

Ursulines in China and Taiwan – One Hundred Years

Sr. Ellen Mary Mylod, osu

FIRST STEPS:

In the ocean of history, 100 years may seem like a trickle in the river of time which feeds it but for those celebrating 100 years of *their* history it is indeed a period packed with experience. Our centenary experience of history in China and Taiwan does not begin in China at all but in a small town in S.E. Canada, Stanstead by name, founded in 1884 from the Ursuline convent in Quebec, founded in its turn by St. Mary of the Incarnation Guyart in 1639

Stanstead was small then and it still is somewhat insignificant, boasting in the 19th century only a couple of churches, a school, a few shops and a bank. Probably the liveliest place was the school even though it remained modest with low school fees. The nuns were poor, frequently hungry and often overworked; even so, they welcomed newcomers among whom was Marthe Audet who entered the community in 1897 as Marie du Rosaire. She will figure prominently in our story. One of 16 children in her family she had begun her education with the Ursulines at the age of 6, her home being in the shadow of the monastery. She made profession in 1900 and soon afterwards she experienced a call to serve in a mission field. There was no way however to fulfil such a call from Stanstead. In 1906, Mother St Julian Aubry, the General Superior of the Ursulines of the Roman Union which had come into being in 1900, visited Quebec and then Stanstead, neither of which belonged to the Union. Marie du Rosaire spoke to her of her longing to serve the Church in pagan lands but Mother St. Julian judged the time was not yet opportune: “Let us pray and await God’s moment” she said. She advised Marie du Rosaire to wait, which she did, for fifteen years!

In the meantime, she found another in the community with similar longings: Agnes

Davis, from England, who became known as Marie de Ste. Croix, had entered the monastery in 1901. and Marie du Rosaire was soon sharing missionary longings with Agnes who, in spite of delicate health remained in hope of service in a missionary field.

Here it might be helpful, to introduce the third foundress of the future convent in Swatow. Dorilla Guay, from the Stanstead community, also had an unusual background, especially of ill health, from which she was delivered through intercession with that great missionary, Marie Guyart, whose name, Marie de l'Incarnation she adopted when entering Ursuline life.

PROGRESS BUT SLOW:

Marie du Rosaire, now some 40 years of age could wait no longer. China was her destination. She pursued it with unrelenting determination despite the unbelievable complexity of bureaucracy and red tape woven between Canada, Rome and China. Part of the problem was that the three nuns were going to China to make an independent foundation. Stanstead could not undertake to support them, neither with further personnel nor finance. These two difficulties were to remain with the new mission throughout its relatively short history in China. Suffice it to say here that Monsignor Joseph Freri, National Director of the Propagation of the Faith stationed in New York City, hearing of the possibility of a new mission in China, wrote to Marie du Rosaire with a detailed list of questions about her plan. She responded immediately. Monsignor Freri made enquiries through the Paris Foreign Missionary Society in China about possible locations for a new mission and learned that Bishop Adolphe Rayssac of Swatow, would welcome them for a new foundation in his diocese, Province of Kwang Tung, China, BUT, and there was a big "BUT", the bishop was direct and practical. He knew exactly what he wanted from the nuns. He would provide a small house, adequate for their needs. For everything else they would have to look after themselves. Marie du Rosaire believed that

requesting affiliation to the Roman Union as soon as possible would solve their problem. In the meantime, she sought by all means possible the financial help she needed from as many sources as she could.

Formal authorization for the new foundation came through on 8th December, 1921 but in January, 1922 Bishop Rayssac appeared to have doubts. He questioned their means of subsistence, their ability to recruit new members and their future in case missionary life did not suit them. Delay was inevitable. Monsignor Freri it was who again made contact with the superior of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society in France who in his turn made contact with Bishop Rayssac. In the meantime, imagine the distress in the hearts of the missionaries for whom departure to China had been almost within their grasp. "Trials are the signs of God's works" wrote Marie du Rosaire in the margin of one of her letters.

