

A LIFE REMEMBERED

Sister Kitty Cashman FMDM

27 September 1934 — 15 January 2017



EULOGY by Sr. Theresa O'Sullivan

during the Requiem Mass on 17 January 2017 in the Franciscan Convent, Ballinasloe, IRELAND.



On Sunday morning 15 January 2017, Sister Kitty passed away peacefully, the end of a long life lived to the full. Today we are celebrating her life of faithfulness, service and example.

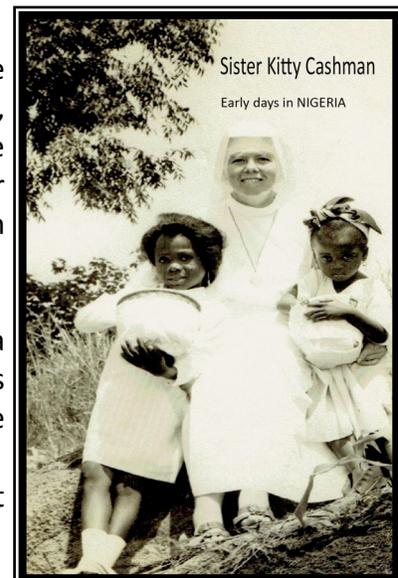
Kitty was born in Youghal, Co Cork on 27 September 1934 the third in her family of three sisters and one brother. She was baptized Catherine Frances. Kitty's family was always very close to her heart. She was always very happy when planning a visit home, where she knew a very warm welcome awaited her. The untimely death of her sister Noleen and later her sister Mary, who was a member of our Congregation, marked periods of deep sadness in Kitty's life, but her faith saw her through.

Kitty began her life as a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood here in Portiuncula Convent, Ballinasloe in 1953; a few months later she was given the name of Sr Asumption. She made her first vows in August 1955.

During his life on Earth, Jesus concerned himself with the material needs of his listeners, to whom he gave bread, healed their sick and preached the message of love, hope and courage. Kitty endeavoured to do this, through her warm-hearted, compassionate nature, as she ministered in England, Nigeria, Zambia, and, in her final years, here in Ireland.

Kitty trained as a Nurse/Midwife and was the recipient of a Gold Medal in the field of nursing. As we all know, awards of this type are not just handed out, instead, they are the result of great commitment and hard work.

It was ultimately the people of Africa who were to benefit from Kitty's dedication to study.



As I have already said, Kitty ministered in different countries, but the one I would like to single out this morning is her years of devoted service in Nigeria. It was here in 1968 that I first met Kitty and we lived together in community for 11 years. It is because of these years, I am present indeed behind the words I speak this morning.

In 1968, Kitty was given the formidable task of setting-up a Health Care facility in Yakoko, at that time a very isolated area in the North East State of Nigeria.

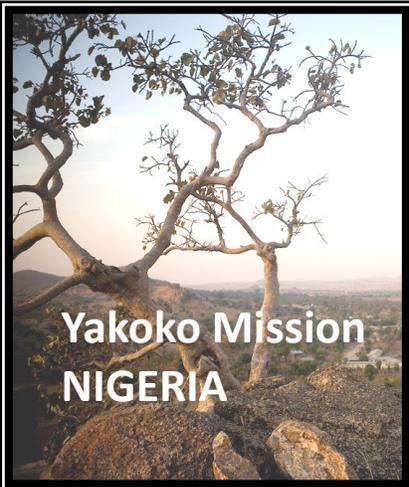
Health Care facility in
YAKOKO, North East

This morning we are privileged to have with us Fr Kieran, whose hometown was only about 12 miles from the centre. The building and equipment for this project had been provided with the aid of a German Charity and Kitty's task was to get it up and running, almost single-handed. At that time financial resources were very scarce, no trained personnel was available and Kitty had no knowledge of the language spoken in that area, which was quite different to the one with which she was familiar. She had no illusions about the difficulties involved in the task ahead.

Kitty was authentic and caring and had a deep respect for everyone.

Her first undertaking was to establish a friendly relationship with the leaders and elders of the community, and gain their trust. The people were a discerning people and soon they got to know that Kitty was authentic and caring and had a deep respect for

everyone. People were never problems to be solved, or patients to be moved along. They could literally trust her with their lives.



She made remarkable progress in the most difficult of circumstances. She had great negotiating powers and, be it a tough Bishop, a Local Chief or an awkward official in the Department of health, Kitty always managed to get round them and acquire what she needed for her people. Kitty kept her eyes on the possibilities rather than on the stars – she set about studying all aspects of tropical diseases so that she could give the best care to those who presented themselves – mostly in desperation.

Kitty kept her eyes on the possibilities rather than on the stars...

She established **Primary Health Care and Maternity Care** and arranged approved training for those in the local community who had potential to care for the sick. Kitty insisted on high standards and arranged frequent inspections which were carried out by the Danish Lutheran Doctors.

As mentioned, The Health Care Centre was financed by the Germans and they also came for regular inspections –these visits could be compared to a combined visit from the TROIKA and our HIQWA, as their inspection involved checking on progress, finances, standards and statistics. In those days technology did not stretch to a laptop but they did have calculators. Kitty had a very sharp mind for figures and was always a step ahead of the calculator. When it came to totting up the next allocation from Germany, she made sure it would be favourable.

Kitty held a number of Leadership posts in our Congregation. In community, she was at all times the essence of kindness and generosity; she was absolutely fair and even-handed to everyone. She was a very warm-hearted person and enjoyed celebrations, especially at Christmas. She had a very nice singing voice and raised many a heart in a lonely mission. Kitty excelled in that true Franciscan quality of hospitality and shared everything with everyone.

The cross of grief and pain was never very far from Kitty during her time in Nigeria. On Christmas Eve 1975 she received a letter from home with the sad news of her dear Father's death – the letter bearing the news had taken some weeks to come, at that time it was the only form of communication.

A year after arriving in her mission, she was to face the tragic murder of the mission priest – she was alone in the mission when this occurred. Three months later, she witnessed yet another tragedy, when the young Augustinian Priest who had replaced the murdered priest, died in a freak car accident on the mission.

In those days there was no debriefing or counselling. Sometimes, loss and suffering can be so intense and painful, that all one can do is to lay it at the foot of the Cross – this is what Kitty did.

Today in Nigeria and Zambia, I know that there is a great sense of loss and sadness among those who knew Kitty. The drums are silent - as they remember a woman of great kindness and generosity - one who saved many lives and alleviated great pain and suffering. In all, Kitty served 34 years in Africa. Her name will always live on.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the representatives of the Dungarvan Sisters of Mercy and Our Lady of the Apostles Sisters who are here today, and who worked along with Kitty. You were there in times of joy and happiness and also to support in times of trouble. Kitty would be very proud to see so many Nigerian Priests and people present today - **Sannu da Zuwa!** *(in Hausa language for 'A warm big welcome')*

We know that a Christian funeral is more than a farewell: it is a farewell until we meet again, when every tear will be wiped away. My faith tells me that those tears of Christmas Eve 1975, are today turned into shouts of joy and gladness. Kitty, you will never be forgotten - may you now enjoy the perfect peace you so well deserve.

