

From the above we can see that there were at the time not enough coloured sisters for them to form a province, in fact there wasn't even one coloured sister who had made her final profession of vows and there was thus not only no one to train the others but also no one to be their superior and take charge of them.

Furthermore it is clear that there was a concern by the General Council that the coloured sisters would be treated as inferior by the black sisters. I doubt that "all" Africans thought coloureds inferior, but the observation that this was so nevertheless existed among the white General Council members. The white sisters had also noted tribal differences and divisions among the black sisters. Lastly it is clear that although it was inconvenient for the King congregation to have to make the necessary arrangements for a change in accommodation, they were prepared to do so, at least as much as possible. There must have been a great deal of confusion, not only in the General Council members but in all the sisters, irrespective of their colour, who were in any way affected by all these changes.

#### THE STRUGGLE TO FIND A SOLUTION CONTINUES

We know that eventually the black sisters were formed into a separate diocesan congregation in 1958 but at this stage in 1954 there was still talk of their forming a province of the King congregation. The latter option would have meant that they would not have cut ties with the



congregation. The following minutes record part of the preamble to the separation:

“A letter from Bishop Boyle said he had appointed Father Perquin as his representative to hold the canonical examination of the African Sisters at Lilyfontein and that he had informed Mother General. He had further discussed with Mother General the status of the African Sisters and that he was of opinion that it would be best to make the African Sisters into a separate Province of our Congregation. The Bishop would write to the Apostolic Delegate on this matter. The letter was placed on the table for perusal by the Councillors.”  
(Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:90)

#### A SUGGESTED NAME FOR THE NEW DIOCESAN CONGREGATION

At the time when the congregation was being divided into four provinces viz. that of the Sacred Heart in the south or Cape area, that of St Joseph in the north or Transvaal area, that of Sancta Immaculata (Schledorf in Germany) and that of the black sisters, the General Council Minutes read:

“Mother General added that owing to the impossibility of making the African Province diocesan, a name should be suggested for it. It was resolved that the African province should be called the Province of the Holy Rosary.” (Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:136)<sup>7</sup>

#### THE EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON EDUCATIONAL WORK

More evidence of the influence of the government's policy follows:

“Mother General said she was worried about the Government's Bantu Education Act and also about our teachers not being allowed to train at Government Colleges. She added that everything pointed to the Government's attempt to oust all religious from schools and hospitals. The outlook was bad. There seemed no prospect of being able to make a living. If we took to hostels all earnings would sink into rates and taxes.”(Archives 1954:File L:Vol IX:159)

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<sup>7</sup> The houses in England, Holland and Switzerland were to be governed by a vicar who was to be immediately subject to the Prioress General.

#### THE CONGREGATION IS NOT ALLOWED TO OWN LAND IN LILYFONTEIN

There were problems because the land at Lilyfontein, a so called location, could in terms of the law not be owned by whites. The congregation needed to have somewhere for the black sisters of their province to live.

#### A TOUGH LIFE IN THE BLACK NOVITIATE

Mother Anna Kugelmann, a white German sister, was the novice mistress of the black sisters at Lilyfontein and also the superior of the convent. She also had care of the children. Live interviews record that Mother Anna was extremely strict with the black sisters and there are those who to this day remember being hurt by her words. One of the sisters told me that Mother Anna did not even want to pray with the black sisters. I do not know why this sister was so hard on some of the black sisters, but that they were hurt by her behaviour remains a fact.

#### RELUCTANCE TO SPEND MONEY ON LILYFONTEIN

The congregation did not want to spend large sums on a place that seemed to be going out of their control:

Mother General had written saying we should not make any outlay on Lilyfontein as it will probably become diocesan. This would cancel the permissions granted on page 46." (Archives 1955:File LI:Vol X:49)

The "permissions" referred to were for a windmill, engine and reservoir.

#### MORE DISCERNMENT ABOUT WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE BLACK SISTERS

The process about the future of the black sisters continued to unfold:

"Bishop Green asked whether our Native Sisters should become an Independent Native Congregation or one that could later be aggregated to the Order. It was unanimously decided that the latter form was advisable." (Archives 1956:File LI:Vol X:166)

It can be seen here that there was foresight in the General Council. The councillors were hoping that eventually the situation would improve and they did not want to make any decisions that did not allow the black sisters to eventually return to them.

## EFFORTS TO TRAIN THE BLACK SISTERS CONTINUE

Black sisters were sent for training to be both teachers and nurses and those at Lilyfontein continued to be taught:

“Sr M. C should go to Lilyfontein to teach the Native Sisters. In spite of her 85 years, she is still well able to do this work.” (Archives 1957:File LI:Vol XI:17)

It is true that such an elderly sister should not have had to teach. At the same time the shortage of staff in the schools was a reality. If a teaching sister was replaced by a secular teacher, the outlay for the convent and school was considerable. There is a case to be made for not writing off the elderly as useless and at the same time it can be said that the young black sisters deserved a younger teacher. I am quite sure that the leadership in the congregation were in a quandary. I am aware that in our society today excellence is seen as a value to be sought after. Parents, for example, will pay heavily to send their children to what are seen to be the best schools. The congregational schools, mostly for whites, were good and to keep them that way was desirable. But what about the young black sisters?

## FINANCES

At the time the finances of a convent and its attached school/clinic/hospital were not separate. The sisters themselves did not receive salaries and the stories of the sisters when I became a member of the congregation testify that sisters of all races lived very poorly. Food was very simple and the fact that all wore habits helped to save money on clothing. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that convents and the attached schools began to separate their finances. Boards of Governors were established and the school fees went to paying the many secular teachers who were needed to replace the declining number of sisters. Sisters who remained in the schools received honorary or token salaries. At the convent school I taught at in the late 1980s and early 1990s the Treasurer of the Governing Body wisely pointed out the cost it would be to the school should the principal, a sister, have to be replaced. It was only in 1986 that this school began to receive a subsidy from the government, but there were ongoing threats from the government to withdraw the subsidy if we took in black, coloured or Asiatic children. We had to submit lists of the names and numbers of the pupils and of course the surnames of the black and Indian pupils made it easy to identify them by race.

