

## HISTORICAL SECTION

### THE MARYKNOLL SISTERS

#### NATURE, ROLE, and FUNCTION

The Congregation of the Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic exists as a corporate response to the transcultural dimension of the missionary vocation of all Christians. As a Pontifical Institute under the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, it serves as a missionary instrument of the universal Church in the United States. It represents an effort of American women and those who freely join them to serve Christ and man in building up fraternal relationships among Churches in the family of nations.

The Congregation's response to fundamental life issues is characterized by an intense concern that Christ's love be known and experienced in the world. It is based on Gospel principles translated into terms of the man of today, the world of today. It anticipates continuous renewal in order to keep responding to the real needs of the people of God.

At all times the function of the Congregation is determined by the nature of missionary activity. It is further shaped by its own historical, evolutionary development as its present members strive to continue and develop what Mother Mary Joseph, their foundress, initiated. They attempt to do this in a world where the ordinary locus of man's encounter with God is the secular sphere. Within this context, the Congregation seeks to make creative response to today's challenges. With the Church, it claims "no other authority than that of ministering to men with the help of God in a spirit of charity and faithful service." (The Church's Missionary Activity, Decree No. 12)

Of necessity the task of the Congregation implies a two-fold activity. On the one hand, it helps the Church in the United States to

express tangibly its mission concern; on the other hand, it provides the Churches in developing countries with a channel for fraternal sharing and communication with one another. In the United States the Congregation's activity will ordinarily manifest itself in the form of mission education. Any other type of service will be undertaken only for the specific purpose of promoting missionary awareness. At a time when vast numbers of people have lost a sense of direction, the Congregation seeks to illumine the meaning of man, the oppressed and disadvantaged man, the man whose human development has been inhibited or impeded, the man whose life seems to be without purpose. The Congregation's concern extends to every man, and to the whole man, not only to his material welfare, but also to the spirit which abides within him and yearns for development.

The Congregation does not function as an isolated entity but acts within the Church as a collaborator with the world. This extends to all types of groups who attempt to promote the welfare and unity of mankind. In particular, the Congregation assumes co-responsibility for activity undertaken jointly with the Maryknoll Fathers.

As women dedicated to giving witness to the redeeming presence of God in the world and to revealing the Church as sign of salvation, the Maryknoll Sisters come together in community, sharing a common vision, inspiration and support. While the missionary vocation as such can be lived out in a variety of ways, the original group of women of Maryknoll adopted the religious life form as their means of responding to the challenge of mission. They attest to their belief in this form as dynamic, evolving expression of Christianity, a vital force and pattern of life for our own times.

## BEGINNINGS

On January 6, 1921, the great feast of light and showing forth of Christ, three young women offered to help the young missionary Society, Maryknoll. One of the three was Miss Mary Josephine Rogers, Mother Mary Joseph, who was the leader of the group and later became the foundress. She was a teacher from Smith College, Boston, who had

been helping in the publication of a mission magazine during her spare time. From here the Sisters' community grew, American in spirit, World-wide in mission, a living tribute to their country's pioneering, sacrifice and generosity.

In 1920 the Maryknoll Sisters received canonical approbation from Rome, and in 1954 Rome further blessed the Congregation as a Pontifical Institute. Within the space of 49 years, the Maryknoll Sisters which began with three secretaries have multiplied, until now they number 1350. Their work for Christ covers the globe. In eighteen mission lands they help the people in countless ways—healing, comforting, feeding and teaching. Presently, there are 140 Maryknoll Sisters in the Philippines. The Congregation requires the highest religious and professional standards for their work.

### MISSIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 1926, a group of Sisters was assigned to open a Normal College in Malabon, Rizal. The need for Catholic-trained teachers in the Philippines was acute. By early June, twelve Sisters were ready to begin this work.

The Sisters' work in the Philippines has been educational for the most part. The Normal School became Maryknoll College, and now occupies a large complex in Quezon City with a total of 2,000 students.

A primary and high school of 1500 is now flourishing at the site of the original Normal School at Malabon. In 1938, a school was begun in Lucena, Quezon Province. The present enrollment is more than 1200. Also at Pakil in Central Luzon the Sisters staff a high school of 500 students.

In a wave of pioneering during the 1950's many Filipino families left their small farms to migrate either to the rich lands in northern Luzon or to the great undeveloped areas in southern Mindanao. Maryknoll Sisters went to both. At Santiago they work with the La Salette Fathers who conduct a complete plant of kindergarten, primary, secondary and college.

On the Island of Mindanao, the Maryknoll Sisters staff another complete educational plant at Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. High Schools have been set up in Panabo, Santo Tomas, Lupon and Cateel in Davao. All of them are separated by miles of difficult roads. At the request of Most Rev. Gerard Mongeau, the Sisters accepted a high school at Datu Piang, Cotabato, a Mohammedan stronghold. In 1968 they took over the primary and secondary school in Bislig, Surigao del Sur.

In all these schools there is a vigorous catechetical apostolate for public school youth and unfortunate children who do not attend school.

Medical work began early in the history of the Maryknoll Sisters in the Philippines. St. Paul's Hospital, 125 beds, in the crowded Intramuros section of Manila was staffed in 1927. This hospital also ministered to the poorest in the city—giving food, clothing, and housing as well as medical care. A nursing school was connected with the hospital and today many of their graduate nurses hold prominent positions in the medical field throughout the Islands. In 1945 during World War II, St. Paul's Hospital was completely destroyed. St. Joseph's Hospital in Manapla, Occidental Negros, was opened in 1948 to care for workers on sugar plantations.

A major step was taken in 1961 when a novitiate for women from Asia was set up in Quezon City. Here, candidates from the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Ceylon receive their early formation as Maryknoll Sisters.

Social Service and Social Action are also part of the Maryknoll Sisters' missionary endeavors in the Philippines.

## THE FUTURE

The world today encompasses a totality of new meanings, emerging problems and unique needs. This contemporary atmosphere as well as the wide range of cultural and geographical settings in which the Congregation finds itself call for equally diverse expressions of life and service. Attuned to a world of accelerating change and ever-widen-

ing choices, the Maryknoll Sisters acknowledge the importance of and the need for a variety of life styles within their Congregation. They respect and support continuing experimentation in order to discover how the mission of Jesus can best be accomplished in our times. They have already seen a variety of life styles within their Congregation—exemplified in a special way by the Maryknoll Cloister which was established in 1932 at Maryknoll, New York. At present, other expressions or ways of life are evolving which, it is hoped, will give to the contemporary world new and intelligible witness.