



Sister Ignatius Wilce FMDM
23 December 1917— 28 June 2016

EULOGY by ***Sister Moira Olliver FMDM***
on the day of the funeral Mass on 12 July 2016 at Ladywell Convent Chapel

Where do I start sharing the life of Ignatius – or, Iggie, as she was affectionately known. All of us here have so many memories – so many stories – I have chosen just a few.

Kathleen Christina was born in Cork on **23 December 1917** to Thomas and Bridget. Ignatius enjoyed telling everyone that she was baptised on Christmas day – and would proudly produce her Baptismal certificate as evidence! The family moved to Plymouth where Ignatius’ father was a Naval Officer at the Britannia, Royal Naval College. Ignatius would speak of very happy childhood days with her sister, Nance, and her brother, Willie. Sport was a very important part of her childhood - hockey, tennis, swimming and boating. She had use of the Naval College boats and loved sailing. It was well known that she could out row any boy on the river Dart! Ignatius never lost that adventurous spirit.

On completion of her schooling, Ignatius trained as a nurse at Torbay Hospital. She and Kathleen (Kathy) Gardner's mother, Jean, became very close friends during their training years. Both dedicated to their patients but both had great senses of humour.

Ignatius' faith was very deep she would start her day by cycling to 6.30am Mass, often taking Jean, a staunch Methodist, with her. Needless to say due to Ignatius' influence, Jean became a Catholic and even considered entering the FMDMs – but left that privilege to her daughter, Kathy!

Ignatius qualified as a nurse in January **1940** and surprised everyone by entering our Congregation in March of that year. She entered in Mount Alvernia Guildford and following her religious formation trained as a midwife.

In 1946 Ignatius set sail for Africa and our first mission in Kasaba, Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia. Along with Mother Francis Spring the four sisters travelled, into the unknown. They called themselves "The Crib" - Carmel Kerins, Rose Godsmark, Ignatius Wilce and Bernard Rudden. Under the special care of the Captain and crew they enjoyed sailing to Africa; taking part in the many on board social activities – with the exception of dancing! Ignatius being an ace at tennis caused many balls to "go over the side".

Following the sea journey, a rail journey up through South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, they finally arrived in Kasaba along a bush track. A tremendously exciting, but formidable journey for four young women in 1946.

The Kasaba mission had been established by the White Fathers, a leprosarium being the main ministry on their arrival. It was hard but rewarding work, which Ignatius simply stated it to be missionary medical work. But in truth, it involved many other aspects of mission life, it included, carpentry, building, vegetable and fruit gardens, digging wells and irrigation systems. Houses were built for the patients and staff each with a garden plot. By 1957 a hospital was planned and being built. Ignatius was a legend on her bicycle – she would cycle from the Convent to the leprosarium, she was observed carefully by the patients – they quickly knew her mood by the way she cycled – if the mood was not too good – word went out to disappear fast!

In 1957 Ignatius was awarded a MBE by our present Queen – receiving the award in Lusaka from the Governor General. As we can imagine, to Ignatius, this was a meaningless gesture to the extent that when her brother, Willie, asked her to produce it so he could have a look, she said she had thrown it in the rubbish!! Needless to say it was found and held in the safe keeping by the family!

Ignatius was also instrumental in the sisters taking over the government hospital in Fort Rosebery, where nursing sisters were desperately needed. Ignatius drove from the north of Zambia to Bulawayo to escort Corona Ahrens, Mater Christi Westlake and Angela Clare Priddey to their new home and ministry. With the sisters in Fort Rosebery, Ignatius would drive very sick patients, often at night the 100 miles from Kasaba in the Volkswagen. Sandy, potholed, bush roads – not the M25! Well possibly not too much difference. Ignatius was a great driver - loved the long distances through any weather conditions. She was involved in a very serious accident – hitting the hardest tree in the bush, stories abound around this incident. Perhaps, just to mention that the quick thinking and prompt action of Dympna Hickey enabled help to quickly arrive at the scene.

