



Remembering Mother Mary Michael

At the Heart of the Church

“We wanted also to come to Rome,” Mother Mary Michael told the distinguished visitor, who came to Steyl on August 4, 1930 and had his privileged tour around the house and garden. The eminent guest was no other than Fr. Superior General Wilhelm Gier, SVD, who clapped his hands in joy, upon hearing M. M. Michael’s earnest remark.¹

The plan for a foundation in Rome did not actually come from M. M. Michael.² Its grand initiator was the SVD procurator, Fr. Karl Friedrich. On April 21, 1927 he informed M. M. Michael that the SVD was already building in Rome and the Missionary Sisters were in the process of buying a plot. He added: “Make a telephone call to the Holy Spirit and ask him if he could find a place for you in Rome and whether your work in the center of the Church would be pleasing in his eyes.”³ Though in jest, a tone of urgency may well be surmised here, knowing the novelty of the telephone system then—an invention of some fifty years back. “At that time, the Sisters felt they could not accept the invitation. Perhaps later when the Congregation was more developed and had the necessary means and ‘thus see the three congregations of the late Founder united at the heart of the Church.’”⁴

The Triple Alliance

Fr. Friedrich, however, was unrelenting. He found a suitable piece of land, relatively cheap and near the Collegio. The Sisters considered the matter and saw the advantages of moving the generalate to Rome sooner or later “so that the three congregations would live side by side on the same grounds just like in Steyl.” They consulted the SVD superior general and the director general and then commissioned Fr. Friedrich to buy the plot. But this time the deal was not concluded.

On January 13, 1928 another offer was made. Mother M. Michael, however, hesitated. She wrote in February 1928: “We are absolutely in agreement not to

¹ Cf. Chronik, Mutterhaus, 1930

² H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaelae, (Steyl 1938/ August 2013), p. 130

³ Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 186

⁴ Ibid., p. 186

buy at this time a plot in Rome, however noble this seems to be. Up to now, we haven't given thought to establishing a foundation there. Our Congregation is not yet developed enough, and above all, we lack the necessary financial means." She further added, "Since we have again contracted large debts on account of our Soesterberg foundation, we will not attempt to proceed with this, but let go of this matter."¹ But when the SVD general councilor, Fr. Josef Grendel, returned from Rome and strongly recommended making the purchase, they agreed and gave Fr. Friedrich the green light for further negotiations. Fr. Friedrich was delighted and looked upon this decision as a "great step forward and a blessing." The procurator succeeded in keeping the price as low as possible, but the seller insisted on being paid almost immediately. The Sisters could not do this and wanted to give up the project altogether. At this stage, just by chance, they came in contact with the SVD procurator general and through him the SVD general council. The council offered to advance the money. On February 11, Fr. Director General Auf der Heide, still in Rome, sent a one-word telegram to Steyl: "Bought." In an accompanying letter he wrote: "Now we must thank God that everything has proceeded so well and the deal has been concluded—without mortgage and bill of exchange. Fr. Friedrich is very happy and sends his greetings. Now our three congregations are represented in Rome, at least through their property. I hope God will now bring the Sisters to Rome—when, of course, only God knows that. But it is a lovely thought that our 'Triple Alliance' has communities in Rome, the capital of Christendom, and indeed side by side, so that they can be of mutual help and support. I am sure our blessed Founder is also happy about this and is blessing the project."² Mother M. Michael, who had hesitantly and fearfully followed the various steps in the negotiations, wrote: "At last the matter in Rome has been settled. It gives us great joy, and we wish to thank God for this token of his grace and goodness. Of course, there is no question of building in Rome just yet. First the Congregation has to expand somewhat more."³

Truly, the foundation in Rome did not come about. The hand of God directed its course according to his all-seeing and all all-knowing providence. The acquired property was later sold, and the generalate remained in Steyl. It was moved to Bad Driburg in 1974, few years after Vatican II, where it is still today.⁴

Foundations - a Revisit

After the death of St. Arnold in 1909, M. M. Michael spared no effort to work on both the internal and external development of the Congregation. The building of

¹ Cf. H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaelae, (Steyl 1938/ August 2013), p. 131-132

² Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, p. 186-187

³ Ibid., p. 187

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 187 (footnote)

the Motherhouse was one important step towards this external development. It paved the way for further expansion. The Motherhouse signified autonomy by which the young community could move forward and live their particular spirituality and charism as intended by the Founder.

