

## "Everything is searching and finding"

Sr Thelma Schwind OP made her vows 65 years ago and looks back on an eventful time as a religious. She has done missionary work in South Africa and Argentina.

The places of her life, the encounters with people of foreign cultures, the conditions under which she and her fellow sisters worked in South Africa and Argentina are impressive. Development aid is what Sr. Thelma wanted to do. She says that it is from the poor that she has learned the most: "People know that I understand their poverty."

Sr. Thelma was born on 11 June 1938 in Lohr am Main, her baptismal name was Anna-Christina. "I am a Lohr Mopper," she says. Mopper, that is the old-established Lohrers in Lohr, of whom there are not many today. She grew up in the "Obere Schlossgasse" together with her younger sister. In Lohr she also attended the "Mädlesschul" (girls' school) on Kirchplatz and went to secondary school with the Franciscan nuns. Her career aspiration was to become a childcare worker.

In 1955 she entered our Congregation in Neustadt. On 3 May 1957, at the age of 19, she made her religious vows. "Everything is searching and finding" was her motto in life and she directed her creative energy accordingly.

On 21 August 1957 Sr Thelma left for South Africa to our Motherhouse at Oakford Priory near the city of Durban. At that time the journey was by ship to take more suitcases and boxes with goods that were needed there. Sr. Thelma was interested in many things and flexible, she was always given different tasks. She was assigned to different schools, for white, African and Indian children. In those days everything was strictly separated: "It was apartheid," she says.

Sr Thelma's great joy was home economics. After her training as a home economics teacher, she taught young African, Indian and Caucasian women at various schools everything that makes for good and sensible housekeeping. The girls learned everything in that regard they needed for their later lives there.

From 1962 to 1965, Sr. Thelma studied teaching. She started teaching Zulu students, planted a garden with them, cooked on an open fire. Sr. Thelma stayed in South Africa until 1974, when she was assigned to go to Argentina. Pioneering work awaited her there. There was nothing but subtropical jungle. "First we had to build a little house," she says. A doctor gave the sisters a piece of land, and with the support of "Adveniat" they built a clinic there. Sister Thelma remained faithful to the school projects: she created programmes for 16 schools and worked in eight of them.

For almost ten years, she was mainly involved in schoolwork, family work and catechesis. This was a special period of life for Sr. Thelma and she enthusiastically tells of her commitment to children from the poorest families.

Via Flörsheim am Main and places in England, Sr Thelma came back to Neustadt. For almost ten years, she worked in the rehabilitation centre "Haus St. Michael". There she accompanied with her expertise in housekeeping and her practical skills the rehabilitants to lead a structured life, taking responsibility for themselves.

In 2002 she was assigned to the Volkensberg Youth House and in 2010 she was transferred to our convent in Dießen am Ammersee. Here Sr Thelma helped in the household and kitchen and took the opportunity to train for hospice work.

She returned to Neustadt on 28 April 2018 and has recently returned to her home town of Lohr to live in assisted living. Friendly contact with people was and is a concern for her.

Original text (in German): Martina Schneider