

"The call must come from within"

Sr Antonia Grawe OP celebrated her 65th jubilee of profession on 3 May 2022 in the convent in Neustadt where she entered our Congregation on 3 May 1957 - at the age of 26.

The decision to lead a religious life was not made overnight, Sr Antonia says. For several years she had carried the thought within her. "I felt attracted to the religious life and I wanted to go on mission to Africa, that was my dream." She says a Dominican priest recommended the St Joseph Mission House in Neustadt, which she visited in November 1954. "After that I knew what I was going to do," says Sr Antonia. "The call has to come from within, otherwise there is no point."

Sr Antonia was born in R \ddot{u} then on 1 December 1929, the second youngest of seven children. She grew up in the parish, which is situated in North Rhine-Westphalia between the towns of Lippstadt and Warstein, and also attended primary school. When she was ten years old, the Second World War began, in which the family lost their only son.

Her father was an organist and sexton in his spare time; the whole family was involved in the Catholic parish. During the war Sr Antonia worked as a kindergarten assistant, afterwards she completed an apprenticeship as a tailor. After joining our religious community, she worked, among other places, at the Landvolkshochschule in Freckenhorst in Westphalia and at the convent in Neustadt, where she managed the tailor shop and helped in the household.

Her greatest wish to go to Africa on mission was, unfortunately, not fulfilled. Eight young women had joined with her the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena of Oakford/Natal at the St. Joseph Mission House in August 1955. Of these, six of them went overseas. However, she herself did not receive the necessary visa at that time, Sr Antonia recalls. So she stayed in Neustadt and made sure that the sisters who started their missionary work in Africa got the necessary outfits. "In the past, everything was sewn by hand," she says. Sr Antonia can no longer say how many vestments she measured, cut and sewed over the years: "There were hundreds."

In 1974 the time came for her to leave Germany. In California (USA), where the Congregation managed the housekeeping in the study house for young Dominican friars in Oakland near San Francisco, her support was needed. Together with three other sisters, Sr Antonia cared for the physical welfare of the students who were studying there. She was not afraid of going to a foreign country, to a country whose language she did not speak. "I went willingly and trusted in God's decision that it was right for me," she says. At college, she learned English in the evenings and on weekends and soon felt at home on the other side of the big pond.

After two decades in America, Sr Antonia returned to Germany in 1994 and worked in the Marienkrankenhaus in Fl \ddot{o} rsheim, again in the tailoring department. In 2004 she returned to the Neustadt convent where she took her first steps in religious life over 65 years ago. Here, too, she was responsible for the sewing department for many years, she helped in the household and took care of the elderly fellow sisters.

Today she is retired. Accompanied and supported by a walker and a cane, she goes for walks. Her need to be useful is still strong in her. She reliably washes the coffee dishes in the convent in the afternoon or pulls weeds in the garden. "I do what I can still do and I like doing it," says Sr Antonia.

Original text (in German): Martina Schneider