

**SISTER JOHANNA ROBBEN (Gaudentis)**

**Deceased on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022 in Boxtel, The Netherlands**

**At the age of 87**

**She was born on 30<sup>rd</sup> September 1935 in Loon op Zand, The Netherlands**

**First Profession on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1960 in Esch, The Netherlands**

Jo (as she was called) was born in *Loon op Zand* in a caring and religious family with 8 children. On her deathbed, she still told us that she had a very happy childhood, together with her brothers and sisters, who protected her. She was grateful for the dedication of her parents, who set her on the right path and how her brothers and sisters always supported her during her choice to become a Missionary.

She often told the story of her vocation: “As a young girl I walked past the church and just then, the bells began to ring“. She said: “It was as if the Lord Himself was calling me to come and work in his vineyard. I tried to forget, but I couldn't. Then I found a magazine on mission with articles about Africa and then I knew which way to go. My niece Marianne Kemmeren (Sister Pacifia Marie) had already joined the White Sisters, so that made my choice easier”.

On 24<sup>th</sup> January 1958 Jo entered, the Postulate in Maarn and made her First Profession on February 11<sup>th</sup> 1960 in Esch. She then left for Algiers to “Saint Marie” in the Motherhouse for a year further formation.

She already had followed the MULO (Upper Primary) and had also obtained her Diploma as a Nursery teacher. She expected that she would leave immediately and teach in the mission. It took however a while before she was appointed for Africa, because it was thought that she was not strong enough for the African climate. She went first to Holmwood in U.K. to help out in the laundry, but went soon to London to learn English. In August 1962 she came back and started preparing to leave for Africa.

Back in the Netherlands, she would initially be sent to Uganda, but later it became Tanzania and in February 1963 she went first to Mwanza to learn Swahili. From there, she was appointed to Tabora, to teach in the Interracial Elementary School. This was quite a challenge for Jo, as she only had the certificate of a nursery teacher. After a holiday in Esch

in 1970 she was very happy to now teach in a kindergarten in Tabora. In 1975 she went to Frascati for her Tertianship.

At one point, Jo was asked to start teaching the girls of the Ujamaa villages, to become themselves Nursery Teachers. Everything would be paid for by UNICEF.

In the beginning she refused because she had no experience in this work and did not know enough Swahili to be able to translate all the teaching material properly. When she first completed additional training in Swahili in Kipalapala and had been able to follow a six months course for training nursery teachers in Den Bosch, she got to work.

She first gave two-month courses to groups of 15-17 girls in Ujamaa villages. After this she was asked to teach a course at the Rural Training Centre in Kasulu and Kigoma. She went on to teach to the leaders of a children's home, at a Protestant Mission, so that the staff would at least have a diploma when the missionaries left. In Sengerema near Mwanza she trained kindergarten teachers at the request of the sisters of Carolus Borromeo. Between courses and training, Jo gave catechesis in several primary schools, because there was always a shortage of religious teachers.

In 1980, she was allowed to go home to attend her parents' golden wedding. After this she was appointed as a portress in Frascati for 3 years, where she got to know many fellow sisters.

From 1984 to 1987, Sister Jo lived in the community in Den Bosch and did mission animation. However, she was asked to go back to Africa to teach future kindergarten teachers in Tukuyu. Until 1992, Jo trained countless girls there. She was always very sorry when girls became pregnant and had to drop out early of education. There was also a great risk of being infected by AIDS. At the end of 1992 this mission was handed over to the "Sisters Queen of Apostles", a native sister congregation. After a few months teaching with these sisters in Sumbawanga, Jo left for Itumba to teach catechism. This was another real challenge for her as she had barely been able to prepare.

Meanwhile, Jo had been in the Netherlands in 1990 when her mother died.

When her niece Sister Marianne Kemmeren went on leave to the Netherlands, Sister Jo went for six months to the community in Nairobi

to replace her. After the definitive return to the Netherlands in 1995, Jo started a new community together with Srs Beatrijs ten Hagen and Francien van Berkel in an ordinary terraced house in Boxtel-East. She lived there until 2003 when the community was closed. In between, she temporarily replaced for a few months Sister Betsie Rijkers in Mwanga, Tanzania, who had to go home due to illness.

Jo did not leave Boxtel anymore and lived in the Prins Bernardstraat and the Molenwiek, until she moved to the “Wereldhuis” in 2015. Together with Sister Gerda Slaghekke, she lived first on floor 5 where later Muslim residents of Sefkat joined them. After a while Jo moved to floor 2. She was always very friendly with these muslim-women, even not knowing the language. They often came to greet her after she had moved to floor 2. After Jo had died, I met one of them and said “we will miss Jo”. She said with a smile to me: “I will keep her always in my heart”.

Sister Jo was a very sweet, gentle and caring sister, who easily made contact with people. She looked with gratitude back on her life and the fact that she was able to train so many girls to be kindergarten teachers. Also, in the Netherlands she went to many schools to share her stories and to share the passion for Africa with the children. At the primary school nearby, she was a “reading mother” for almost 4 years. She also taught Dutch to several refugees and migrants in Boxtel.

In “The Story of her Life” she writes that she had received a lot of love from her family, acquaintances and fellow sisters. She was very grateful for that and she wishes everyone all the best.

A few months ago, Jo started having pain, several stomach ailments and was very tired. She became weaker and finally was bedridden. She was longing to go to the Lord. In the afternoon of 19<sup>th</sup> of March, she peacefully and very quietly slipped away, in the presence of the sister who was with her.

Dear Jo, it is no coincidence that you died on March 19, St. Joseph's Day, because you had a special bond with St. Joseph. May you Rest in peace, together with your brother Kees who died a few weeks ago. You are now both in the Eternal Peace of the Lord.

*Marina van Dalen/Tiny Holscher, MSOLA-NL, April 2022*