### CONTINUED EFFORTS TO HELP THE POOR

The congregation continued to try to help the black people in whatever way it thought best. The mission at Maria Hilf in the Native Area Kaffraria needed a better clinic to replace the single small room in which the sisters worked. A fully qualified native nursing sister was to take charge of the clinic, serving the sick, attending to maternity cases and acting as district nurse. The problem was that the community of sisters at Maria Hilf was in poor circumstances and could not afford either the buildings or the equipment. They also wanted to build a domestic science kitchen for the school. Mother General wrote to overseas benefactors begging for an extraordinary subsidy to carry out the proposed scheme". (Archives 1957:File LI: Vol XI:27)

It is indeed ironic and a fact of life that those who are seen to be in power are often rendered powerless by sources outside their control. It is also significant that a tremendous effort has been made by overseas donors to help financially with the work of the congregation. Most of the donations received have gone into projects to help the underprivileged. In the past it was common to give the poor secondhand clothing which had been sent in parcels from overseas benefactors, usually German people who knew our sisters and wanted to do something for the missions. Slowly this tendency has changed, although it has by no means completely vanished. The sisters became aware of how degrading and unempowering it was for people to receive handouts. Now far more energy is being put into developing self help projects with the people.

### YOUNG BLACK SISTERS MUST BE EDUCATED

The need for educating prospective members of the sisterhood can once again be seen in the following quote:

“Seven African postulants applied for the reception of the habit in June. The Council considered a postulancy of barely six months too short as these girls have so little education. The Council was hesitant in giving the vote therefore Mother General is to ask Bishop Green for advice and a decision.” (Archives 1957:File LI:Vol XI:35)

Bishop Green was not sure what to do and replied that he would leave the time arrangement for the African Postulants to the Generalate. The Council thoughts that an additional half year's training would greatly benefit these girls. So it was decided to prolong the postulancy to one year.

## WHITE ATTITUDES TO BLACKS ILLUSTRATED BY A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

The headlines of an article in the Daily Dispatch of 27 July 1957 read - Against Plan to Sell Farm to Native Trust - A "Shocking State of Affairs". The opening paragraph stated that proposals that a farm in the Upper Kubusie area should be sold to the Native Trust had raised a strong protest at the quarterly meeting of the Border Farmers' League in Stutterheim the day before:

"It was stated that the farm, known as 'Fairview' and belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, had been offered for sale to the Native Trust. The Trust, it was said, would probably use it for Native settlement or the growing of fibres. The farm was adjacent to land owned by Europeans but on the south and south-east side it was contiguous to Native land. The effect of selling it to the Trust would be that the extent of Native land adjoining the land of Upper Kubusie's European farmers would be lengthened by three miles. The farmers objected to this.

Mr E.F. Whittal said that at the last meeting of the League, Mr Miles Warren, M.P., the chairman of the League, had said that assurances had been given by the Native Affairs Department that there would be no more transactions involving the buying of European farms for Native Occupation until the Group Areas Act had been brought into operation.

Now, it appeared that a transaction was about to be negotiated in spite of that assurance. He considered this to be a shocking state of affairs.

Mr D.G. Maclachlan said if the Native Affairs Department intended to stand by the assurances that had been given, it should have refused even to consider the offer made by the Roman Catholic Church. It should have indicated plainly that it would not buy the farm.

The League adopted a resolution protesting against the proposed sale of the farm to the Native Trust, objecting to any transaction of this nature taking place in the Border area until the various group areas had been clearly and finally demarcated in terms of the Group Areas Act, and reminding the Native Affairs department of the assurances that had been given." (*Daily Dispatch* 27 July 1957)

That the relationships between blacks and whites were not good is clear. The effect of the passing of time seems to have several effects: firstly when I read the above article more than forty years later, I feel shocked at the attitude of the white farmers at the time, secondly I realise how things have changed, thirdly I realise how easy it is to accept any status quo even if you yourself are one of the oppressed and lastly I realise how quickly human beings seem to forget atrocities that have been committed. Have we humans a tendency to get so caught up in the daily struggle of life that we forget the values, the ideals, the aims we stand for? And so I think most of us just give up and eventually accept as did our black sisters when the confusion of separating from the congregation they had each originally set out to join hit them.

#### RULES TO COPE WITH SEPARATION

Because the separation of the black sisters was imminent, rules and regulations had to be in place for the new diocesan congregation and the King sisters tried to assist the process:

“Mother Ann sent a few suggestions towards the African Sisters Constitutions.

Some of these are: 1. To have the Office books in Xhosa and English

2. After a year's Postulancy a year and a half Noviciate should be long enough, in cases where necessary let it be prolonged for another six months. Leave the present King William's Town arrangement of three years temporary vows that can be extended up to six years if necessary, or add one year to the temporary vows and prolong to four instead of three years.

3. The formula of vows would be more effective if the three vows were mentioned as we had in former years.

4. It would be better for sisters to come together in a common room than keeping constantly to their cells.

5. Sisters should not easily be dispensed from companionship when going out on Mission.

6. The “Käpple” should be dispensed with.” (Archives 1957:File LI:Vol XI: 47-48)

#### DISSENSION OVER BELONGINGS

From the minutes of the same meeting, it is evident that the leadership among the white Sisters

were aware of impending dissension about what belonged to them:

“When the Bishop takes over Lilyfontein, give the truck (£300) but we should be allowed to sell ten head of cattle from the existing stock. We built the house and the noviciate.” (Archives 1957:File LI:Vol XI:48)

A reading of the archives shows that the sisters suffered financially at the hands of bishops. The dispute continued:

“The Congregation had a mind to get 10 head of cattle out of the 26. Mother Anna met with opposition from Rev Father Flynn, who appears to have put the matter before the Bishop. From a letter received from the Bishop, we gather that he does not approve of the arrangement. He wants an inventory before giving a decision. We, on our part feel that, since we had spent so much on Lilyfontein Farm, 10 head of cattle would not be too much of a claim.” (Archives 1957: File LI:Vol XI:51)

It is true that the congregation had put a great deal of their resources into Lilyfontein. The place and the black sisters on it were now to fall under the Bishop who wanted to take over everything as it was. I have no evidence of the stress this caused the white sisters but I can imagine that they felt caught between asking for what was rightly theirs and the guilt of seeming greedy. It was just not done for the sisters to oppose the hierarchy of the church and although there were some who did, the agony they went through is apparent from the annals. Even today some of our older sisters will say things like: “Father wants it like that” when questioned about why a change in the liturgy could not happen. Father’s words, let alone the Bishop’s, was law, even when it related to a cow that the sisters had bought and bred! Unfortunately it seems to me that in turn women in leadership in both black and white congregations in South Africa and indeed throughout the world have taken the hierarchical, patriarchal model of governance and faithfully copied it so that they very often have governed the sisters under their authority with the same heavy handed disrespect. As I have said several times our congregation and many others are now in a time of developing a more participative, organic form of governance. To be fair there have also been greatly loved leaders among bishops, priests and the sisters who have managed to inspire those in their authority.

