

**Mariannahill in the Netherlands**  
**Mission House St. Paul Arcen**  
**1911-2022**

**A review**

**Frans Lenssen c.m.m.**

**Mariannahill Arcen**

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## PREFACE

The foundation of the mission house St. Paul in 1911 in the Netherlands was intended as a formation institute of the new Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill in Europe. This new foundation was meant to take over the task of the formation of new members of the Mariannahill Monastery in South Africa.

The articles collected in this book describe the course of this foundation from different angles, which inevitably leads to overlapping of certain episodes and topics under different aspects. A century of St. Paul's history shows that the purpose of the new foundation certainly has been met. Numerous missionaries have started their formation in this house and have contributed substantially to the growth and flourishing of the Catholic Church in various countries worldwide.

*Frans Lenssen c.m.m.*





# MISSION HOUSE ST. PAUL

## 110 years Mariannahill Mission in the Netherlands

### LOCATION OF THE MISSION HOUSE ST. PAUL



At the exit from the National Road Venlo-Nijmegen near Arcen, a large crucifix catches the eye at the entry of the Mariannahilldreef. This road leads to the Mission House St. Paul. This crucifix was erected in October 1933 and blessed by visiting bishop Emanuel Haenisch, Vicar Apostolic of Umtata, South Africa. In his speech he praised the people of the province Limburg for their deep sense of faith expressed by planting field crosses. The 'Nieuwe Venlosche Courant' of 07.11.1933 wrote: „The bishop thanked the initiators and collaborators for this great work. The place where this stately Cross was erected has been chosen by the Divine Providence as it stands near the great Mission House, where still young men are being trained to plant new field-mission crosses in the vast field of the Vicariate of Umtata. There were three groups of men under the cross on Golgotha. These groups of men still continue to exist; those who love the cross, carrying and follow it; those who do recognize the cross, but whose worldly worries move them ever farther and farther from the cross; and those who hate and persecute the cross. Back to Christ and his cross gives new courage for life and gives help in this difficult time. Hereafter the Bishop performed the ritual of blessing. In the meantime, the community of St. Paul sang the hymn „The Cross“, after which the students of the religious formation college chanted their hymns.”

# THE BEGINNING

## Origin of a missionary vision

'If no one wants to go, I go'. Every Mariannahiller knows at least two statements by Abbot Franz Pfanner, the founder of Mariannahill. He uttered the first sentence when, in September 1879, the South African bishop J. D. Richards came to ask at the General Chapter of the Trappists in Sept Fons in France for volunteers to start a monastery in his diocese. „If no one wants to go, I'll go,“ Franz Pfanner said. He had just built the huge Maria-Stern Monastery in Bosnia. The request of the South African bishop (an Irishman) was not as strange as it may seem. Thomas Merton writes in his book about the Trappists/Cistercians 'The waters of Shiloh' that Pope Leo XIII had informed the Cistercians that he longed very much that they would found monasteries in mission areas: in Africa and in the Far East.

In July 1880, the 55-year-old Fr. Franz arrived in South Africa with thirty-one monks. Bishop Richards assigned them to Dunbrody where they moved into a shed of corrugated iron in a deserted and parched area with thorn bushes and cacti. The monks started building and cultivating. But it remained dry, almost nothing grew, and the bishop hardly gave any help. It must have been hell there. Many monks fell ill, and some died.

### „Get out of your country.“

In 1881 Fr. Franz went to Europe to consult with his superiors during the general chapter of the Trappists. In the meantime, he sent two Brothers to Natal to ask Bishop Jolivet if he wanted a Trappist monastery in his diocese. The bishop said yes, and informed Fr. Franz who telegraphed his second historical sentence from Europe to South Africa in August 1882: 'Exi de terra tua' (Go out of your land), the words God spoke to Abraham.