TO CHINA:

It was not until March, 1922 that the problems were more or less settled and the Sisters could embark on a flurry of preparations and the inevitable farewells to family and friends. On 15th June, elections were held to appoint officials in the new community. Marie du Rosaire was elected superior, M. de Ste. Croix her assistant and M. de l' Incarnation the zelatrix. After recitation of the noonday Angelus in Stanstead on June 19th they left their convent home and made their way to Montreal, eventually boarding the trans-Canada train to Vancouver where they boarded the *Empress of Canada*, described as a floating palace. It took them to Yokohama (July 10), Shanghai (July 16) and Hong Kong (July 20) among other stops. On July 22nd they left Hong Kong for Swatow after meeting Bishop Rayssac and spending a couple of nights with the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres.

REALITY:

Their arrival in Swatow brought them face to face with reality. The bishop had indeed provided a small house with three beds made of boards covered with a woven mat according to Chinese style together with the required mosquito net and a couple of chairs and a rickety table. A better table with chairs adorned the dining room and the kitchen provided a minimum of pots and other utensils. They spent their first few days learning about their new environment, totally unprepared for the massive typhoon which struck and all but destroyed Swatow on 2nd August. Eventual letters arriving in Stanstead from the Sisters describe something of the devastation of the city, their own near brush with death (Hong Kong newspapers reported more than 10,000 deaths from the typhoon in and around Swatow) and their efforts to patch up their all but destroyed house. Their letters also describe the amazing courage of the Chinese, so many of them poor to begin with, as they quietly began to put their lives together again.

Nothing daunted, our Sisters opened a very small dispensary under the direction of M. de Ste. Croix, to help those most in need and began a branch of the Holy Childhood, a society within the Church to serve little ones orphaned or abandoned. The Sisters did what they could to save such infants from smallpox which they could recognize but only later did they realize that many of these babies had been abandoned because they showed signs of leprosy.

On October 2nd, 1922, Marie du Rosaire opened a very small primary school under the patronage of the Holy Angels. It was a daring project because among the three of them she herself, being Canadian, was the only one who spoke fluent English. Students numbered 21, of different ages and nationalities, resulting in a veritable Tower of Babel, but they all wanted to learn English. Interestingly enough, she began them with the Our Father and Hail Mary which they recited together with varying degrees of fluency.

Bishop Rayssac, although more kind and fatherly than they had expected, insisted

once again that they simply had to have more personnel. The problem was where were they going to come from? It had to be, at least for the time being, from Canada. He wrote to Stanstead but no help could come from there. As we have said, the problem was going to remain with them for the next twenty years.

WITHIN THE ROMAN UNION:

On November 9, they sent to the Ursuline Generalate in Rome their petition to join the Roman Union, signed by all three. Imagine their joy when on April 23, 1923, they received news of their affiliation to the Union. It was tempered, however with the unexpected. Given their small size they would be attached to the Province of Java. M. du Rosaire accepted the decision in spite of its drawbacks. Not so the Vice-Provincial of Java who wrote for more information about their resources and plan for the future. But there never had been nor could there be, in reality, any plan for the future until their number increased. Could a novitiate be set up in Canada for those desiring to serve in China? This opened an avenue for reflection. One good result of communication with Java was resulting correspondence with M. Bernard Mancel working there who had also long cherished a desire to work in China.

GROWTH IN CHINA IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING:

Bishop Rayssac remained determined to extend the scope of HIS mission. He therefore took the nuns to the little city of Chao-Chow Fu, some thirty kilometers north of Swatow. Ste. Croix described it enthusiastically in a letter to Stanstead. The apostolic possibilities were extensive: orphans, Holy Childhood, Chinese Virgins, (a Chinese organization for women who wanted to serve in parishes, especially for catechesis) possibility for a primary school...If they were to go there, she envisioned going alone, leaving M. du Rosaire and M. de l'Incarnation in Swatow. What else could they do?

While awaiting the outcome with its inevitable tensions it is hardly surprising that the political situation did not occupy their attention overmuch. There is little or nothing in their correspondence to indicate the burning anger sweeping the country during and after the fall of the hated Manchu dynasty nor did they seem aware of the power of the increasing military units determined to put new political leaders in place. Poor means of communication on the national level as well as preoccupation with those in their care account for much of it although Bishop Rayssac, in one of his reports to Hong Kong shared his awareness of how things were going, especially the growing anger and resentment against foreign missionaries for much of which many missionaries had only themselves to blame. It has to be understood however that little of this was known in Swatow.

