

1926—2015 *Memories* of Sister Catherine Joy FMDM

Sharing by Sister Bernie Ghent FMDM

on the day of the Funeral Mass at Ladywell Chapel on 11 December 2015



For someone who has been in our Congregation for over 60 years, there will be many memories. I have just tried to focus on the most significant ones. You will have your own memories which I am sure you will share afterwards over lunch.

Though born in Midhurst, Sussex, almost 90 years ago, Catherine was brought up in Newcastle upon Tyne and lived there until she entered our Congregation in 1952. She was **very** proud of being a Geordie and often said that the Geordies were the only people who spoke English properly!

All, to whom I have spoken in recent weeks have said that Catherine was a lovely quiet, gentle, spiritual and prayerful person and I can second that, having lived with her for many years. One might be forgiven for thinking she must have been one of these meek and mild people who would never set the Thames on fire! That was not the Catherine I knew, nor the picture I received of her from others.

After her first Profession she went to Zimbabwe, at that time known as Rhodesia, and was entrusted with the responsibilities of housekeeper, dietician, and cook in a very large mining hospital in Hwange, consisting of 300 African beds and 36 European beds, all under the same roof. Although a wonderful cook, Catherine had no experience of African food, or of cooking for larger numbers or, indeed, of running a huge laundry, but she took up the challenge with determination, asked the local people, learned on the job, read up books, and magazines and managed excellently. This determination and seeking to broaden her knowledge, was characteristic of Catherine all throughout her active life.

Not only was she a great cook, but she was also a good teacher and she passed on her skills and knowledge to the African staff. She trained all the African staff who worked with her. She demanded high standards of herself, and expected the same of others. Some years after she had left the hospital, one of the young African men whom she had trained was appointed head chef and in charge of catering.

She was somewhat older than most of those in her community at that time and so brought with her many gifts and skills, again which she used for the benefit not only of her immediate community, but also for the benefit of the wider community. She put on a special concert in the hospital every Christmas, for which she trained the nurses in acting, singing, (including Negro spirituals) and, with the help of a local person, also dancing - Irish, Scottish and Russian!

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When she returned to England the late Mother Francis had received a request from the bishop of the newly erected Diocese of Arundel and Brighton, the late Bishop David Cashman, if she could let him have some Sisters to help him set up house in Storrington, Sussex, in a property owned by the White Canons of St. Norbert. So Catherine was asked to go and “make a home” for him. Here she was able to put to good use all her talents and skills. I was privileged to be a member of that community. I witnessed at first hand, Catherine’s determination and enthusiasm to turn what had been a pastoral centre of sorts into a home for the Bishop and his household, which included in those early years Monsignor Barry Wymes, and Monsignor John Hull, who are here with us today, and also Fr. Michael Bowen who succeeded Bishop Cashman.

Fortunately, Bishop Cashman was in Rome at the time, attending the final session of Vatican II, so we were able to forge ahead and get most of the repairs, electrical re-wiring, decorating, curtain making, furnishing, etc. finished before the Bishop returned. **HOWEVER** just a few days before the Bishop was due back from Rome the delivery of a bath intended for the bishop’s bathroom had not materialised, for some reason or other. I remember Catherine stating emphatically “*I’m not going to be beaten by a bath*”. So she promptly got on the ‘phone, rang round a few places, and a bath was delivered, installed, and everything was in order in the nick of time.

Catherine loved caring for the bishop, his successor, Bishop Michael Bowen, and the priests, helping in any way she could to enable them to fulfil their particular ministries. This care for priests was also manifest some years later when she went to the Beda College, Rome as Procurator. As the Bishop’s House had large rooms downstairs, it was arranged that the meetings of the Senate of Priests, could be held there, also the annual “Open Day” which Bishop Cashman arranged for young people with special needs. Catherine, put her all into preparing for these days and enlisted help from Mother Francis who always sent a few young professed sisters down early in the mornings to assist with serving, washing up, etc. I’m sure some of you will remember helping in this way!

