



Obituary

Sr M. Arnolda Surmann OP

29.03.1934 – 17.08.2022



*When God leads us home
from the days of wandering.
brings us home from the twilight
into His blessed light,
that will be a feast!*

(Author unknown. Excerpt, based on Psalm 126)



Sr Arnolda often and gladly prayed and meditated on this Psalm 126, especially in the last days of her life. She also held the image of Mary from her home parish of Oythe in her hands.

Elisabeth Karla was born on 29 March 1934 in Oythe/Vechta. After primary school and attending the agricultural vocational school, she entered our Congregation in Neustadt in February 1952 at the age of 17. She followed her two sisters, Sr. Josefa and Sr. Kunigunde, who had already joined our Congregation in 1948 and 1949. God has already called both of them home. At her Reception she received the name Sr. Arnolda. After her First Profession in 1953, her first assignment was to the Volkersberg before she was sent to South Africa in 1956. This had been her heart's desire.

She faithfully served as a cook in many mission stations; in Genazzano on the Indian Ocean, in our maternity homes Marifont (Pretoria) and Marymount (Johannesburg), in Empangeni, at Rosary Lodge and Mazenod, both hostels for young working girls, and in Koinonia, a Retreat and Conference Centre. Sr Arnolda's last assignment was to our Casa di Studio in Via dei Quattro Cantoni, Rome.

Especially in Africa, working in the kitchen was not easy. She was also happy to take on other work, taking care of the garden, making sure the flowers flourished. Hence her great love for flowers, as we experienced it until the end.

In 1994, after the closure of our house in Rome, she was transferred to Neustadt. Sr Arnolda was available for the services needed in the house and for the community. In the same willing and friendly way, she looked after the welfare of the groups of guests who came to the convent at that time. She was remembered by many for her smile.

"The great deeds of man are not those that make a noise. The great things happen as simply as the trickle of water, the flow of air, the growth of grain," says the German poet Adalbert Stifter. These words speak to the essence of Sr Arnolda's being and doing.

She bore her serious illness with trust and deep faith. Faithfully she attended prayer times and was often to be found in the chapel. In her later years, she discovered her creative nature. She painted mandalas with enthusiasm and thus gifted others with joy and with her works of art.

The long period of her illness, the inner distress and accepting the ailments of old age sometimes took their toll on her and caused her much suffering. The text of the beloved Psalm was a source of inner strength:

We sow in sorrow,
suffer and mature.
Our end remains
a beginning!
The one who sows in sorrow
shall reap in joy.
For God, our God,
is a God of eternal creation,
a God who with us creates the new earth,
the new heavens.
God makes us come and go,
makes us die and rise again.

Sr Arnolda was always very close to her family and to people who had become friends to her on the path of life.

On Assumption Day, which is a holiday in Bavaria, Sr Arnolda was consciously prepared to die. She believed that now was the hour for her. She was ready to die, but God had a different timetable for her. The following day she received Holy Communion. She was completely inwardly present and consciously prayed.

Although we were all prepared for it, the death of Sr Arnolda hit us very hard. At lunchtime, our nurse went to check on her. She sat down at Sr. Arnolda's bedside. After a few breaths, Sr. Arnolda gave her soul back to the Creator.

We are grateful for Sr Arnolda's testimony of life and faith, for her smile and for the traces she left in her life. We trust that she may now be completely with God and be an intercessor for us.

RIP