DARK CLOUDS BEGIN TO GATHER:

Ursulines were more concerned with the formation of three or four young Christian women who were desirous of joining them. Could a novitiate for the formation of Chinese Ursulines really not be founded in Canada since little could be yet be done in Swatow? It was suggested that M. du Rosaire return to explore one or two promising possibilities although it was M. Ste. Croix who eventually went. She returned, ten months later, empty handed regarding the novitiate; there was hardly a single bishop who would even consider the possibility of such a missionary foundation in his diocese at such uncertain times. All the same, she brought the hope of two young women desirous of soon becoming missionaries in China. At more or less the same time, a further blow to Swatow was the non-arrival of four promised missionaries, two from France and two from Yugoslavia. Add to that, the threat of persecution all around them, incursions into their house from Bolshevik insurrectionists and growing hostility towards foreigners so it was all the more surprising when Bishop Rayssac pursued his intention of opening a

third foundation for the nuns in Hopo, some several days' journey by boat north of Swatow. Set in exceedingly beautiful surroundings, the foundation became a reality on March 25, 1926 and enjoyed a period of peace to begin with since enemy forces were not inclined to penetrate so far inland. Ste Croix with two young Hakka pre-postulants were enthusiastic about the possibilities that could be opened up but the bright dreams were short lived. Enemy interference put a stop to them, hostility to foreigners increased especially after January 1927 and fear was experienced everywhere. Yet, although civil war and persecution were always in the air, strangely the missionaries did not seem to be specifically targeted. Their orphanage now numbered over 50 infants and formation of women catechists for parishes was prospering. In October a new missionary arrived from Bratislava while on 8th December they had the joy of celebrating 3 local professions: those of Srs. Helena Lau, Anna Tsai and Aimee de Jesu Vigneault following their first formation in Swatow. What a ray of hope in the midst of darkness.

The following few years however remained dark. Tragedy struck the Swatow area with overwhelming military incursions and destruction. Hundreds of poverty-stricken peasants poured into the city having lost everything and the nuns with Bishop Rayssac were faced with the overwhelming task of doing all they could to help them. Eventually the many who most needed help were rehoused in country areas and the nuns could evaluate what their own life was going to be. One consensus was that Rome did not really understand the situation in China. There had to be some firsthand clarifications, thus it was decided that M. du Rosaire would take advantage of the invitation to provincials and superiors of missions to visit Rome to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Profession of the Prioress General, M. Marie de St. Jean Martin. This she did in 1929 taking in Canada as well as Europe. She made the most of the opportunity not only to further the hope of founding a novitiate for China in North America but visiting places important for the Order in Italy as well as having

conversations in depth with the Prioress General. They proved useful. Not so the hope of setting up a novitiate in Canada or the United States. Other significant events followed including the welcome arrival of five new missionaries of whom one, M. Ursule Blot, will figure prominently in our history. There was good news about the progress of their novice from Shanghai, Augustine Zing in Beaugency, while apostolates in Chao-Chow-Fu and Hopo and improvements there further increased hope. However, sadly, it did not last. We can imagine the distress in December, 1931 when Sr. Aimee de Jesus, only 36 years old and not long professed was declared critically ill in Chao-Chow-Fu. M. du Rosaire went there as speedily as possible but there was no hope and Aimee died within hours. That left Rosaire with her heaviest burden of all, facing the long drawn out departure from this life of Ste. Croix of an inoperable cancerous breast tumor. She had shared with her all that had been involved in the foundation of the mission. Ste. Croix departed this life in March, 1932 leaving M. du Rosaire to be reappointed superior of the mission when M. de St. Jean was reelected Prioress General; a short period of peace settled down when the forces of the Nationalist army temporarily overcame those of the Red Army.

CHANGE ON THE HORIZON:

At this time M. Marie de Lourdes Simons was appointed superior of the missions of Java and China and one of her first appointments was to make M. Bernard Mancel from Java superior of the mission in China.

