

Sister Riet Droogh (Maria Helena)

Deceased on 8TH February 2024 in Boxtel, The Netherlands

At the age of 92

Born on 6Th February 1932 in Hazerswoude, The Netherlands

First profession on 15th Augustus 1954 in Esch, The Netherlands

After spending almost, a week in the hospital with a lung infection, Sister Riet returned to the Worldhouse last Tuesday and here she passed away in peace.

Riet was born in Hazerswoude in a large and busy, but pleasant and social family. She was the 4TH with 5 brothers and 6 sisters. They lived in a large farm surrounded by water. They also had a cheese factory. They were not poor, but they had to work hard to feed everyone. They often had other children to stay to recover. They also helped people in hiding during the war.

Riet was not only a good learner, but she also loved to read. For example, she liked to read the so-called 'Blue Book' of the White Sisters. When she read that a fellow villager (Sr. Mechtildis) had died in Uganda, she thought that she could continue her work.

This is how she came to the postulate of the White Sisters in Maarn in 1952. At least, then she knew for sure that she was going to Africa.

At her first Profession she was given the name Sr Philippina. During the year of ongoing formation in Algeria, she already gained practical lessons as a nurse. She continued her further education in Veghel, NL.

When she was 27 years old, she was appointed to Tanzania. She ended up at the remote Bukumbi mission on the shores of Lake Victoria. Riet started working in the outpatient clinic and learned all about tropical diseases.

She then went to the district hospital in Sumve as a surgical assistant. People still strongly believed in witchcraft and often only came to the hospital when they were already seriously weakened.

After more than six months, Riet was appointed as an operating assistant in Sumve (Tanzania). This was a larger district hospital, where more specialist care was provided. Here she worked together with the Dutch Ms. Dr. Schreuder, the best surgeon in Tanzania at the time. Meanwhile, Tanzania became independent in 1961 and Riet returned to Bukumbi. Here she made her Eternal Vow. Meanwhile, two years earlier, her sister Leny had also joined the White Sisters.

A year later, Riet arrived at an even larger hospital in Kagondo, near the Ugandan border, in northwest Tanzania. Here she worked, among others, with fellow sister Blien Veldman. Riet mainly worked as an anaesthetist in the operating room. This was done using fairly primitive means, and she had to be on call day and night. This caused her to become overtired and, due to taking a lot of chlorophyll against malaria, she developed an eye disease that made her almost blind. Fortunately, this could be prevented because a Czech doctor worked in Kampala and treated her in time with Prednisone and a lot of rest.

In 1967, Riet returned to the Netherlands for a holiday. Because one eye had improved significantly, she was able to start her paediatrician nursing training in the hospital in Oss. Now that she had proven that she could work again, she was appointed by the Congregation for Uganda in 1972. Idi Amin

had just come to power here, it was a dangerous time with a lot of violence and political refugees.

Riet had more and more African nurses as colleagues. In the meantime, indigenous Congregations had also been established, such as the “Banakabira Maria”, exactly as Cardinal Lavigerie, our founder, had intended: 'teaching the local people so that they can do the work themselves'.

In 1976 Riet returned to the Netherlands. To her disappointment, she was appointed superior in Sterksel where the elderly sisters lived. This partly had to do with her eyes, but also with the dangerous situation in Uganda. In Sterksel she learned a lot about elderly care and she also went to England to learn about the phenomenon of homecare. After an operation on her ear, she was very pleased to return to Uganda in 1982, although things were still turbulent there. She became ultimately responsible for the children's and adult departments at the hospital in Nkozi.

Rebels often came by at night for letting treat their wounds. One day a regiment of heavily armed soldiers came in, all of whom wanted to be treated. Bravely Riet said: 'First put all the guns in the car, otherwise I can't do anything'.

The 1980s were characterized by the emerging AIDS epidemic. The hospital received medicine from Dutch NGO Memisa and during information meetings Riet advocated the use of condoms, despite the Pope not allowing it. A lot of people died and this caused many AIDS orphans. Little babies who were kept alive with art and craft. Riet often donated blood for this, because she had a special blood type. In 1994, the hospital was transferred to an African Sisters Congregation and after 11 years of Nkozi, she returned permanently to the Netherlands.

After a year of rest, she was appointed as Provincial Assistant to the Dutch Provincialate. She regularly visited all the 10 communities in the country and was the link between the sisters and the Provincial. In 2000 she had a bicycle accident and shattered her right arm, but despite surgery she remained disabled.

Two years later she moved with her sister Leny to the Molenhof. After all those years apart in the mission, they eventually became neighbours.

Here Riet became active in the residents' committee and she was also a contact person and informal carer for the older sisters in the various residential centres.

Riet was grateful that she had been able to help with the development of healthcare in Africa. She did not always find it easy that the Congregation decided where she should go, but she learned to accept this and saw that it was for the common good. She was happy when 2 years ago she could move to the care home World house together with her sister Leny.

Riet was a modest, sweet and wise sister, who devoted herself completely to the mission, looking at what was needed. She paid attention to others until the end.

After she got a nasty lung infection, which did not go away in the hospital, she returned to the Wereldhuis. Here all the sisters and staff were able to say goodbye before she passed away peacefully.

She was exhausted and wondered what would be on 'the other side'. Full of confidence that the Lord would await her in his Eternal Paradise.

Dear Riet, rest in peace.

We are going to miss you very much.

