

SISTER LOUISE-HENRIETTE THOELN SS.CC.

BELGIUM

February 2nd 1881 – May 6th 1952

In 1949, The Sisters in Hawaii formed their own Province and Sister Louise Henriette Thoelen became the first Provincial Superior. By the she was 68 years old and her health was poor. In spite of it all, this last appointment was important, not only because of her previous posts, but also because this Sister, as Provincial Superior took some very important decisions which were of significance for the future of the Province.

Jeanne-Louise Thoelen was born on February 2nd 1881 in the Belgian village of Hoesselt. She came from a solid family, two of seven children became priests and two religious. After primary school Jeanne-Louise went to the boarding school of the Sisters in Tongren, where she became acquainted with the Congregation and decided to enter. Her father had dreamt a different future for his daughter, yet finally he gave his consent. He was persuaded by one of his sons who had become a priest. Her novitiate began in Tongren on March 6th 1903. Novice Louise-Henriette obtained her teaching qualifications. While still in the novitiate she rendered great service to the young community of Tongren. After Tongren the Belgian novice went to Picpus where she was professed on October 17th 1906.

Her first appointment took her to Corcelles-le-Mottewhere Louise Henriette became assistant to one of the school principals.. Alas! it did not last long, because on July 19th 1908, Louise -Henriette and some other sisters were sent to America to begin a new community in Fairhaven. After the foundation of the North American community had been firmly established Louise-Henriette was sent to Hawaii where the community in Kaimuki needed a competent superior. The new superior arrived in Honolulu on November 7th 1916 and there she was to live and work for the rest of her life.

The most important task for Louise-Henriette was the further expansion of the convent, the schools and the boarding school in Kaimuki. There was still a great deal of to be done but under the energetic leadership of this formidable Belgian Superior it was carried out. First and foremost, the rather limited central buildings had to be extended. In 1920, a first wing was added and some years later a second. The crown of the enterprise was the Chapel, for the most part designed and tastefully furnished by the Superior herself.

Her attention was directed also to the lower and middle schools. Soon after her arrival she divided the teaching into a commercial and an academic course. The education given was so good that former pupils of the Academy were very much in demand. The Superior also organizes extra-curricular activities. In 1926 the school's beautiful yearbook '*The Sacred Hearts Audion*' was published for the first time. In 1935, the pupils were allowed to become involved in the scouting movement. From 1943 there was a well presented school-paper '*The Sacred Hearts Academy Shield*'. Some years later the school has a schola cantorum. Apart from all this, the enterprising Superior and principal still found time to establish and maintain various pious organizations for the pupils. A 'Legion of the Sacred Hearts' for the pupils of the middle school; a 'Tarcisius Group' for the younger girls and a group of 'Children of Mary'. In 1951 the work of the Sacred hearts Academy was crowned: it became affiliated to the Catholic University of Washington.

Outside school Louise-Henriette was as busy as ever. She organized the secretariate of the Enthronement and made the Convent of Kaimuki the Centre of the Night Adoration in the Homes. After the Second World War, she started the Association of the Sacred Hearts in Hawaii and laid the foundations for a solid organization. Another enterprise outside the community was the start of a parish-school in Saint Patrick's Parish in 1930. It became a school with more than 900 pupils of whom quite a few chose the religious life and the priesthood.

On a congregational level the Superior of Kaimuki was also active. In 1924 she was in Europe a member of the General Chapter. In later years already much older and in ill health she undertook the translation into English of our manual '*The Religious of the Sacred Hearts*'. In her brief period as Provincial Superior she took an important decision: She sent some Sisters to the Island of Kawai to work among the poor Filipino children on the sugar plantations. So she gave the Hawaiian region of the Sisters an example of missionary endeavour. To a great extent, our Sisters directed themselves in those years to the education of the children from better families. Their education was specially aimed at

the formation of a well educated and soundly formed Catholic female elite. Louise-Henriete, however, discerned very clearly other needs and areas of work which would guard the Congregation against a one-sided approach.

Louise-Henriette was a matter-of-fact woman, yet with a great heart. She knew what it was to work, but took an ample time for prayer and reflection. She managed as Superior of Kaimuky, to show true concern for the pupils while at the same time maintaining the necessary discipline. She fostered modesty while also developing a healthy growth of personality. She was able to tread prudently and at the same time did not deviate from decisions which were taken after a great deal of consultation. Already as a young Sister she had quickly found original solutions for the most divergent problems, displaying a rare inventiveness. She achieved much for her Academy in Kaimuky, for the Church in Hawaii and for the innumerable people whom she happened to meet.

At her death on May 5th1952 she was rightly called a resolute, a formidable woman..

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