



OBITUARY

Sr Ferdinand Robecke OP

29.08.1929 - 07.11.2019



Who can find a valiant woman? for her
price is far above precious stones.

Proverbs 31,10



Sr. Ferdinand was born on 29 August 1929 in Sassenberg in the Diocese of Münster, Germany. Her parents were Johannes and Maria Elisabeth Robecke. She was the fifth of nine children, the first girl after four boys. She was baptized when she was three days old and named Irmgard Sofia. Sr. Josephine, her sister, who died earlier this year, was nine years younger than her.

She had eight years of primary schooling, part of it disturbed by the Second World War. She spent two years at vocational school, training in cooking and sewing and then did housekeeping for a family.

She entered the convent in Neustadt in August 1955, a day after her 26th birthday. Her father's advice to her was to come back home if convent life was not for her, but her mother's advice was to give herself time. "No coming home after a few days or weeks". Sr Ferdinand described her postulant days as fun as there were nine postulants at the time and some of them were 'characters', including herself. She made her first profession in Neustadt in 1957 and soon after that received the news that she was to leave for South Africa. Five Sisters sailed on the "Lloyd Tristina" from Italy, spending 19 days at sea. She spent some time in Oakford learning English and Afrikaans before starting her nurse's training. From 1959 to 1962 she did the general nurse's training at "St Augustine's Hospital" in Durban, and from 1966 to 1967 the midwifery training at "Mater Dei Hospital" in East London.

Sr. Ferdinand was assigned to Marifont, then to Marymount, where she served as Sub-Prioress, to Osindisweni as assistant matron, to Ekukhanyeni as Superior, to Oakford and to Villa Assumpta. She used her nursing skills not only to care for the physical health of her patients but also took the opportunity to share God's love and compassion with the poor and the helpless. Sometimes the love she gave was 'tough love' and she demanded the best from her nursing staff. People knew exactly where

they stood with her. Ferdi, as she was known, made many lasting friendships and kept up contact with them right to the end of her life. She was always honest and sincere. When she turned 70, she decided she had had enough of nursing and spent five years at the Bluff working in the kitchen at St Dominic's House of Prayer. It was obvious that she enjoyed putting into practice what she had learnt in her youth and having a little more time for prayer and quiet. She then moved to the Generalate in Bedfordview where she did housekeeping and cooking.

She recently wrote, "I have found my happiness and fulfilment in our Congregation. I have become aware of so many blessings in my life, especially the blessing of obedience, trusting in my God, in my superiors, and in the people I have worked with. It was not always easy but I would never break my vows. I have promised to be faithful until death."

In 2017 when she felt her energy failing she asked to be moved to Pietermaritzburg. This was a difficult decision to make. One of her friends told her that it was better to go while she was still quite well and could make the place her home rather than to go later on as a patient. She took this advice and in November 2017, she moved to Pietermaritzburg, determined to keep interested in life and to keep up some of her hobbies.

The death and loss of her sister, Sr Josephine, was a very painful experience for her, but she took it as an opportunity to 'embrace the Lord in everything.' She had taken this practice from one of her retreats and tried to do this in the midst of her suffering, even when she felt that God had forgotten her. It is now her turn to be embraced by her God, whom she loved and served so generously all her life. May she enjoy the peace she longed for.

RIP