



Obituary

Sr Hildegunde Runne OP

4.11.1930 - 7.7.2021



I am confident of this, that the one
who began a good work among you
will bring it to completion by the day
of Jesus Christ.

(Phil 1:6)

Ursula Hedwig Runne was born on 4 November 1930 in Worms, in the diocese of Mainz to Heinrich and Dorothea Runne. She completed high school in Germany in 1950. She became a postulant in October 1950 and completed her novitiate in Oakford where she made profession on 9 July 1952. From 1957 to 1958, she completed the Natal Teachers' Diploma at the Durban Teachers' College, living at Walsingham in Durban.

Sr Hildegunde spoke lovingly of her family life. Her parents nurtured her faith and that of her siblings, four brothers and a sister. They faced suffering and fear during the War when her eldest brother was declared missing in Russia.

After the War, she was among the young people rising to the challenge of building up, and bringing hope and trust after so much destruction. She wanted to become a missionary, and, following one of her brothers, Burkhard, who had become a Dominican (and later a friend for many years of the sisters), she felt attracted to Neustadt.

Becoming a Dominican was not unexpected: she had been a member of the Dominican parish of St Paulus and her mother was a Dominican tertiary. Just nine months later Sr Hildegunde was on her way to Oakford.

She was a member of the pioneer community in Empangeni where St Catherine's school was opened in 1955. A particular joy for her 60 years later was to visit St Catherine's once more and to see what wonderful progress the school had made since its beginnings with just eleven pupils. She taught for three years (1964-1967) in Virginia in the Free State.

From 1968 to 1993, she spent, what she described as "the most fulfilling time of my life" in Swaziland (now eSwatini). After Swazi Independence in 1968, there was new life in education and in the Church and the Sisters were part of that. She was a member of a team that developed a new curriculum for Mathematics and as a teacher inspired young people to love the subject.

After the appointment of the first Swazi bishop, she participated in the building of small Christian communities through family catechesis. She valued the various community-building workshops conducted by our sisters and others, and the collaboration with other religious in the country: the Cabra Dominicans, the Canadian Ursulines, the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Swazi Servite Sisters. She formed great friendships with many Swazi people. Leaving Swaziland was a painful experience for her.

But Sr Hildegunde immersed herself in the new challenge of and experience at St Boniface School in Kimberley. She again taught religious education, worked in the library, and accompanied troubled young people who trusted her with their stories of hardship.

She spoke often of the community spirit among the sisters in Kimberley, and of the joy of being part of the Local Community (known for some time as the Gau-Kim community) which gathered for meetings in Johannesburg.

Leaving Kimberley was another difficult time, but Sr Hildegunde came to see the time in Johannesburg at Emmanuel Community as part of the process of "getting ready to be old"! She joined the St Vincent de Paul Society, and made contact with refugees and asylum seekers from all over Africa who were helped by the Holy Angels Parish in Bezuidenhout Valley, a suburb of Johannesburg.

Sr Hildegunde retired to Villa Assumpta in Pietermaritzburg in 2018. When asked why she had remained a religious she said, "I found what I had been looking for." This sense of contentment and fulfilment was felt by all who met her or lived with her.

May she now enjoy the peace and love of God whose call she answered so faithfully and generously.

RIP