The two arrived there on a morning in September, 1935 and M. Bernard was installed that same afternoon. She was not unfamiliar with the situation in China and decided the best would be to have one canonical authority for government (she herself) with deputies in Chao-Chow Fu and Hopo. Moreover, her understanding of the schools in China was colored by her years of experience in Java and Siam where the schools had

prospered in every way. Among other issues she was convinced that the schools in China had to be reformed. Her first attempts to get the existing ones to admit fee paying pupils to balance mission accounts met with opposition from all sides. But something had to be done to generate even a slight income for the nuns. China seemed to her to be poor, illiterate and chaotic. Like Bishop Rayssac, she felt she knew what was necessary and would do all she could to bring it about.

Faced with local problems it is no surprise that she seemed wholly unaware of the current political situation, the increasing hostility facing foreigners, the strong revival of Confucianism and the growing presence of the Japanese felt in Swatow and Chao-Chow-Fu. As work continued, M. du Rosaire always spoke with admiration of M. Bernard but did not confide in her. It was a surprise therefore when in January, 1937 she left China for Canada with the approval of Rome to pursue her dream of setting up a novitiate there for formation of vocations to China. In 1938, M. Bernard took Sr. Augustine to Shanghai to begin degree studies according to the desire of the General Government that Chinese sisters be prepared to take up positions of authority. It was unexpected that M. Bernard then clearly became seriously ill with what was eventually to diagnosed as cancer of the stomach. Treatment in Java helped her and it was while she was there that she learned of the death of M. du Rosaire in Canada after a long drawn out failure to found a novitiate for China.

CHANGE LEADING TO NEW LIFE:

Given the difficulties of every kind it is amazing, therefore, to learn that in 1940 the long dreamed of high school in Swatow, Stella Matutina, opened its doors to fee paying pupils succeeding beyond expectation during the following years. In November 1948 it was learned with joy that it had received formal government accreditation.

War was over by 1945 and much direct help began to arrive from the United States and Canada but the demand for personnel became increasingly acute. In 1947, the bishop's report to Rome observed that there were some 1,500 pupils in the several different schools in the care of Ursuline religious in Swatow. It was impossible for France to send nuns at the time but three arrived from the United States which helped a great deal at a time when communist forces were increasingly forcing their way into the south. The future became even more dark after 1950 when all missionary work was closed down. That year marked the 10th anniversary of the opening of Stella Matutina. On 16th December, just a few days after celebrating the anniversary on the 8th a noisy demonstration was organized by the local party. M. Augustine was denounced and imprisoned and others accused of unlawful or harmful treatment of students. From spring, 1951, almost all the nuns had either left China or were forced to do so. M. Ursule managed to stay on for a short time to care as far as possible for the needs of M. Augustine but by mid-July she too had to leave in mid-July, 30 years after the first arrival of missionaries in Swatow in 1922.

However, what looked like the end indeed was not so. As one of the Bible's Wisdom books observes: "In my end is my beginning" and so it proved to be. Thanks to the work of Therese Lee, later to become Sr. Marie du Sacre Coeur, M. Augustine was eventually freed from prison after more than three long years and made her way to Bangkok, Rome and then France where she was joyfully reunited with M. Ursule and a group of Chinese novices, past students of Stella Matutina, who had entered there shortly before. They had all kept contact with those nuns from China who had sought refuge, mostly in Siam and shared their hopes and dreams of rebirth. Hong Kong was hardly possible for such renewal being already greatly overcrowded. What about Taiwan?

TO TAIWAN:

Negotiations followed and on August 18, 1958 a passenger ship from Hong Kong pulled into the harbor of Keelung, carrying among other passengers 4 Ursulines and a young women aspirant preparing to share her life with them. Who were the Ursulines? M's Ursule, Augustine, Teresa Lin and Agnes Huang. On the quay, expecting them was Bishop Verineux of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society (MEP), Fr. Michel Maillot, also MEP and several others. The Bishop had already bought tickets for them so together with a vast amount of luggage, on 20th they set out for Hualien on the east coast. They were entranced by the beauty of the lofty mountains on one side and the deep blue Pacific Ocean on the other.