The opening of Mater Dei Hospital, Bulawayo also benefitted from Ignatius' pioneering spirit – coming down from Kasaba – working in the Operating Theatre and helping Angela Clare with labour ward duties!

In 1962 Ignatius returned to Ladywell as the Local Leader, Ladywell, which at this time was the Motherhouse and the Novitiate. It was very busy and Ignatius could be seen on building sites with Thaddeus Murphy, or painting with Monica Orange. Monica tells the story of Ignatius painting the novitiate – rushing in to the refectory for lunch – looking very pale due to paint. On the strength of her “pallor” was given an extra-long sleep the next day!

In 1965 we see Ignatius travelling to Aitape, Papua New Guinea with Françoise Greening, Rosario Hogan and Ruth Ogden – again to a new mission working alongside our Franciscan brothers. Not an easy mission due to isolation and the tremendous amount of health care needs in the area. Leprosy, tuberculosis, malnutrition, maternity complications apart from all the other medical problems! Similar but not the same as Africa, the climate being very harsh and humid and very taxing. There were lighter moments – like enjoying swimming at Yakoi beach on the edge of the Bismarck Sea. Not forgetting to mention “Lizzies Liquor” brewed from dried fruit – quite potent and enjoyed by all!

Another of Ignatius' challenging overseas ministries was to the Palestine Hospital in Amman, Jordan. Ignatius was able to pass on her midwifery skills and in spite of not speaking Arabic she made herself understood by maternity patients using sign language. Dorothy Johnson remembers very clearly trying to help un-block the hot water system and covering Ignatius in soot. All taken in good humour.

1977 found Ignatius back in the UK, being involved in parish work in Chingford and Aldershot. We are all grateful to Ignatius and Angela Clare – who on a visit to the coast discovered Edgewater in East Preston - our holiday home by the sea. Ignatius spent many happy holidays there and well in to her 80's would go for a “dip” in the sea.

One of her greatest loves was being a member of the community in St John's Seminary, Womersley. Her sense of humour, her down to earth advice and availability quickly cemented lasting friendship with the students and the professors. She remembered names and people very clearly – even being able to ask about a member of a student's family.

Ignatius semi-retired to St Clare's Community, Ladywell **in 1999**, but she still remained very active with community commitments and assisting where ever she could.

In 2008 she decided at 90, La Verna was the place for her. She really enjoyed her retirement; she had time to read avidly, listen to music and spend time in prayer, her daily rosary was most important to her. But she was always willing to lend a hand - apple or potato peeling. Sadly, her deafness caused her much suffering, she lost her singing voice – she had a very good ear for music, loved plain chant and was able to hold a true note – and arthritis prevented her from continuing to play the organ – but you never heard a word of complaint.

She always spoke of the love and gratitude of her family especially Cavan and Sarah and all the “children” – she looked forward to visits, news and photographs.

Ignatius was always grateful for the loving care and support that the La Verna staff gave to her and for the wonderful surrounding she found herself in. The last few months could have been very burdensome for her health-wise – but Ignatius became mellow, peaceful and very grateful – her desire was to be with her God, often asking “why was He taking so long in coming”. On the morning of 28 June, Ignatius showed visibly signs of weakening; she received Holy Communion with great reverence and appeared to be very content. Slowly, in silence she slipped peacefully to her God – with her great friend, Angela Clare, sitting holding her hand.

How do we describe Ignatius, comments like “tough but fair”, supportive, understanding, strict but kind at heart, sense of humour, loving, adventurous, a heart of gold, prayerful, a twinkle in her eye, a toughie – but a nice one, supportive of all the sisters, down to earth, all words used to portray our Ignatius, what a full life – what a whole person!

But perhaps this prayer found in her Bible, written in her own hand, brings to light that deep spirituality that she so desired to live throughout her life.

*God, let my whole being be directed to you,
so that you can be the God of compassion and love to me
and through me...STILLNESS*

*THANK YOU Ignatius for sharing your life with us,
may you rest in peace.*