## INAUGURATION OF CONGREGATION OF ST MARTIN DE PORRES

On 16 July 1958 Bishop Green inaugurated the Congregation of St Martin de Porres as a diocesan congregation under the diocese of the Bishop of Port Elizabeth. Sr Mary Mabentsela was appointed first Mother Vicar of the congregation, her highest superior being the Bishop of Port Elizabeth. Three general councillors were appointed: Srs Fidelia Grohe, Dilecta Kley (both white sisters) and Stella Hlatshwako. Sr Stella is in a retirement home now but Srs Mary, Fidelia and Dilecta have died. Sr Stella speaks highly of the work done by Sr Fidelia in helping the new congregation find its way. Sr Dilecta had learnt how to speak Xhosa. Both white sisters remained members of the King congregation, but were lent to the new diocesan congregation.

The novitiate for black sisters at Lilyfontein formed part of the diocesan congregation and Mother Anna although remaining part of the King congregation was the novice mistress. There were two other communities of black sisters initially: the one at Woodlands in the Cape and the one in Payneville near Springs in the Transvaal. The former was called Blessed Martin Convent and the latter was called St Lewis Bertrand Mission.

Gradually more communities of black sisters were formed viz. the one at Peter Claver Mission in Duncan Village in East London, the one at Evaton Mission in the Transvaal and the one at New Brighton in Port Elizabeth. There were also some black sisters at places like Potchefstroom mission and at St Scholastica's near Soekmekaar where the people were Vendas.

The superiors of these communities were black sisters e.g. Mother Gratia was appointed superior of the Woodlands on 5 November 1961.

In December 1966, the sisters of the Sr Martin de Porres congregation had a chapter or meeting at which they chose a new Mother Vicar, Sr M Regina. One of her councillors was a white sister, Sr Frieda.

Four sisters were sent to Hammanskraal where they helped to run the seminary.



## DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DIOCESAN CONGREGATION AND RE-UNIFICATION

It seems that things did not go all that well during this time of being a diocesan congregation. There are numerous allegations, among them that there was jealousy among the sisters because the church authorities, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, showed favouritism to some and that financial difficulties were many. The black sisters asked to return to the King congregation and on 5 January 1971 there was the re-unification of the two congregations although the black sisters were placed in a province, the Province of St Martin de Porres. The Apostolic Delegate was present at the event and so the re-unification was approved and made official.

I have not been able to find out what effect the re-unification of the two groups had on Bishop Green who had wanted the black sisters to be diocesan in the first place. He resigned as bishop in December 1971 and went to work in one of the poorest and loneliest parishes as an ordinary priest. Eighteen months later his vacant seat was filled by Monsignor Murphy who had acted as vicar in the interim.

Mother Regula Schelle, a white German sister, became the sister in charge of the new province. Her councillors were Sr Frieda Preis, a white sister, and three black sisters, viz. Srs Stella Hlatshwako, Regina Giwu and Thomas Tshinki. According to the Woodlands annals improvements were immediate. Among them were: renovations in the boarding house, mending of windows and doors, the painting of dormitories, the weeding of the garden and the planting and sowing of vegetables. She was re-appointed at the beginning of July 1976.

Sr Beatrice von Felten, a white Swiss sister, arrived in Woodlands on 13 June 1972, to become novice mistress of the black sisters and Lilyfontein was closed on 14 July 1973 and the noviciate moved to Woodlands.

During his time the black sisters continued to study and obtained nursing and teaching diplomas.

In 1976 riots took place in New Brighton and Kwazakhele and the sisters in these areas temporarily moved to other safer convents in the places such as Port Elizabeth.

### AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

At the end of December 1978 the province of the black sisters held a conference. Mother Regula's second term of office was to come to an end at the end of 1980 and the purpose of the December conference was to engage in a consultative vote about who could replace her. The sister elected, preferably a black sister, would be given a year's formation, especially in leadership, during 1979. The new Mother Provincial, however, was not a black sister but Sr Beatrice von Felten who was installed on 29 March 1980. Her councillors were Srs Margaret Nazo, Cecilia Nltiziywana and John Masibi.

### SUSPENSION OF ST MARTIN DE PORRES PROVINCE

It seems that the black sisters of the St Martin de Porres Province felt that they were not equal to the white sisters of the King congregation in South Africa. They wanted to be seen as fully part of the King congregation. There was another province, the German one in Germany, but the black sisters saw the white sisters in South Africa as not belonging to a province and they perceived their role in a province to be inferior to that of the white sisters. They asked for the suspension of the province and so a decision was made to apply for the suspension of the Province of St Martin de Porres. Permission was granted by the Apostolic Delegate of the time, Archbishop Edward Cassidy. The St Martin de Porres Province was officially suspended as 1 February 1983.

### PROCESS BEFORE SUSPENSION

Before the suspension a process of consulting all the sisters in South Africa was undertaken. 348 questionnaires of 470 sent out were returned. 307 sisters favoured the suspension, 20 were against and 21 did not give an opinion for or against. I think it is worth quoting some of the sisters' summarised hopes and fears:

Hopes:

- ◆ I expect that integration will take time but it must not be so infinitesimally slow that generations come and go
- ◆ There will be clashes sometimes, but with the grace of God and with goodwill, these will gradually be overcome.
- ◆ There will be great surprises as both black and white sisters have changed greatly in the past ten years.

- ◆ Some day there will be equality, when the “rich” among us become poor.
- ◆ We will respond more courageously to the call of the Church and the changing needs of the people and our times.

Fears:

- ◆ Fears relating to misunderstanding and non-acceptance of different cultures e.g there are different attitudes about community, dialogue, sharing, funerals, customs, food, money, work, clothes, thinking and different languages spoken
- ◆ Perhaps there will be revenge because of past wrongs committed.
- ◆ Perhaps I will be lonely if I am the only sister among others of a different background
- ◆ Will we trust each other?
- ◆ The Government laws concerning Apartheid will create insecurity among us.
- ◆ There might be competition for power and domination of one culture by another.
- ◆ Visitors, especially unexpected visitors, will not be welcomed.
- ◆ We will be poorer and have to give up cherished ways.
- ◆ The Sisters of St Martin de Porres Province will miss the autonomy they had.