Soon they were going to learn that very many missionaries, persecuted or deported, had also come to Taiwan to add to the large numbers of those Chinese who had accompanied the Nationalist government which had also taken refuge there. In 1948 there were 13,000 Catholics in Taiwan. In 1954 there were already more than 32,000 Catholics and just ten years later the number had increased to 265,500, an astonishing growth rate of 73%.

Our Sisters, after they had settled down in Hualien, did not waste a moment. On September 1 they began work in Meilun Mingde kindergarten where 100 children filled rooms in a Japanese style house managed with energy by M. Teresa with the help of M. Agnes while M's Ursula and Augustine were planning the establishment of Stella Maris High School. They searched for land with the help of the Bishop who applied to the government for them. He was a simple, easy going good shepherd who did things without delay and admired the teaching skills of the Ursulines.

The purchase of campus land went smoothly after which M. Augustine showed her amazing skill, drawing up plans, construction, purchasing furniture and organizing the Board of Trustees while M. Ursula tirelessly made efforts to raise the necessary funds as can be seen from the hundreds of letters now to be found in the archives of the Ursuline

Generalate. The preliminary plan was for a two storey cement construction, two rows of parallel buildings connected in the middle estimated to cost US\$10,500. The upper floor would be for convent and dormitory. The first floor would be for primary and junior school classrooms.

STELLA MARIS, HUALIEN AND ST. JOSEPH'S.

On June 12, 1959, Stella Maris Private Girls Junior High School, Hualien, Taiwan, was officially approved and registered by the Education Department in Taiwan. The school was to enroll students on September 2 but, no surprise, a typhoon arrived and disrupted arrangements. In spite of everything Sisters were ready on September 15 to welcome their first 108 students in two classes. 1959 to 1961 were the two hardest years for the Ursulines. Only two of them, M. Teresa and M Augustine, were officially Chinese citizens and qualified for teaching and administration as required by the government; facing 100 students, with numbers increasing year by year and very few outside faculty members hired at the beginning, the nuns were truly overworked and understaffed, ready to take up any and every school duty that needed to be cared for. It could be said that they were capable of anything.

By November, 1959, M. Ursula formally applied to the Order to open St. Joseph's Primary School, so named to carry on the work of its predecessor in Swatow. In September, 1960, it was opened for 39 students for whom Sr. Jeanne George who had rejoined the community engaged herself totally. It was the first private primary school in Hualien, the only reason for building it being to serve the poor. Year by year it added students until in 1967 it had 216 in six classes and 235 in 1968 - normal growth rate, in fact.

In 1969, at the request of Bishop Verineux, Stella Maris began to admit male students. Boys could be better prepared for admission to the Minor Seminary for

formation for the priesthood.

CONGREGATION OF ST. MARTHA.

On March 1, 1960 came the long awaited fulfilment of a desire of Bishop Verineux, the foundation of a native congregation of Sisters to serve the native people in his diocese. He named it the Congregation of St. Martha and hoped the Sisters would learn to serve the weak and poor in Christ following her example. He requested M. Ursule to be their first General Superior and eighteen candidates were accepted. The bishop built a two storey house for them as their convent, gradually adding rooms for it to be completed in early May, 1964. The Congregation came to be much appreciated by diocesan priests who badly needed help in outlying parishes.

Little by little the number of Ursulines increased as those in formation in France came to join them. By 1965 they numbered more than 20, coinciding with the annual expansion of the school. In 1963 a senior high school was added, students numbered 500, 160 of whom were boarders. In that same year, two Sisters, Angela Chen and Fidelis Wang arrived from the Eastern province of the United States. At that time, however, the language in the community was French making communication difficult for the two Sisters. It was helpful for them when Sr. Marie de l'Incarnation Guay arrived from Siam to help translate and teach the newcomers a little French. She was the last of the three foundresses to go home to God, dying in Hualien in 1972.