Sisters have spoken of Catherine as always being a great community member. Catherine led by example in sharing in the general work of the house in different ways - whether it was the with the everyday routine of the house, doing the garden, **which she loved**, or looking after a big group especially on “big days”, or helping to get the Bishop’s pastoral letter out on time - we all pitched in together

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Back in the Sixties, as a Congregation, we were still very much confined to working within our own FMDM institutions (except for our Sisters on the missions) and seldom had reason or opportunity to mingle with anyone outside that. But Catherine soon became part of the local village of Storrington with her Geordie, friendly disposition. The community was well known in the area by the local shop keepers, electrician and other tradespeople. Catherine took part in the annual horticultural show in Storrington every summer, encouraging those of us in the community to do the same - and we even won a few prizes into the bargain! She was very involved in Maryvale Pastoral Centre for a few years where she would have been a warm and welcoming presence to everyone who came there. She made many friends, some of whom are with us here today.

It was around this time that she went to the Institute of Pastoral Liturgy in Carlow, Ireland. Her love of the liturgy was nourished and deepened as she enthusiastically absorbed all the opportunities it provided. As was typical of Catherine, she shared the knowledge she had gained with our Sisters here in England, taught us the music for the short responsories at Morning and Evening Prayer for Advent and Lent, and, one year, led the Readings for the Easter Vigil down in our conference room, illustrated with slides. A Sister who was present in Ladywell at the time told me the Vigil lasted 3 hours, but that no one minded! She also went round all the communities in Zambia (at the invitation of the then Regional Leader, Sr. Monica Orange, who is with us here today) not giving lectures, but simply passing on her knowledge and love of the Liturgy. Catherine was Administrator of our Retreat Centre in Ladywell for 3 years and during that time worked very hard in arranging renewal courses for Religious Sisters in general which proved very popular.

Always ready to extend her knowledge in anything that would help her in her ministry for the Church and the Congregation, she was given the opportunity to take part in a training programme for Franciscans in Spiritual Direction and Directed Retreats, and later on attended a Diploma course in Franciscan Studies at Canterbury. Afterwards she passed on the fruits of her study on Franciscanism to our young professed Sisters; as one Sister said, "she always shared with great love and fervour as she wanted the Sisters to know Saints Francis and Clare as persons, not simply know their writings from the study point of view."

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During her years in Canterbury she made a great impression on the people and helped many by her kindness and consideration for each person and, above all, her listening ear. The same was said of her during her 9.1/2 years in Aldershot where she was well loved by the people and her own FMDM community. Catherine was involved in the parish in Aldershot and especially in spiritual direction. She was a good spiritual director and was noted for her availability and generosity.

When Catherine returned to Ladywell in 2003, she was already slowing down but entered into all the activities of the community as best she could and continued with spiritual direction and retreat giving. She was also involved in the formation of our FMDM Associates for several years. Always keen to look to the needs of others, Catherine and a few other sisters ran a stall every Sunday after Mass selling Fair Trade goods to help the farmers of the third world until such time as the idea of Fairly Traded goods became widely known and this promotion was no longer necessary.

At the beginning of 2008 severe back pain and a fall, which resulted in a broken shoulder, made it clear to Catherine that she needed to move to an environment where further risk of falling would be minimal and so she came to La Verna in April 2008. Here she was able to continue to receive visits from friends, be taken out to tea, or for a drive by one of the Sisters and sometimes go out for a day.

In the last few years, increasing frailty and illness took its toll, and the Catherine we knew was not always visible. **However**, the **real** Catherine **was** still inside her. She used to say to me, over and over again, when I visited her that she thanked God every night for this lovely room she had in La Verna, where she could look out and see the sky and the stars, for the care she received from the Sisters and staff, especially the night staff, who would often pop into her room with a cup of tea.

When Catherine suffered a severe stroke 6 days before she died, she told Moira that God was coming for her on an express train. Well the **Lord did** come for her on the First Sunday of Advent, a Season which she always **loved**.

Catherine, thank you for all you gave to our Congregation and to me in the 60 + years you were with us. We pray that you are now with the Lord enjoying the peace and happiness you so richly deserve. Maybe there is a little garden there in which you can potter around and a dog or two to play with.