How we can help towards the process:

- ◆ We can eradicate the “they/we” attitude by really listening to each other and by sincerely sharing attitudes, backgrounds, feelings, hopes and fears.
- ◆ Once we have learnt which behaviours are hurtful to others, we must try as is humanly possible, to stop the behaviour.
- ◆ Language is an area of hurt. We need to speak the language which everyone understands when we are in a group. We should only speak our mother tongue when everyone present understands it and no one feels excluded. We need to be sensitive to the fact that some of the words we use have hurtful connotations for other
- ◆ We need to appreciate the past and each others’ way of doing things.
- ◆ We need to become aware of how our cultural backgrounds add to our way of thinking, feeling and acting. Sometimes we think that our own cultural or habitual way of doing something is the only and best way of doing something.
- ◆ We need to improve our own self acceptance and that of others.

### Mistress-servant relationships:

It is interesting that many sisters made mention of mistress-servant relationships which in South Africa have both race and class elements. It was thought the relationship of white sisters with their domestic servants needed to be examined and changed where necessary. It should not in any way flow over into relationships between white sisters and black sisters.

### Behaviours that will help:

- ◆ We need to take time to study the background, anthropology and languages of the various cultures of King Dominicans.
- ◆ We could make an effort to spend holidays in a convent where sisters of another race live.
- ◆ If we live in a mixed community, one group should abstain from privileges e.g. a visit to a theatre from which the other group is deprived by law.
- ◆ We must not retrace our steps at the first sign of governmental opposition.
- ◆ If possible it is better not to have only one sister of one culture in a community of predominantly one other culture.
- ◆ To begin with we need an integrated noviciate.

One sister wrote: "Thank God a move has been made - it implies that a stand has been taken and gives encouragement to those of us who have had to battle alone on this issue in the past."

(Archives [1982]. Questionnaire on suspension of St Martin de Porres Province.)

### AFTER THE RE-UNIFICATION

That all sisters had embarked on a road towards a future in which by far most believed is clear. That there were difficulties ahead is also clear. Many of the problems have disappeared over time. Some allegations of apartheid still exist, but most sisters are at peace with the integration. There is definitely a much greater awareness of how sisters have been hurt in the past. Work continues on healing relationships in the story telling groups and in ongoing workshops on topics such as cultural differences. There is always small group work at such workshops and usually there is deep sharing in the small groups where healing continues. We have an Ongoing Formation Team which organises such workshops and sisters of other congregations as well as people who are married or single men and women often join our weekend workshops.

There is not only the challenge of racial injustice among our sisters, but also others e.g the challenge of ecclesiastical authority that is hierarchical, patriarchal and oppressive, the challenge of the AIDS pandemic and our role in it and the challenge of globalisation and the way it is damaging people and the earth's resources.

#### CONCLUDING SUMMARY

This chapter has told the story of the uncertainty that existed in the King congregation from the time that the very first black sister asked to join the white sisters. Taking a black sister was venturing into unknown territory. Black sisters were seen as different from white sisters. One of the first attempts to find a solution was to draw up a set of rules which the black sisters were to obey. There was a great deal of fear in the white sisters who looked to see what other congregations who had already taken the step had done.

To complicate matters the white leadership were unable to follow their own common sense because church rules followed a pattern where the ecclesiastical authorities had to be consulted. Most times it took months before there were replies from Rome about what to do. In spite of the delays the congregation took the black sisters but proceeded cautiously. Together with the church authorities they drew up documents for the new situation in such a way that a compromise could be reached if necessary.

The white sisters wanted the black sisters to be educated and put a great deal of stress on sending the black sisters for further education, chiefly as teachers and nurses.

An admissions policy existed from the beginning and exists to this day but it has changed as the style of religious life has changed. White sisters were always in charge of the black noviciate even when the black sisters were a diocesan congregation under Bishop Green of Port Elizabeth. Most white sisters had little idea of what was going on when the black sisters became diocesan. On the whole white sisters were unaware and ill informed about the black sisters and about the unjust situation in the country. Today there is a much greater awareness as well as action to address racial prejudices which are ongoing in South Africa.

The chapter also makes mention of the coloured sisters and the fact that Chinese people were another ostracised group. It must not be thought that there were no tensions among the black sisters themselves. There were at times disagreements and jealousies.

The evolution in governance is given some coverage and the eventual decision to return to the congregation, first as a province and then as fully integrated sisters ends this chapter. The confusion that reigned when the black sisters first joined was past. Information sharing and questionnaires ensured that all sisters were part of the re-unification of the black sisters with the King congregation.

## **CHAPTER 5: A RECORD OF SOME INTERVIEWS HELD WITH KING WILLIAM'S TOWN DOMINICAN SISTERS**

### **AIM OF THIS CHAPTER**

In this chapter I am making an attempt to record what some of the sisters themselves had to say. Often there was a different perspective from that given in the archival sources which were written mostly by white sisters in leadership positions. It was my hope that the interviewees would feel heard at the end of each interview.

### **A. Black Sisters**

The following questions were drawn up as a guideline before some of the black sisters were interviewed. Sometimes the interview was such that the questions which had been drawn up could not be used. Sometimes it would happen that a sister would launch forth into detail about an incident that a question had sparked off and there was often a time constraint which prevented an exploration into those questions which had not yet been asked. I think it was a healing experience for the sisters to talk and at times it seemed necessary to allow the time for it.

### **Questions:**

1. What was positive for you as a black person when you entered a predominantly white congregation like ours?
2. What was negative for you as a black person when you entered a predominantly white congregation like ours?
3. What were the attitudes of your family and people towards you when you entered religious life? How did you deal with these attitudes?
4. What were the attitudes of other sisters towards you when you entered religious life? How did you deal with these attitudes?
5. What were some of the expectations you think others had of you as a black person with regard to culture, spirituality and lifestyle?
6. How did the fact that the congregation is made up of different nationalities of white sisters affect you?