In August, 1964, the General Council appointed Sr. Teresa Lin, Prioress in Hualien freeing M. Ursule for other duties. In the meanwhile, some Stella Maris graduates were serving in education and one of them Liang Gui-Yun who lived in Kaohsiung met the Bishop of Kaohsiung, Bishop Cheng Tien-Hsiang, a Dominican, and learned from him that he wanted to set up a girls' high school in his diocese. She described Stella Maris in Hualien and the Ursulines to him; the bishop learned more about the Order and visited

M. Ursule in Hualien. After seeing things for himself he wrote to the Ursuline General Superior in Rome inviting the Order to establish a Catholic girls' high school in Kaohsiung. Kaohsiung it should be said was a flourishing commercial and industrial center in the south of Taiwan. It also had the island's biggest harbor.

WENZAO COLLEGE OF LANGUAGES, KAOHSIUNG.

Following a visit from two General Councilors the Order made an application to the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization to make the foundation which was approved. The new school would be called Wenzao after the first Chinese bishop consecrated in 1674 C.E. who, like Bishop Cheng, was also a Dominican. It would be built in Chinese palace style according to the enculturation spirit of Vatican II then in session. Land purchase and construction costs were borne almost entirely by the General Government while many provinces also gave welcome help.

The original plan was for a secondary school for girls but the government was then vigorously promoting a five-year junior college system so the original plan was changed from that of a high school to a five-year junior college. But what was a five-year junior college? No one really knew. Foreign Languages was chosen because the Ministry of Education suggested that in Taiwan there was a real need for foreign language education. Moreover, teachers might be available because there were many foreign priests and nuns in the Church, highly educated and qualified for teaching.

In early 1966, M. Marie de Lourdes Simons, appointed by the General Council took up the double responsibility of Superior of the community in Kaohsiung and founding Wenzao college. It was hoped that the college might open in the autumn so M. Ursule and Sr. Marie de Lourdes Siao among others who had settled in a house in Nan Hua Road arranged for the nuns by the bishop went several times a week in all weathers to supervise construction while Srs. Fidelis Wang and Agnes Therese Ching, neither of

whom had any real administrative experience, under the personal guidance of M. Marie de Lourdes Simons, were assigned to clarify the educational philosophy of the school, its basic aims, structure, curriculum, teacher recruitment and other matters. It was natural that the main axis of school planning was to use languages as a tool of communication between Chinese and western cultures.

However, no new foundation has been without its difficulties. Serious illness struck Agnes Therese who had to go to Taipei for cancer treatment. Difficulties, due to inexperience, in applying for a permit to open a new school abounded. However, with the help of several experienced priests and that of the father of Sr. Fidelis, Mr. Wang Fuzhou, familiar with the ways of government, official recognition was pushed forward. Construction problems were also numerous so finally the community just packed up everything in Nan Hua Road and settled temporarily in a classroom on the third floor of the unfinished building. That made the builders hurry up and the central hall of the building was finally completed by July.

Then came further problems. Sr. Fidelis had been appointed Principal of the new school but the Ministry of Education, when examining the process, deemed her qualifications inadequate. There was no one else to choose. What to do? Unexpectedly the problem was solved when Sr. Fidelis's father stepped forward and offered his name for official purposes. There was no difficulty about his qualifications; and experience had made him familiar with the ways of officialdom; all subsequent procedures were carried out smoothly and on July 17 the school was officially approved to enroll 200 students. On July 23 and 24, 730 students took the entrance examination of whom 185 were accepted. Teaching spaces were decided for English, French, German and Spanish students on the first floor, administrative offices on the second floor and dormitory space on the third floor while the convent had moved to the middle of the third floor. Enough faculty members were appointed for the first year. September 24 saw the first

opening ceremony which took place in the Entrance Hall of the central building presided over by Mr. Wang and the Bishop of Kaohsiung who was Chairman of the Board of Trustees. A notable feature of college development took place in 1980 when, at a recommendation of the Ministry of Education, Wenzao opened its doors to male students. The Ministry was sure that young men as well as young women needed to become proficient in foreign languages given the need for this at Taiwan's national level.

URSULINES FROM GROUP TO PROVINCE:

In this same year, on August 6, since there were now two communities in Taiwan, they became officially a group within the Order with M. Marie de Lourdes Simons the first group superior under the direct authority of the General Government. Their apostolate included St. Joseph's primary school and Stella Maris High School in Hualien and Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages for Women in Kaohsiung. In 1972, M. Teresa Lin replaced M. Marie de Lourdes as Group Superior, the first Chinese Ursuline to do so.

