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# Sister Aine McDonald FMDM

A LIFE REMEMBERED

2 November 1931—5 September 2015

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## Sharing by Sr. Frances Woolman

How can anybody do justice to a life like Aine's in five minutes? The truth is you can't. We have come today to celebrate the life of and say goodbye to a woman who loved so deeply that she touched thousands of hearts with her gentleness and caring and she will live for a long time in those hearts even after today.

Aine was born in Wexford on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1931 to Denis and Annie McDonald. She had three brothers and six sisters and her family always remained very important to her even though she was separated from them geographically.

She entered the Postulancy in Guildford in February 1949 and was received into the novitiate on 15<sup>th</sup> August that same year being given the religious name of Sr Mary Celestine. In 1955, shortly after finishing her nurse training she went to Zimbabwe and she stayed there until 2007 when she returned to Ladywell. 52 years of continuous dedicated service to God's people in Africa.

Aine was a very private person and she was always happiest in the background, but the roles she was asked to undertake threw her into the limelight more often than not. She gave all she could to whatever she was asked to do even though it was not her comfort zone.

When she first went to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) she was asked to start a nurse training school. Bear in mind that she finished her own nurse training in 1954 and this was 1955. The ink was hardly dry on her nursing diploma when she was suddenly "sister tutor"! She remained the tutor in Hwange hospital until 1980 (25 years) and the school turned out wonderful nurses. Hospitals around Zimbabwe would poach Hwange trained nurses and often when posts were advertised if a nurse had trained in Hwange no interview was necessary. This was all down to Aine's total devotion to duty and trying to get the women who passed through her hands to achieve the very best they were capable of. Everybody mattered to her and I can remember years later women who had trained under her coming back to visit. They were middle aged women with grown up children by this time but she made such an impact on their lives that they never forgot.

Maybe at this point I should mention that her love was big enough to encompass not only people but all creatures. She had a great love for animals especially dogs and birds and would cry if she saw any of them suffering. I remember traveling with her from Hwange to Victoria Falls once and along the road we saw an injured Lilac breasted Roller – Aine's favourite bird. I had to stop the car and reverse so she could rescue it. We took it back to the Falls and she nursed it for the time that I was there. I was then commissioned when I was returning to Hwange to take it back and I had strict orders to put it under a bush very near to where we had picked it up so that it would know where it was and find its family again. I was sent off with a small bowl of water and little packet of bird food to put with it in case it needed something for its first day back!

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In 1980 Aine was asked to leave her beloved Hwange where she had been for 25 years and move to Bulawayo to be local leader and matron of the hospital there. A post that she stayed in until 1987.

It was a difficult time in Mater Dei. We had changed a lot at 1977 chapter, there had been times of struggle and doctors were concerned about change in leadership in the hospital from Sr. Joachim whom they had known for years to Aine (and Sr. Angela Clare) who were new to Mater Dei and unknown quantities to them. It speaks volumes for both Aine and Angela Clare that in a very short time the tension that had existed was gone and relationships with the doctors were back to the normal trust and respect. It took great strength of character to come through that time but true to form it was done quietly and gently. The thing about Aine and conflict is that she just did not do it. If there was anger or raised voices in a group Aine would speak quietly with wisdom and whoever was shouting had to stop in order to hear what she was saying! I never ever heard Aine raise her voice though I have seen her deal with many irate people – she even had to deal with me at times!!

From 1983 to 1987 she was asked to be postulant director in addition to her two roles of local leader and matron of Mater Dei. We were just starting our formation programme in Africa at that time and it was uncharted waters for us. Helen Doyle was one of her first postulants. Helen wrote about her “I was welcomed by her as a postulant and made my final vows in her presence when she was Regional Leader. Aine was always an unassuming kind of person who led by example”

Later Aine was appointed regional leader in Zimbabwe which put her even more in the limelight particularly around the running of Mater Dei Hospital and being on the Board of management. This was a role she found particularly tough but again she did it with total dedication and the people who were on the board with her in those days still speak of her with great admiration and respect. Dr Cohen on hearing that Aine had died immediately sent a message of condolence to us saying what a great woman Aine was and what an asset she had been to Mater Dei.

On completing her time as regional leader Aine was appointed deputy novice director in Victoria Falls and then in 2001 she moved to San Damiano in Bulawayo. This was a community where our younger sisters lived while training. All in all Aine spent many years with our newer members helping them in one way or another in their formation. All of these without exception speak with great love of Aine and are genuinely devastated by her death. I think not seeing Aine for a long time they still imagine her as the dynamic formator whom they could always turn to in any need.

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When several African sisters were over for the formators' meeting in April they spoke to me of how hard it was for them to see Aine looking frail and what she had been for them from the beginning of their religious commitment right up to the present.

So what was it that made people resonate with this quiet private person? It certainly wasn't her oratory or great conversational skills because she did not have those gift. What warmed people to Aine was her sincerity, her deep and genuine love for people, her gentleness and humility. Those of us who lived with her in community in Africa would add "her tremendous sense of humour". Aine was one of the funniest people I know. While her gentleness, prayerfulness and humility were always evident in Ladywell I do not think her humour was. Although Aine made the decision to leave Africa and return the UK herself, she found the transition very difficult after so many years and her humour never seemed to come to the fore again except in private moments one to one. She still always greeted me (and I think others whom she knew well) "me luv, me duv" which had been one of her jokes long back based on Hosea.

In her time at La Verna she helped out in St Francis when we needed somebody in the office especially answering the phone and it was lovely when I rang up to hear her beautiful gentle voice answering.

She also reached out to other sisters in the community who needed a little companionship taking Teresa Leahy and Clare McShee for a walk each day when they were no longer able to go alone.

Aine's Irishness was always very important to her even though she never returned to Ireland to live after she entered the Congregation. She would speak lovingly about life over there and after she returned from Africa to la Verna she spent many hours reading Irish history and listening to Irish music – catching up on what she may have missed living away from her own country for so long. This along with her love for her family kept her rooted in her traditions and true to the person God had created her to be.



So we come today to lay Aine to rest thanking God for a life lived to the full in gentleness, sincerity, contemplation and love of others. I feel privileged to have shared so much of my life with Aine. To have benefitted from her wisdom, learned from her gentleness and laughed at her jokes.

**Rest in peace me luv me duv!**