

Louise-Henriette THOELLEN - 06/05/1952 – United States : Honolulu

V.C.J.S. + V.C.M.I.

Kaimuki, the 24th of May, 1952.

Reverend Mother,

With deep sadness I wish to inform you of the death of our beloved and much missed Mother Louise Henriette who surrendered her beautiful soul to God on May the 6th, when in union with the entire Congregation we celebrated the feast of Our Most Reverend Father.

Although seriously ill for many years and often even confined to her room, she nevertheless continued with tireless dedication to govern her great Community. We had hoped to have her with us for a long time to come. But on Easter Tuesday a cerebral haemorrhage, followed by a heart attack complicated by pneumonia alerted us to the danger. Our good Chaplain, the Reverend Father Liévin, whose visits brought the venerated sick woman so much peace and consolation, administered Extreme Unction which she received with great piety. A few hours later, she regained consciousness. However, she continued to weaken. One day, like Father Damien, she murmured: "I am very happy...". These were, so to speak, her last words. She was serene to the end; conscious too, but no longer able to open her eyes during the final days, she suffered in body, mind and heart, and so ended her beautiful life in a triple holocaust of love.

Mother Louise Henriette (Jeanne Louise Thoelen) was born in Hoesselt, Limburg, Belgium, on February 2, 1881, into one of those patriarchal families where traditions of honour and piety are passed on from generation to generation. Of the seven children of whom she was the sixth, two sons became Priests; two daughters, Religious. Her childhood was filled with pure joy. Early on she began her classes under the guidance of the Daughters of Mary, who soon noticed her keen intelligence and profound piety coupled with a charming individuality. It was with great regret that Mr and Mrs Thoelen decided to send her to boarding school with the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts who had just moved to Tongeren to open a Juniorate. For them, a Juniorate meant a "boarding school for young people". The Superior of the new establishment, Reverend Mother Benjamin, received the young girl with open arms and surrounded her from then on with motherly affection, which not only never wavered but lasted all her life. And as if the Sacred Hearts wished to consecrate this affection for eternity, these two beautiful souls, always united on earth, left for heaven only eight days apart.

In Tongeren, under the guidance of Mother Benjamin and then Mother Thérèse Joseph, the young girl received an important congregational formation which gradually developed to give the great Family of the Sacred Hearts one of its most beautiful jewels.

Her religious vocation was at first strongly opposed by her venerated father. But soon convinced by his priestly sons that this was God's will, he gave his consent. On March 25, 1903, Sister Louise Henriette pronounced her resolutions as a novice of the Sacred Hearts in the chapel of Tongres. Having obtained her Teacher Training Diploma, she stayed for two years in Tongeren where she rendered great service to the nascent Institute. In 1905, she arrived in Picpus where she made profession on October 17, 1906.

The first assignment of the newly professed was for Courcelles-Motte, Belgium. Her Superior, Mother Marie Henriette, niece of the Good Mother, appreciated her at her true value and appointed her as assistant to the Head of the primary school, Sister Marie Cécilia, who always remained her faithful friend. The beautiful days spent in Hainaut were of short duration. The

following year Sister Louise Henriette was recalled to Picpus, and on July 29, 1908 she left with Mother Beatrix and five other Sisters for the foundation of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, USA.

The House of Fairhaven treasured its memories of early times in which Sister Louise Henriette played a key role. But as the Massachusetts Community grew, another foundation was also gaining importance in the Pacific. It was Kaimuki, until then under the direction of Mother Marie Laurence, Superior of the convent in Honolulu. The Kaimuki Community had to have a resident superior.

Very Reverend Mother Marie Claire, Superior General, appointed Sister Louise Henriette to this new position; and on November 7, 1916 the newly elected, then 36 years old, arrived in Kaimuki. She immediately set her sights on the work that awaited her. The new convent stood amidst rocks and cactus. A first building was there, it is true, but there was still a lot of work to be done.

Without wasting any time, the young Superior dealt with urgent needs. Clearing the land, embellishing the property, enlarging the premises, everything was done with intelligence and tenacity. In 1920 a left wing was added to the central building giving the Community isolated quarters; at the boarding school, a large study room. A few years later, a right wing restored the symmetry of the whole and provided, in addition to new classrooms, sickbays, dining-rooms and music rooms.

But the most important construction was the chapel, built in 1932, for which Mother Louise Henriette herself had to act as architect. The interior decoration is particularly remarkable with its bold murals and pious and well-chosen glass canopies.

Here and there in our gardens, our zealous Mother also liked to construct small sanctuaries: the Grotto of Lourdes, the monument of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, the statue of the Guardian Angel and that of the Virgin, dear to all the Children of the Sacred Hearts, Our Lady of Peace.

Intellectual development goes hand in hand with material development. When Mother Louise Henriette arrived in Kaimuki, the number of students barely reached 300; today it exceeds 800.

Her first concern was to divide the Advanced Course into two sections, Commercial and Academic. As early as 1922, she gave the students a uniform that adapted so well to all weathers that it is still the same today. In 1926 the first volume of our yearbook, The Sacred Hearts Audition, was published. The Scouts organized themselves in 1935; the monthly magazine, the SHA Shield, began to appear in 1943; the Cub Scouts joined the Scouts in 1944; the Schola Cantorum made its debut in 1946; our athletes made theirs in 1947; in 1951 the Academy was affiliated to the Catholic University of Washington.