Mention must now be made of Taipei where a convent was created as early as 1975 by Sr. Teresa Lin to provide an Ursuline home for Sr. Paschal who was beginning studies in the Chinese department of Fujen University. Very conveniently situated behind the university it consisted of three small two storey dwellings connected to each other. Soon it became the administrative center of the group while other Ursuline students in formation were also given the advantage of the convenience for study. Eight years later the Taipei community moved to Chientan, Taipei City, to take up responsibility for the girls' dormitory attached to the new church and parish which the diocese had opened there.

With the three communities in the group now established, this account must become selective about what is deemed significant in our history one item of which must describe our passage from being a group in the Order to becoming a province. On the

one hand, to achieve this, the Group Council began to communicate with the General Council in Rome and on the other to make necessary preparations for the change. On May 5, 1984 by Act 33/84 the Prioress General officially approved the establishment of the Province of China, effective on July 16, 1984. Sr. Marie de Lourdes Siao was appointed its first Provincial Prioress

Before our change to becoming a province, however, changes of another kind also had be experienced and accepted, one of them being the departure from this life of several of the sisters. On February 5, 1984, before Taiwan became a province, M. Marie de Lourdes Simons died peacefully after a life spent in dedication to God and the work of the General Council of the Roman Union and the missions, especially Taiwan and Wenzao. Following her on September 20 was Mother Augustine. She had spent her life in service to education in China and Taiwan in a host of different ways. More than 3 years had been spent in painful imprisonment in China but no one had ever heard her complain. On December 10,1992 M. Ursule Blot who was revered by all died in Hualien of bone cancer. She had been fully involved in the Congregation of St. Martha since 1971 serving as its Mother General until 1985. At the request of the Martha Sisters she was buried in their cemetery. Others who left us for eternity during these few years included Srs. Angele Brishoual, Marie Paule Tong, and Deodata Markievich, all of whom left memories of prayerful and faithful service. A joy in 1994 was the creation of an Ursuline mausoleum for our departed sisters in the Catholic cemetery on Jinbao Shan, Tamshui, Taipei. Holy Mass is offered annually there for the repose of their souls on or around April 5, the Chinese special day for honoring the dead.

Other sisters who left the province during this time were those who returned to their province of origin including Marie Cecile Perdu, Ancilla Murat, Armelle Baron and Jeanne George, this latter much regretted in Hualien where she had been a pillar of strength in Stella Maris Primary School over many years.

NEW APOSTOLATES:

A further consequence of the passage of time is, of course, aging. As sisters grew older they could no longer be employed in the schools so looked around for other avenues of apostolate. When Marie de Lourdes Siao completed her term as provincial in 1990 she turned to the spiritual possibilities of the Enneagram, working with Teresa Kastner of Maryknoll, and became much appreciated for the help she was able to give. Others turned to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises with the help of the Sacred Heart Sister, Sr. Atsuko and became helpful retreat givers. The opening up of contacts with China enabled Angela Chen to work with the Bridge Church and render remarkable service in many fields for some 18 years. She also helped develop the Friends of Angela, a group of teachers and administrators in Wenzao formed to help pass on the heritage of Ursuline education to the next generations.

Financing was a further problem arising from retirement from formal education. Discussion gave birth to a system of Central Financing among the three communities, helped by the expertise of Sr. Therese Chen. It works well from many aspects, practical and spiritual.

WITH THE CHRISTIAN SERVICE COMMUNITY:

Now seems to be the moment to describe briefly our cooperation with the Christian Service Community, (CSC), a group of professional Catholic lay persons. Professor Bosco Lee Wen-wrei was an active member of the group which was discerning how to become involved in a form of active apostolate in the Church. At the same time, Sr. Fidelis Wang, still Principal in Wenzao, was deeply concerned about developments in education in Taiwan brought about by policies imposed by Taiwan's Ministry of Education. One solution seemed to lie in strengthening the Boards of Trustees of the three schools.

