

## In Memoriam White Sister Betsie Rijkers - MSOLA-NL

Betsie was born into a deeply religious farming family in Strijp, Eindhoven, NL. Her parents were overjoyed to have a daughter after 4 sons. Shortly afterwards they moved to a larger farm in Eeneind near Nuenen, NL. Later two brothers and a sister were born.

Betsie was an active child and liked to help her mother in the household and on the farm. Dressed as a missionary nun, she participated in the then popular Holy Infancy parades. She was a member of the Young Farmers' Union and was a member of a sports club. She also liked to go out dancing with boys and to the fair.

At first, Betsie did not want to become a religious at all, but she still became infected with the missionary virus and wanted to go to Africa to help the people there. On her mother's side, there were already four uncles and aunts with the White Fathers and White Sisters. But first she had to work on the farm, now in Stiphout, and in the household. She also took a 2-year sewing course, which later came in handy, and eventually went to the postulate of the White Sisters in Maarn at the age of 23.

Despite the homesickness she felt for her family, she made her First Vows in 1959 in Sancta Monica in Esch. Her new sister name became Aldegonda Maria. After the international training year in Algiers, Betsie went to learn English in Liverpool and was appointed for Mwaziye in Tanzania. There were already some Dutch sisters here, including Sr Betsie Derksen. She picked up Swahili fairly quick. A few months later she found out that her father had died in the meantime, the mail did not go so fast in 1962.

In Mwaziye, Betsie was instructed: 'Look around and see what you can do'. Accustomed as she was to farm life, she soon

knew how to get things done. She started a dairy business and made cheese and butter. She also worked at the domestic science school and made home visits to local families. After about five years, she was appointed for Sumbawanga, a much larger town. Here, Betsie set up a 2-year sewing course, which attracted women from all over the area.

After another five years, she was appointed for Chala. This only lasted a short time, after which she ended up in Tabora, a large city. Sr Riek van Dijk was one of her fellow sisters here. Here too, Betsie organized successful sewing courses for women, with sewing machines paid for by the Missionary supportgroup from Stiphout, NL. With her newly acquired driver's license, she was able to make home visits to the surrounding villages, where she assisted women with practical and spiritual help. She worked in Tabora for a total of 12 years. Here she celebrated her 25th sister jubilee and also received a visit from her family, a great gift.

In 1984 Sister Betsie moved to Mwanga, a new mission station, where all kinds of things still had to be set up. She started with home visits, learned to hold sermons and also gave catechesis to women in the church. The work here was not easy and things did not go very smoothly in the community either. Eventually she went on leave to the Netherlands and turned out to be so exhausted that she had to rest in the Beukenhorst monastery in Biezenmortel, where several fellow sisters lived. Once she had recovered a bit, she went to work in the kitchen in the house in Sterksel, where our elderly White Sisters lived. She also learned bookkeeping here.

At the age of 58, Betsie was invited to go back to Tanzania, to her great joy. She didn't have to be told this twice! She left for Itumba to do social-pastoral work, she led celebrations and went on home visits, did a lot in and around the house and assisted the White Fathers with exorcisms. After two years,

the post was handed over to the African sistercongregation and Betsie returned to the community where she had been before, namely in Mwanga. She worked here until 2000, after which she returned to the Netherlands permanently, after almost 40 years of being on and off in Tanzania.

Of course, returning was not easy after such an active life. After all the outdoors work and encounters with the people in Africa, it was just a too quiet place for Betsie in Esch. The mother house Sancta Monica was sold after a few years and together with a group of sisters she moved to the Regional House in the Prins Bernardstraat. When this was also sold after 7 years, Betsie moved to the large community in Terhaghe Monastery in Eindhoven. She lived here for about eight years before she was able to move into the Wereldhuis in Boxtel with 5 remaining sisters in 2020.

Unfortunately, due to rapidly deteriorating cognitive problems, she had to be admitted to the Psycho-geriatric department of Carehome De Beemden in St. Michielsgestel in mid-2024. Here she passed away peacefully at the beginning of this year after an unfortunate fall just before Christmas. Fortunately, she had many family members and fellow sisters visiting before.

Sister Betsie was a sweet, gentle and cheerful sister, who loved people around her. If her head got too full, she couldn't always follow it anymore and had to take a rest. But singing and dancing always cheered her up, as did the close contact with her family. Almost until the very end, we could see the twinkle in her eyes when she recognized you.

Dear Betsie, we are going to miss you very much. Rest now in Peace with the Lord.

*Marina van Dalen, coordinator MSOLA-NL*

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