

Our Sisters in Brazil Mark First Anniversary

By FATHER EDWARD J. BARRETT, O.M.I.

"To part is to die a little," says the French phrase expressing neatly a deepfelt human happening. But, to die is the breeze and promise of a new flowering life — here in nature and hereafter in super-nature.

So, when the community and friends of the Sisters of St. Joseph packed Sacred Heart Cathedral a short twelve months ago to assist at the departure ceremony of their first missionary group to Latin America, they naturally felt the parting.

Tear-filled eyes watched as Sisters Rose Alma, Michaela, Marya, Adelaide, Annice and Regis filed to the altar to humbly kneel and accept the invitation of their Divine Master to carry His light to the neglected harvest fields of central Brazil.

Admiring hearts beat fast as one by one the Sisters accepted their mission cross from Bishop Kearney and faced the unknown challenges offered by a strange land with its teeming millions of parched souls.

From the daily grind of convent life the view of the Brazilian mission is beautiful. The image is that of a group of cheery young Sisters who twelve months ago packed their bags and hurried unselfishly to join in the religious struggle of Latin America. But, as so often happens, the image is glossier than the reality. The glories are few and the going tough. Honors and rewards are not the goal of this expedition.

When the Sisters of St. Joseph accepted the invitation of Dom Benedito Coscia, O.F.M., to work in his diocese of Jatai, they were by no means swept up in the idealism of it all. As Mother Agnes Cecilia said, "There's a great difference be-



Fr. Domingus, O.F.M., vicar general for the Diocese of Jatai, and Sister Rose Alma, superior of the Brazil mission.

between a noble idea, no matter how well conceived, and the execution of that idea in practical, realistic, down-to-earth terms. Were it the idea of just worldly expedition and conquest, it might be foolish to continue. But, Our Divine Master has assured us that His

kingdom is not of this world." Brazilian operation has been a fine over-all success.

Less than twenty-four hours after saying good-bye to family and friends, the Sisters were immersed in an intensive Portuguese language course at C.E.N.F.I. — Petropolis. For six hours a day, five days a week, they suffered until they became really proficient.

By December 18 they were headed towards the relatively unknown interior of Brazil and their new home at Mateira, where they joined forces with a group of seven Irish Oblate Missionaries who had arrived the previous year to become the first resident priests in the area.

A public reception awaited the Sisters in the local theatre where hundreds of smiling Brazilians gathered to catch a glimpse of these strange ladies in their long robes and veils. Fr. Domingus, O.F.M., V.G., and Father Peter Moriarty, O.M.I. were present to extend a warm welcome and offer plenty of encouragement and assurance. For facing the Sisters was the vigorous challenge of the mission, which they accepted with the same faith and optimism as the first messengers of the Gospel.

Hard work, plenty of it, lay ahead in the months that followed. The weeks passed quickly. So, too, did their first Christmas in the boiling heat of the Golas wilderness. This was a time of adjustment to climate, to people, food and customs. It was a time that very often called for ingenuity and improvisation in trying to cope

with the lack of power, super-care of the recently founded markets and modern appliances. The trials and hazards presented by red, dusty roads, churned to quagmires with torrential rains, must be left to the imagination.

By February the Sisters were ready to enter the public schools. Weeks of home visitation with the Legion of Mary had helped them win the hearts and confidence of the people. It is interesting to note that there are no parochial schools in the parish. The Fathers had become Directors of the government schools at primary and secondary levels, thus affording them the opportunity of religious organization and influence without involving them in the tremendous financial burden of building their own schools. In no other way could they have so surely and swiftly reached the hearts of the people.

This is what the Sisters of St. Joseph have "inherited." In the short space of a few months they have direct contact with all the children of the area — doing the greatest amount of good in the least possible time space. Their work is a marked contrast to the traditional role of Sisters in Brazil.

For centuries Sisters and convent education have been synonymous with the "privileged few" — a system which has lamentably failed to produce good lay leaders in the Church. This latest break-away is significant because it involves fewer personnel, working with greater potential and reaching the mass of the people.