In 1994, Sr. Fidelis, having studied the possibilities, approached Dr. Lee as to whether the CSC would be willing to undertake such cooperation. From 1995 to 1996 many meetings and much discussion took place and eventually, five CSC members, all from higher education or the business field, joined the Boards of Trustees of our schools. In the meanwhile, Dr. Lee had become President of Wenzao and began nine years of most valuable service. Between them, Sr. Fidelis and Dr. Lee established Le-Ming Cultural and Educational Foundation to help unite all efforts of the CSC for the development of the schools strengthened by Dr. Lee's previous experience in Taiwan National University. Those working in Wenzao soon learned of his total dedication to the work in hand, especially to the further education and development of faculty and staff as well as to the upgrading of campus facilities. His work was deeply appreciated although it must be said his demands were also somewhat feared at times.

INTERNATIONALITY:

Developments were also taking place on province level, especially from the aspect of internationality. Interestingly enough it also touched on all three of the schools. English was being taught with energy and skill in both the primary and secondary schools in Hualien so international visits were arranged and enjoyed to facilitate students' knowledge and interest in cultures outside their own. As regards Wenzao, professional links with other institutions of higher education multiplied resulting in a wide variety of intellectual and cultural activities increasing annually. A further impetus was that of the province of China making relationships with the provinces in the Asian region, a movement strongly encouraged by the then Prioress General, Mother Judith Meitzelfeld. A first meeting was held in Kaohsiung in 1977 attended by delegates from Java, Siam, India and Japan and pronounced a religious and cultural success by all. It would be hosted by the provinces in turn. By 2002, when the second round began and the meeting

returned to Taiwan. representatives from Australia had been included so the name changed to that of the Asia-Pacific region with the consequence that its vision widened considerably. The General Chapter of 2007 called the Institute to “Go Beyond the Borders” an inspiration which flowered in the Asia-Pacific region to a foundation in Cambodia where homeless children and young girls were roaming the streets, alarmingly in need of care and attention. By 2010, after much research and discussion, the Roman Union provincials signed documents of collaboration which were approved at Generalate level and the new group took up work on September 29. It opened its Ursuline Learning Center in 2015 which developed into a kindergarten and is now Mother of Peace Elementary School.

THE FUTURE:

To conclude this all too brief outline of the birth and growth of Ursuline life in the Province of China, mention must be made of a phenomenon at national level that is undoubtedly affecting its future, namely the dramatic decrease in its birthrate. Research is under way analyzing its effects from many aspects: immigration, national economy, employment, together with, among others, education and the future of the schools. It has long been recognized that there are too many schools in Taiwan for the number of children and young people to attend them, especially private schools. Some of them genuinely fulfil needs, are efficient and successful and unwilling to go out of existence unless absolutely forced to do so. Among the latter are many Catholic schools which have long catered for the less affluent but from which parents increasingly turn now to state schools where expenses are less demanding. To a greater or less extent, this is the case for our Ursuline schools in Hualien. Will it begin to show up dark clouds on the future of Wenzao also? The college can still recruit students and balance its accounts but it is sadly evident that the quality of students, especially at university level, has clearly

deteriorated. Those responsible for the administration of our schools are faced with what are seemingly insuperable problems for which no solutions are, as yet, available.

One avenue which has opened up to help clarify the future and give courage is to make available, in Chinese, books on Ursuline spirituality and education. A number of them have been translated including, among others, the excellent *Spirituality, Gender and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St. Ursula (1474-1540)* by Dr. Querciolo Mazzonis and Sr. Irene Mahoney's excellent account of the history of the Chinese Ursuline Mission up to 1951.

The General Chapter of 2019 called us to become a Global Community moving into New Life. Reflecting on that call and on Ursuline future in Taiwan, one is irresistibly reminded of the closing years in Swatow. What looked like an ending there proved to be an unseen beginning in Taiwan, planned by God for the glory of God in the Church. How necessary it is, in our future, to be faithful and courageous, reflecting on these words of Angela Merici, our foundress, in her Preface to the Counsels:

Act, move, believe, strive, cry out to Him with all your heart, for without doubt, you will then see marvelous things.

Thank you for your attention.