7.
  - a) To which ethnic group do you belong?
  - b) How did you express the values of your ethnic group or culture in religious life?
  - c) How did you integrate the values of your own culture with the values of the three vows of celibacy, poverty and obedience? What were the difficulties?
8. How did apartheid influence your life in the convent?
9.
  - a) Do you think apartheid is still alive and well in society? Give reasons for your answer.
  - b) Do you think apartheid is still alive and well in the convent? Give reasons for your answer.
10. Have you ever regretted entering a predominantly white congregation? Why/why not?
11. We have young black women who want to become fully professed members of our congregation. What advice would you give the congregation about how to treat them? What advice would you give them about their own conduct?.
12. Can you tell me something about a time of great sorrow, or anger, because of what happened to you in the congregation? Can you talk about this?
13. Can you tell me something about a time of great joy and happiness because of what happened to you in the congregation? Can you talk about this?
14. What were your feelings in July 1958 when the black sisters in our congregation became diocesan? What did the experience do to you?
15. What were your feelings in 1971 when the black sisters rejoined the congregation as the Province of St Martin de Porres?
16. What were your feelings in the 1980s when the Province of St Martin de Porres was dissolved and the black sisters were no longer in a separate province but part of the same organisational structures as the white and coloured sisters in South Africa?
17. During the years, black, white and coloured sisters, usually non-professed, but also professed, have left the congregation? Do you have any specific thoughts on possible reasons for their leaving?
18. What were relationships between black and coloured sisters like?



**Some responses to some of the above questions:****Sister 1: 81years old, Xhosa**

When I was a little girl, I wanted to be a Catholic but my parents did not want me to be one. Eventually they gave me permission when I was fifteen. When I was 22, I ran away from home because I did not want to marry the man who wanted to marry me. I went to Woodlands. I had gone to school there. I knew my parents did not want me to become a sister but eventually they agreed.

Life was not always easy for us. We did not eat with the white sisters. When we went to Holy Communion, we had to wait until after the white boarders.

I don't think apartheid has gone yet. Some white sisters still don't accept the black sisters.

I think the congregation must be open and honest in the treatment of the young black sisters. There must not be talk about them behind their backs. Let them have places where black people can come and visit them.

I feel sad at the way we were sometimes treated. At the time I knew I had come to take the cross, that I had not come to the convent only for joy but for suffering too. Once a white sister hit me.

When we became a diocesan congregation, I did not feel hurt, but now I know that I did not understand what was going on. I was glad about the way it was done. The Bishop and Mother General explained nicely to us what was going on and then we were called one by one to give our opinion. We did not ask to be diocesan, but some of the white sisters said we did. When we were diocesan, we were not told what went on at the meetings of the council.

When the black sisters rejoined the congregation as the Province of St Martin de Porres, we did not know what was going on either. Everything was done in secret.

When sisters left the congregation, we did not talk about it. What's the use of talking? You can do nothing.

We black sisters had nothing to do with the coloured sisters. They didn't stay with us.

**Sister 2: 64 years old, Xhosa**

I entered at Lilyfontein. We did not eat with the white sisters. We ate mostly mealie meal. I enjoyed the prayer life. I didn't like not being combined with the big congregation of white sisters.

I think my Ubuntu values were squashed. We were not encouraged to show hospitality to visitors. My sister died when I still a very young sister and I deeply felt the lack of support from the other sisters.

I think when apartheid stopped it was because the churches went first and the government followed. I think there is still apartheid in society, but it's shown in a different way. In the convent there's also apartheid but it's underground. (Author's comment: I think the sister means the apartheid behaviour is subtle.)

I have never regretted entering our congregation.

The congregation must not baby the young black sisters, but treat them as mature women. There must be mutual openness between them and their formators. It is important to dialogue with them. They need to learn to stand their ground and yet be loyal and keep to the congregation's values. Everybody must be treated equally. We need to try to promote vocations.

A sad thing for me was that I was never allowed to go to my father's funeral.

When I entered, the congregation was already diocesan.

I think the coloured sisters were favoured above the black sisters.

**Sister 3: 56 years old, Sotho(Pedi)**

I entered at Lilyfontein and then trained as a teacher. I loved the life of prayer and humanness. I felt there was discrimination against the black sisters. I felt my culture was squashed. On the

other hand we black sisters did very little to assert ourselves. I don't think we must use our blackness to do nothing.

I thought that coming back to the congregation as a province was a step forward.

I think that the coloured sisters were in a way more privileged than the black sisters because it seemed to me that growth work (human development work) was done with them but not with us.

I think our younger sisters must take responsibility and take the initiative and must be allowed to make decisions.

Among the black sisters the values differ from tribe to tribe. We need to share the knowledge of these values. We also need to teach our young black sisters the values of hospitality, sharing and community.

#### **Sisters 4, 5 and 6:**

These three sisters had very little to say that was either positive or negative. One was over 80, one was over 70 years one was 67 years old. One was Southern Sotho and two were Xhosa. They gave the impression of being content in their present set up which is a retirement home.

#### **B. White Sisters.**

I did not put exactly the same questions to these sisters.

#### **Sister 1: 88 years old, German**

In 1959 it seemed to me that the Bishop wanted a congregation. Most Bishops had black congregations. The black sisters were happy to be under the Bishop, especially at the beginning. Unfortunately there seems to have been jealousy among the sisters because the Bishop seems to have shown favouritism to some of them.

One of the reasons the sisters were glad to return to the King congregation even though they were a province and not fully part of the King structures was that there seemed to be no unity among

them.

Later on, not at the time, the structure of a province was seen as negative. It seemed to some of the black sisters that by being kept apart in a province, they were not being empowered. The reason our leadership had suggested a province was exactly that, empowerment! We thought if they had control of their own structures and finances, they would be empowered.

There were white priests and white sisters who pushed for the dissolution of the Province of St Martin de Porres. It was hurtful to the white leadership who meant well to feel the opposition to the Province.

**Sister 2: 87 years old, English speaking South African**

The problem was lack of money among the black sisters. They could not manage on their own financially.

**Sister 3: 76 years old, German**

I think there have always been times when relationships between our black, coloured and white sisters have been difficult. It seems that there were definitely hurts in the past but things are better now. I think all our sisters have mellowed with age. There are still squabbles but on the whole here in the retirement home things go smoothly.

A great deal of work with all our sisters has been done since the 1970s in the area of expressing feelings and there has been healing. I would agree that racism is still present although it is not very evident. Here the sisters accept each other and are treated equally.