Sisters Michaela, Marya and Regis direct two primary schools at Mateira — each with 400 children (7-16 age group). Sister Adelaide travels to nearby Canal Sao Simao every morning and directs another primary school with 400 children. Sister Rose Alma takes

On the medical and social front, diminutive Sister Annice from St. Joseph's Hospital is dynamic in her efforts to combat sickness, hunger and poverty. Already she is responsible for two clinics in Mateira and Canal Sao Simao. Tirelessly she devotes herself four days per week to clinic work. The remainder of her time is spent visiting the shacks of the sick and needy. On Sundays she organizes and supervises the distribution of food and clothes donated by Catholic Relief Services.

The transformation in the life of Mateira is nothing short of phenomenal since the arrival of the Sisters. Even the most bigoted and hard-core, hardly fail to recognize the wonderful change for the better. The signs are everywhere, commercially, socially and religiously.

"A healthier place to live in since your arrival" is how an old pioneer puts it. "Your very presence has been a civilizing influence — a taming of the wild. People are settling down and building their homes. There is promise of a brighter future for their children. The educational program under your direction is leading to the disciplining of an undisciplined people. And the 'law of the wild' is giving place to a recognition of rights and duty — of man's place in society."

This is fair testimony to the heroic work of five Sisters of St. Joseph. Their parting in August, 1964 from their family and community may have been like a "little death" but the dying has flourished into a new life of promise for thousands of Brazilians. It has been a year of progress — a year filled with sacrifice and hard work. The reward will be reaped only in the glory of Heaven.

Peace Corps Volunteer Reports From Nigeria

Living conditions for a Peace Corps volunteer in Eastern Nigeria range from modest luxury to austerity, according to David A. Northrup, of Mt. Morris, N.Y., who is teaching English and French in a rural school in the African bush country.

In letters home to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Northrup of 5 Clark St. in Mt. Morris, the American volunteer has described both the plus and minus sides of his new home life.

On the side of modest luxury — he has his own small house, a 4-room cinderblock affair, complete with a combination houseboy-cook-instructor. On the side of austerity — bicycle transport, hot humid days through a 6 months rainy season, and not enough hot water to take a shower.

Northrup likes his work, which is teaching 32 classes a week in a 200-pupil school, operated by the government, but supervised by a Catholic missionary. The priest-principal, Father Owen Reid, is from Ireland, as are many of the Catholic missionaries in Nigeria.

The school is in a "bush area," (meaning anything that's off the paved roads) near the town of Ikot-Epkene.

Northrup had a chance to see more of modern Nigeria between school terms in late April, when he spent a few days at a Peace Corps Rest House at Enugu, the capital of Eastern Nigeria. The stay afforded him the treat of a hot shower:

"There is a modern hotel here," he wrote from Enugu, "which has a pool and hot showers which you can use for 70 cents a day. It was the first hot shower I'd had since I left New York!" (In January.)

Like most African nations, Nigeria is modernizing in a rush, but the tempo is a bit uneven. His May 17 letter underlined this, as he described the new Education Centre of the University of Nigeria at Nsukka. (He was there for an English teachers' conference.)

"It's like a modern American hotel with classrooms attached. It's all air-conditioned, but the electricity company won't be able to supply enough juice to turn it on for two years!"

Northrup was one of a group of 115 Peace Corps volunteers who arrived in Nigeria early this year. Nigeria now has the largest Peace Corps contingent in Africa.

The Mt. Morris resident graduated from St. Patrick's school there, attended McQuaid Jesuit High in Rochester and got his B.A. and M.A. in History at Fordham University.

Festival Set At St. Michael's

Annual Festival of St. Michael's Church, 869 Clinton Avenue North is being readied for Friday and Saturday, Sept. 10 and 11, according to Rev. James F. Baker, general chairman.

James Byrnes, chairman and an active committee are planning for games, refreshments and special attractions.

Proceeds of the festival will be used to pay for the recent school renovation and the purchase of a station wagon for the School Sisters of Notre Dame staffing St. Michael's School.



Sisters Michaela and Annice with some of the children near a partly reconstructed church.

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