What about the apostolic work of Mother Louise Henriette? With her deep faith and pious enthusiasm, she communicated to her children the attraction to prayer. The splendour of the religious feasts of Kaimuki is an imperishable monument to her memory! Every First Friday of the Month, opening with a General Communion, is a true day of adoration; from half an hour to half an hour, classes follow one another for the guard of honour in front of the Blessed Sacrament exposed. In 1938, during the visit of Reverend Father Mateo to our islands, the venerated Mother inaugurated the Legion of the Sacred Hearts among the students of the Secondary School, consolidated the Secretariat of the Enthronement established from the very first hour, and made Kaimuki a centre of Nocturnal Adoration in the Foyer. In 1948, she gave impetus to the work of the Tarcisius for the Elementary School students. Around the same time, under the impulse of Our Most Reverend Father, she began the work of the External Association which now has more than 200 members and is growing considerably. Her devotion to the Blessed Virgin is universally known, and she carefully maintained and cultivated the Society

of the Children of Mary among the boarders, our external students being affiliated to the parish groups.

Two other great works dear to the heart of "Ma Mère, (my mother)," as she was universally known, were the opening of St. Patrick's Parish School in 1930 and the foundation of the Convent and School of the Immaculate Conception on the island of Kauai in 1951. St. Patrick's, which today has more than 900 students, boys and girls, is a centre where the Sacred Hearts are much loved. A good number of religious and priestly vocations have already come out of this dear school. Kauai, the first and only foundation outside of Oahu, decided upon during the visit of Our Most Reverend Mother in 1950, has always been the object of special attention on the part of Mother Louise Henriette; we are convinced that she will remain its ardent protector.

Unbeknownst to her, this great educator casts new rays of glory on our beloved Congregation. The Belgian Government awarded Mother Louise Henriette the Palmes du Roi et de la Couronne; the French Government appointed her Officer of the Academy and then Knight of the Legion of Honour.

The education of children was not, however, the exclusive responsibility of Mother Louise Henriette. Her Community had the best part of her devotion and vigilance. Her dearest desire was to make of her Sisters, so far from the centre of the Congregation, true Children of the Good Mother, true Picpucians. In order to ensure the congregational formation of the young English-speaking Sisters and novices, recruited for the most part from among the former students of the Academy, she did not hesitate, although already seriously ill, to translate successively the Rule, the Directory, and the Religious of the Sacred Hearts.

The Novitiate was also very dear to her. She knew how to give it a marvellous impetus, discerning emerging vocations, directing with firmness, developing in young souls the love of our great devotions.

Her devotion extends beyond Hawaii. As a congregationalist, she makes all the works of the Congregation her own, giving them a large part in her prayers and in her well-known generosity.

In 1949, when the branch of the Sisters was divided into Provinces, our Venerable Superiors General appointed Mother Louise Henriette Provincial of our Hawaiian Houses. Our beloved Mother was already very tired, and it was a great sacrifice for her not to be able to travel to visit all her daughters. But with what affability she received the dear Mothers and with what affectionate interest she followed the development of each of their works! Her wisdom, the fruit of great prudence and long government, was a sure course of action for all.

The countless expressions of sympathy received immediately after the death of our dear Mother Provincial have only confirmed the great esteem and veneration we all hold for her. Allow us to insert here two quotations chosen from among many others:

"... Mother Louise Henriette was of a good and generous character, enterprising and daring, tenacious in her resolutions, not fearing fatigue. She was gifted with a lively and clear intelligence and easily assimilated the most diverse knowledge ... Her voice was admirable. The Good Lord gave her a vocation where she had the opportunity to use all her talents. »

"... She was a soul completely superior in intelligence, in the delicacy of her feelings, in her supernatural spirit, in her apostolic zeal. Who will say what a great good she did on the Islands and what the apostolates of Hawaii owe to her! »

The Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was always the great, first and vibrant devotion of our dear departed! At the hour of death and in a very striking way, Jesus seems to want to put the seal on this Eucharistic Love. For his faithful wife, He chose to be her last food here on earth: after her Communion on May 5th her tongue became paralysed and it became

impossible for her to swallow even a single drop of water. For all her many children who had been marked by her Eucharistic radiance, the news of her death was a call to prayer. Spontaneously, our Première students organised a Triduum of Holy Hours on the evening before the funeral, which attracted hundreds of people to our chapel. Close to the remains in the Common Room, which had been transformed into a glowing chapel, there was a constant and crowded procession of people who came to pray their rosary. Until death, Mother Louise Henriette assembled her children to have them pray again as she had taught them.

This splendid tribute is only the prelude to the magnificent funeral of our late Mother. His Excellency, Bishop Sweeney, Bishop of Honolulu, presided at the funeral Mass and gave the absolution. Our Reverend Fathers were present in large numbers and did us the honour of singing the Solemn Mass in two choirs. Six Brothers of the Sacred Hearts carried the coffin to the hearse which left the Academy through a cordon of honour formed on each side first by the students of the Academy and then by the boys and girls of St Patrick's School. A long parade of cars escorted Ma Mère to her final resting place. Dressed in their white robes, the Reverend Mothers and Sisters took their places in the first cars.

At the cemetery, after the liturgical prayers still sung by our Reverend Fathers, the Ladies of the Association of the Sacred Hearts sang in their beautiful Hawaiian language their song of the heart, "Aloha Oe".

We hope that purified by her long sufferings and abundantly provided with the help of our holy religion, our late Mother Louise Henriette will have received a favourable welcome from the Sacred Hearts whom she served so zealously, and from our venerated Founders whom she loved so much! We ask you, however, My Reverend Mother, to kindly have the prayers prescribed by our Holy Rules for a Provincial Superior prayed for her.

Please accept, Reverend Mother, the expression of my religious respect.

Sr. Marie Gertrude  
rel. Of the SS.CC.  
Sup<sup>re</sup>