**C. Coloured Sisters**

**Sister 1: 54 years old**

There are only five coloured sisters at present. As a child I came into contact with the King sisters and I loved them. There was confusion about how to treat us. Two of the first coloured sisters went to the noviciate in Lilyfontein with the black sisters. A lot of coloured sisters left and that left me very uncertain. Now things are all right and we are treated as equals.

## CONCLUSION OF THIS CHAPTER

The interviews were a good experience for me. I thought the sisters had been very open. I was aware that the hurts were something neither the white nor the black sisters had forgotten. I think this work is being done in more depth and with many more sisters through our present story telling groups. In such a group whatever is said to the other sisters in the group is confidential. The groups consist of about six to eight sisters and are multiracial. Great healing is being experienced through the work of these groups and the facilitators, who are also sisters and who also share their stories, report that the trust level has increased dramatically and that there is a great deal of bonding. Although most of the interviews were only short and once off experiences, I do think healing occurred in them. I was certainly touched into a new awareness of the pain not only in the black sisters, but also in the white sisters who now look back at what happened from the perspective of a new South Africa. I was aware that there is still anxiety about the past in the white sisters.

The effects of the bonding of the story telling groups spill over into bigger meetings when all the sisters in this northern South African region of our congregation meet for assemblies. One can see that sisters who had nothing much to do with each other before the story telling groups existed now meet and talk to each other at tea time and when there is group work, they feel at home with someone who is also in their story telling group.

An important implication of the interviews was that all those who were interviewed were positive about the future. Irrespective of what had happened to them, all those I spoke to believed in the value of religious life and were hopeful about the future. The sisters wanted the congregation to continue in spite of the fact that there are only one or two new vocations each year. The black sisters shared their suggestions for training new members of the congregation. Of the eight women in initial formation in 2002, six are black, one is white and one is coloured. Our older black sisters spoke of treating the sisters who are in initial formation with respect and fairness and of not making decisions about them without consulting them. At the same time the older sisters are aware that those who are in the stage of initial formation need to be accountable and responsible and show that they can indeed be trusted.

On a personal note I would like to add that in my work as a formator of those in the stage of temporary profession, I am often part of a team of older sisters. There is such a team in the King congregation, but there are also Fedosa teams who conduct annual workshops for novices and postulants. I work specifically with those in the stage of temporary profession which is the stage before final profession. Fedosa is the Federation of Dominicans in Southern Africa. The Fedosa team to which I belong works together to ensure that the workshop runs smoothly and that the participants benefit from it. There is a great deal of participation from the women in formation. They prepare papers for the workshop before they arrive and share these and we then discuss the papers. They also share in the preparation of the day's morning and evening prayer. The whole group, in 2001 there were sixteen of us, evaluates the day so that we can build learnings into the next day or workshop. I am always filled with a deep gratitude for what these young black women have taught me during our workshop of five days together. I am also always very grateful that the team is multiracial because so often when I am not sure of a situation, I will ask one of the black sisters on the team and her wisdom has never failed to be of help.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### AIM OF THIS CHAPTER

The aim of this chapter is to look briefly at the past and the story of the integration of black and coloured sisters into the King congregation and to see what learnings the experience has for the sisters, not only for the present but also for the future.

### THE PAST AND THE DILEMMA IT PRESENTED

When Domitilla Dlamini, the first black sister, asked to join the congregation, the sisters in leadership were uncertain about what to do. It was 1928 but in South Africa the different races had always lived apart and indeed the laws of the land kept them apart. There were separate schools, churches, living areas, railway coaches, buses, entrances to police stations, hospitals and many more places to which the public have access. The problem of knowing how to deal with the black sisters was indeed perplexing. On the missions the white sisters had been teaching the Catholic faith to those who were looked upon as heathens and the work of bringing Christianity to these people was to the sisters extremely important. The meaning of their lives as religious women who had chosen to live out the three vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience was totally bound up with their work of the salvation of souls. They believed and lived out their calling to be sisters with all their hearts and rejoiced when others wanted to join them. Now, however, they were faced with a big problem. The young women who were approaching them were different from them. Cultural differences had been handled before. South African, Irish, Dutch, Polish, Swiss and English women had joined them and although there were sometimes some rumblings about the domination of the German culture, the integration of these other cultures had proceeded relatively smoothly. But Domitilla and the others were different. They were cut off from the white sisters by the laws of a land that kept people of different colours apart. What were the sisters to do?

### THIS IS ALSO THE STORY OF OTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In a way the story of our sisters and their struggle to integrate is the story of so many in South Africa. It is the story that novelists used to tell in the past when a coloured person who was rather light skinned "tried for white" as it was put. It is the story of the young couple who worked

together, he black and she white, and the agony of being distanced from their families and country by their love affair. It is the story of all South Africans as we lived and worked together and sometimes made friends with people who were of a different colour from us. When I was in the noviciate in 1978, I made friends with a coloured sister who was also a novice. One day we caught the train to a function we were to attend in Johannesburg. We walked together from the convent to the Brakpan station where our animated chatting stopped. She went and bought her ticket at the non-whites window and I bought mine at the window reserved for whites. We waited together on the platform ignoring the glances people gave us. The train arrived and I stepped straight into a coach in front of me while she hurried down to the rear end of the train to the coach for non-whites. I shall never forget that trip. I had never before felt the impact of apartheid as I did that day. I felt sad, frustrated, angry and injured all at once. My friend just laughed. She was used to it.

There were other South Africans who formed friendships and relationships across the colour bar. Many escaped together into exile and pursued their lives there. Many went into hiding and kept their friendships secret. Our congregation was law abiding and just could not find an easy solution to the problem of how to cope with being integrated in spite of the colour differences.

#### SHOULD THE WHITE SISTERS HAVE ACTED DIFFERENTLY?

As I read through the material to write this mini-dissertation, I kept asking myself whether I had expected the sisters to whom I now belong to be different from the rest of white South Africans. After all these were women who had chosen to live out God's calling in a special way. Why were they not able to act differently in this situation of accepting black sisters into their midst?