New foundations were at the heart of M. M. Michael's program of external development. "She was happy as a queen whenever she could open a new convent of adoration, for it meant that in another place our Savior would always be adored. For in each convent, there is another throne of exposition for our dear Savior. The thought of all the glory and love that would daily be offered unceasingly to him in the Most Blessed Sacrament overwhelmed her, especially the realization that in this or that place, where formerly our Savior had not been adored, he would now always be loved and honored in the sacred Host."⁵ That is why she worked with great zeal to found new communities wherever and whenever possible, as God's will and providence directed her, for she was convinced that "it is better to have many convents with a smaller number of Sisters than few convents with many Sisters."⁶ One cannot imagine the burden and cares she bore during these years up until her death.

A quick glance at her plans and the foundations she established, together with the personnel resources available, gives us a glimpse of her remarkable zeal for the glory of our Eucharistic Lord, her faith in God's will and guidance, her trust in divine generosity and providence in the face of difficulties and meager means, her supernatural foresight and her prophetic boldness to venture into the unknown.

Legend: **Pos** - Postulants / **Nov** - Novices / **Prof** - Professed Sisters / **Con** – Convents

Year	Pos	Nov	Prof	Con	Events
1909	3	5	28	0	• Death of the Founder, St. Arnold Janssen
1910	4	6	31	0	
1911	3	5	31	0	• Search for a new home began
1912	10	4	33	0	• Purchase of the building site • Construction of the Motherhouse began
1913	6	10	34	0	• M. M. Michael suggested to open a new convent in St. Wendel but Fr. auf der Heide thought St. Gabriel would be much better. • Invitation to open a convent in Philadelphia
1914	11	10	35	1	• Transfer from the Missionary Sisters' convent to the Motherhouse
1915	11	11	44	2	• Inauguration: Convent of Divine Love, Philadelphia
1916	7	13	47	2	

⁵ A-thought-a-day Guide in striving for religious perfection, July 8

⁶ Ibid., July 8

Year	Pos	Nov	Prof	Con	Events
1917	9	12	52	2	• Negotiations for a convent in Neisse, Silesia (now Nysa, Poland)
1918	13	13	56	2	
1919	11	18	59	2	• M. M. Michael wrote a letter to the SVD provincial in Argentina of her intention to open a house in Buenos Aires
1920	14	18	61	2	• Negotiations to open another convent: possible choices were: Wiedenbrück, / Münster / Duisburg / St. Wendel / Siegburg, Wolsberg / Bad Driburg, Paderborn
1921	11	19	68	2	• Invitation to open a convent in the Philippines • Negotiations for a convent in Bad Driburg and Tsingtao, China
1922	13	18	76	2	
1923	8	17	85	3	• Inauguration: Convento del Divino Amor, Lipa, Philippines (closed in 1936) • Bad Driburg: laying of the foundation stone
1924	16	17	90	4	• Inauguration: Holy Trinity Convent, Bad Driburg • Invitation to open a convent in St. Louis
1925	21	21	96	4	
1926	16	28	101	4	• Negotiations for a convent in Leobschütz, Silesia • Plan to have a convent in Berlin
1927	21	26	113	5	• Negotiations and soon after the opening of the Cenacle in Soesterberg, the Netherlands (1999 – transferred to Utrecht) • St. Louis: Laying of the foundation stone • An offer was made to buy a property in Rome
1928	25	29	127	6	• Inauguration: Mount Grace Convent, St. Louis • Purchase of a property in Rome
1929	17	39	135	7	• Opening of the Convent of Divine Love, Leobschütz (closed in 1936)
1930	12	35	148	7	• Construction: Convent of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Baguio
1931	15	22	161	8	• Inauguration: Convent of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Baguio • Received the attractive offer to open an adoration convent in China
1932	21	18	170	9	• Inauguration: Convent of Mary Immaculate, Tsingtao, China (closed in 1949)
1933	17	29	171	9	• M. M. Michael wrote an official application letter to open a convent in Berlin
1934	19	29	169	9	• Death of Mother Mary Michael – February 25 • Berlin: Laying of the foundation stone - Nov. 28