The story of their pain and confusion and search for the right thing to do touches me. I think back to the very first arrangements for Domitilla. She was given a room inside the Vleeschfontein convent. She was sick and Sr St James nursed her until she was better. We have Domitilla's mother's letter of gratitude. We have the minutes of council meeting after council meeting as the leadership struggled with the problem of where to put the newcomers, what rules to make for them, how to deal with educating them, how to integrate them into the work the congregation was doing. The task was enormous. In spite of the problems the sisters became part of the



congregation. We know they were treated differently. They sat at the back of the church in Woodlands and received communion after the white boarders, few those these were. The black sisters felt hurt and inferior because although they were part of the congregation, they were kept apart from the white sisters.

#### THE SOLUTION: A DIOCESAN CONGREGATION

Then came the Group Areas Act and the legislation that seemed to doom them to be apart forever. Ecclesiastical authorities did not fight the government. They looked at ways to get round the issue. At the same time Lilyfontein was a place where the people were neglected. If sisters would be put there, the people would benefit. I think Bishop Green thought that if he were to take the black sisters under his wing as a diocesan congregation, the matter of their not being allowed to be part of the white congregation would be solved. At the same time a congregation of his own would enable him to develop his diocese. The black sisters would be an excellent work force. He had problems with all the details of what their rules and constitutions and every day living should be like, but the King sisters allowed Mother Anna Kugelmann and a few other white sisters to remain with the black sisters to guide them. The black sisters at Woodlands stayed where they were under Mother Mary Mabentsela but the noviciate moved to Lilyfontein.

Lilyfontein was very poor and it was only through the generosity of the white people on neighbouring farms in the area and the nearby King convents that the convent there managed to survive. Mother Anna Kugelmann, the superior and novice mistress, managed the place. Some of the black sisters were hurt by her strictness. I have not succeeded in getting them to talk about it but I am aware that they still feel hurt.

#### PROBLEMS IN THE DIOCESAN CONGREGATION OF ST MARTIN DE PORRES

The diocesan congregation had many problems, not the least of which were financial. Buildings became neglected. Some sisters were jealous because there were allegations that the bishop showed favouritism to some and the sisters disagreed among themselves. Those who have mentioned the jealousy issue do so with hesitation as the sisters concerned are still alive. There is of course jealousy among sisters. Sisters are human beings and the life of a sister can be lonely. Friendships in convents are now open and free, but such changes have only come with time as

religious life has evolved. Under stressful living and working conditions, the attention from a priest or bishop or superior meant a great deal to a sister. Unfortunately it also meant a great deal to the sister who was not at the receiving end of it.

Eventually the black sisters asked to rejoin the white congregation and the diocesan congregation came to an end. It became a province of the King congregation under Mother Regula Schelle in 1971. The noviciate returned to Woodlands and life improved greatly. Buildings were repaired and sisters continued with their education. The story of the province would need telling in another thesis. The black sisters were glad to be back even though they were a province. Of course some of the sisters had entered the diocesan congregation after its break away in July 1958 and so for them there was not a return to a former congregation to which they had belonged, but a joining up with something that was totally new to them.

#### FULL INTEGRATION IN THE KING CONGREGATION

Further developments were on the way. The black sisters felt that their being a province somehow implied that they were still not fully integrated with the white sisters and eventually after dialogue and consultation with all sisters, both black and white, the Province of St Martin de Porres was suspended in 1980 and the black sisters were fully integrated with the white sisters.

Today black, white and coloured sisters live together in our convents. We still struggle to accept each other fully but we are on the way.

#### THE PAIN OF THE PAST

As I look back over the history of the King sisters especially with regard to the integration of the black and coloured sisters, I see a history of struggle, uncertainty, mistakes, hurts and needless suffering. I also see plenty of good will. I am aware that the attitudes of some of the white sisters towards the black sisters were patronising and hurtful. I am aware that those very same attitudes are still in many white people and indeed in our white sisters today. I am aware that I as a white sister am making a conscious effort to fight these very attitudes which somehow crept into my makeup as I grew up here in South Africa. I am convinced that such hurtful attitudes were largely due to ignorance on the part of white sisters. I do not believe that the white sisters were fully

aware of the suffering of black people. There were many sisters who did a great deal of mission work among the blacks but it took a long time for some of us to understand that just giving the people food and money was not the solution. The black sisters wanted us to have a relationship of equality and for whatever reason, there was often a failure to do that. I think that often the white sisters just did not know how to relate. I also think we bought into the attitudes of the government and the majority of whites in this country towards the blacks.

There was definitely an attitude that blacks needed to be raised through education. Most of the sisters were very good and kind and self sacrificing towards the blacks but there was a constant awareness of needing to raise the level of education of both the black pupils they taught and the black sisters they accepted. I think that this attitude which can be almost patronising at times remains in South African society today. It implies that a person has to earn a certain level of education or cultural behaviour to be on an equal footing with whites. It seems to me that there are still many hundreds of older black women who work as domestics and who continue in an attitude of servility, humility and acceptance in their relationship with their white employers. There are also many hundreds of younger women who uphold and practise the values of equality with all as they take up their places in society with confidence and at times even aggression.

#### THE LACK OF AWARENESS

I am aware of just how hard all the sisters worked. I am also aware that individual sisters did not have their own radios. When TV arrived in South Africa in 1975, many communities of sisters remained without it for several years. Newspapers were available but not in the more isolated places. It is not surprising to me that sisters were so unaware of what was happening politically. When I was a child at the Klerksdorp convent in the 1950s, the sisters hardly ever ventured out of their convent and the adjoining school and its surroundings. Much of the time when they were not working was spent attending prayers which were held in the morning, at midday and in the evening. The practice of keeping what was called the grand silence was still in vogue until the 1960s. This meant that there were no conversations from 21:00 until after breakfast the following morning. In my opinion all of the above contributed to the lack of awareness that existed among the sisters. The sisters were alone in their lack of knowledge of what was really happening in the country. I think one of the results of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was

that people were suddenly shocked into an awareness of what had been going on in the country. Most people just did not know exactly how much black people were being oppressed. Most people were ignorant of the effects of the rules which parliament kept passing. Nowadays there is more awareness and demonstrators will get up and wave placards and make us aware that there is another side to any new political decision. The demonstration or march is televised and so there is awareness raising. The King sisters as they struggled with the problem of the integration of the black sisters did not have the media resources available to us today.

#### ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES

Another factor that affected the white sisters was the attitude of ecclesiastical authorities. Sometimes our leadership found it difficult to go against the bishops and priests. A kind of dependence on the church authorities had existed since the beginning and it was not the done thing to oppose them. When bishops and priests had great dreams for their diocese or parishes or missions, the sisters were asked to help them to put these into effect. I can remember being on a mission in 1986 and 1987. The sisters there did not agree with the way the priest wanted to run the boarding house for the black pupils. He thought the children could do with less but the sisters pointed out the need for an adequate and balanced diet which would cost more. The parents were paying the necessary fees but the attitude was that some of the money meant for food could be saved. The sisters fought for justice and were successful but life on that mission was made even tougher because of the constant friction between the priest and the sisters. Sisters who opposed the local clergy in any place did not have easy lives.

#### BUYING INTO THE GOVERNMENT

Perhaps it is true that the white sisters felt indebted to Jan Smuts and the South African government because of the indemnity they had been granted at the time of World War II. From my own experience in the 1980s I know that there was a tremendous fear of opposing the government. In my own family we criticised the government in our home but kept our mouths shut in public. I think this was the attitude of many white South Africans. And the black sisters? Why did they not speak out more? I think that the first sisters were only too grateful for shelter, food, a prayer life, companionship and work. They were dependent and so they too kept quiet. When the struggle reached its height, I think our black sisters, just like the white sisters, were

simply too afraid to speak out against the injustices.

#### THE PRESENT SITUATION

After the black sisters had been fully re-united with the congregation, some of them went into positions of leadership and served on the regional councils of the Cape and Transvaal. There were only four coloured sisters at the time and some of them took up new challenges e.g Sr Connie Uithaler who became the person in charge of the King pre-noviciate. Today there are five coloured sisters. We are now in a time where we have been living in mixed communities for some years. In some communities the black sisters still feel that there is racial prejudice against them but in others they feel fulfilled and happy and accepted as equals.

At present each of our temporary professed sisters, three blacks and one coloured, is in a different community where she takes full responsibility for her participation in community life. It is my work to accompany these four sisters. I think one of the most difficult tasks is dealing with the results of the poor education they received in their past. An important aspect of Dominican life is study and further training at tertiary institutions takes up much of their time. They are also involved in various projects in society e.g. helping with AIDS patients, organic gardening, catechism and confirmation teaching and working with young people. They are also learning to drive and to become computer literate. They continue to attend counselling sessions and spiritual direction in order work on their own personal growth.

Novices and pre-novices also have similar courses as those in temporary profession, but they are even more in depth. Sometimes a woman who is older approaches us to enter the congregation. We assess each case separately and will change the above programme to fit the person.

I think the past has been a tremendous learning experience for the congregation. I am convinced that the great majority of hurts that were inflicted on each other from both sides occurred because of ignorance. Sisters were so often in the dark about what was really going on. I think the not knowing caused great damage. As I said earlier, the story telling groups to which we belong have greatly helped many of us. In these groups we have told our stories and felt heard and accepted.

## THE WAY FORWARD

In our younger sisters we are encouraging leadership. They attend our assemblies where we do a great deal of group work. These sisters take their turn to report back for the small group to the large group and so their confidence grows. We also hold many workshops. Last year eleven young Dominican women came together to look at Ubuntu values. They belonged to various tribal groups and it seemed to me to be very healthy for them to hear each one share on her tribal values. It was not so much the same customs in the tribes that interested them all, but the ones that were different.

I think as a group the King Dominicans have become more tolerant of each other's differences. Conformity is no longer a value. Instead we celebrate our diversity. Nevertheless we need to work hard on communicating with each other. Good communication is a skill and can be learnt. If we know how to communicate, we can break through the barriers that still exist. It seems that when we live in mixed communities, we begin to see each other as human beings who belong to the same congregation and believe in the same values of Dominican religious life. Then differences vanish. We hold regular community meetings and we go to workshops on a range of topics related to what we are about as religious women. But there is more to be done. We need to continue to make conscious efforts to know each other better. We need to dare to challenge each other when we see behaviour that hurts others.

An important development within the congregation has been the education of all sisters to higher levels. With knowledge has come a certain ability to fight the ignorance and helplessness of the past. I think we can now see that in the past we allowed injustices in the treatment of the black sisters and became part of the oppressive racially prejudiced regime. I am aware of the terrific fear that existed among the white sisters especially when there were riots. I can remember a charismatic retreat in the mid 1980s where a priest came to celebrate the sacrament of confession with us. This priest had been imprisoned by the security police and before meeting him, there was in me a kind of suspicion and mistrust of him. I felt as though he had done something wrong. When I realised that here was a man of great compassion, my resistance melted and I can truly say that I felt very touched by God's grace in that moment. The fear and suspicion gave way to understanding, repentance and reconciliation. It seems to me that understanding, repentance and

reconciliation is what has been happening to some extent between the various groups in our own congregation. A black sister told me very recently that she had not realised just how much pain there was in some of the white sisters. Her impression had been that most of them were very happy.

It is my hope that our congregation will be a kind of microcosm of what is going on in the country. I think that South Africans are becoming more and more accepting of each other and that we mix much more easily although there are still groups and clubs to which only whites or only blacks belong. It seems that the factor which continues to separate us is money. Large numbers of South Africans still seem to be relegated to the former townships or to the ever growing squatter camps because of the lack of money.

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE INTEGRATION OF BLACK AND COLOURED SISTERS IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CATHARINE OF SIENA OF KING WILLIAM'S TOWN IN THE PRESENT AND IN THE FUTURE

In our congregation we are growing in tolerance and acceptance of each other. More I think we are developing a love and respect for each other. Sometimes it seems to be a very slow process, but it is happening. May we have the courage to challenge injustices of whatever kind and may we have the courage and trust to allow our young sisters to lead us into the future. The reality is that there are very few white sisters entering the congregation. Of the eight people who are now in initial formation, six are black, one is white and one is coloured. If we are to continue at all future leadership will have to be multi-racial and the white sisters will have to let go. Our task among the sisters is to continue to work for the day when our skin colours are no longer barriers between us and when the suspicions and mistrust and mistrust of each other have been confronted, shared and reconciled.

May we have the courage to continue to face our future together with openness to each other. May our sharing grow so that understanding each other continues to develop and we allow the beauty and richness that is each sister to contribute to the whole. Together we can then go forward for the good of all those who touch our lives.

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Sr Claver Maier, 15 December 2001, completed

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Sr Imelda Mayekiso, 14 December 2001, completed



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