This time the monks appeared to have better luck. A few kilometres from Pinetown, the monastery 'Mariannahill' (Maria-Anna Hill) arose. Silently, praying and working, a growing number of monks built large

monastery.. Silently, as the rule of one of the strictest orders of the church desired, these monks wanted to bring Africans closer to Christ through the example of prayer and work ('ora et labora'). It was not at all clear in the beginning – strange as it may sound – not even to Fr. Franz, to what extent they would go as monks and missionaries in a direct sense. In any case, they wanted to create a kind of radiance through their lives and their presence. In this way they could be compared with the Benedictine monks who converted Northern Europe in the early Middle Ages. Thomas Merton also says in 'The Waters of Siloë': „The most remarkable thing about this new mission was that it worked entirely according to Benedictine methods. It was an apostolate of prayer and manual labor, of the liturgy and the plough.“ In 1883 Franz Pfanner wrote: „Our presence and our silent diligent work appears as an example before the eyes of the local people and as a school and sermon for the children.“ According to the Mariannahiller Fr. Franz Schimlek, the missionary method developed by Abbot Franz in a short period of time, differed emphatically from that of Cardinal Lavigerie, the founder of the White Fathers, who came to Africa at the same time as Franz Pfanner. Fr. Lavigerie decided to form African laymen, who in turn were to become missionaries among their own people. Franz Pfanner's tactic was to buy much land, to establish black as 'tenants' who often lived already on the purchased land, and then convert them. These Christians would then carry Christianity among their people. Everyone could count their fingers that Trappist ideal of silent witnessing would come into conflict with the harsh South-African reality.

In the first place, as Thomas Merton also writes, the strict Trappist rule was never intended for life in the tropics. Secondly, conversions on the one hand and the need for development of the Africans on the other hand, the monks were forced to come out, and to take the rule with an ever-increasing grain of salt. A huge conflict could not be avoided, and certainly with the fierce Franz Pfanner. But before it came to final choices in that conflict, Mariannahill had to go through a few more years of stormy development and growth.

The Mariannahill monastery was erected with sweet delight. A school for boys was built after only two years, in 1884, and the following

year a school for girls. In 1886, delegates from Zulu leader Sakayedwa came from 200 km. far, and asked abbot Franz to start a school in their area. The school was built here, as well as an-out station. Before 1890 there were already seven of these outposts, even up to 300 km. from Mariannhill. In 1884, the first Africans were baptized. In 1890, Mariannhill alone had 500 baptized people.

In 1885, permission came from Rome to promote Mariannhill into an abbey, and Fr. Franz was elected abbot. The 31 monks of the beginning were 130 five years later. In the meantime, Franz had already founded a Sister congregation. Later they would become the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Monks and Sisters were recruited by Fr. Franz himself to a large extent on his many trips to Europe.

### **Black and white**

But the Mariannahillers also put a lot of bad blood in their environment.

The local middle class of neighbouring Pinetown apparently felt the competition of the monks with their many businesses and spoke ill of the Trappists. But many Zulu parents also became angry, because their daughters went to Mariannhill Abbey to get an education. African chiefs and village leaders also became jealous on the influence that the monks had on their people. And then more and more people looked with suspicion at the extensive land purchases of the Trappists – with money from European benefactors – throughout Natal around their mission posts. Soon the Trappists had many parts of land of Natal in their hands! Many vicious and accusatory articles against the abbot and his monks appeared in the South African newspapers. Now Abbot Franz was certainly not an easy lord and his monks were not all equally meek, but there was more to it. The most serious reproach of the white settlers and the press was the fact that the monks in their schools let black and white children sit next to each other, without distinction of colour race or creed. In 1884 Franz Pfanner had drawn up an educational program, which, in addition to an unequivocal preference for poor children and orphans as pupils, also stated the following: „We make no distinction

in colour or religion. All boys in our institute receive room and board and education without distinction of person, whether he is pagan, Muslim, Protestant or Catholic or white or coloured, British or Dutch, German, Italian or African". And then he continues: „The blacks in South Africa, it seems, are considered as half a human race and they can be treated like cattle. When we here (at the request of the bishop of Natal) saw that the first white orphans had nothing better to do than scold the Bantu boys and throw stones at them, I immediately healed them of that delusion with water and bread and the threat of a firm spanking. Contempt and disdainful treatment of blacks are not tolerated with us.“ Then a storm of protests broke out against the abbot. Some representatives of the white race came to Mariannahill to point out to him the terrible, even „monstrous“ of his performance. In the end, Abbot Franz had to give in to the pressure of public opinion and henceforth limited himself to raising only blacks. The inevitable conflict with the order erupted in 1890. At that time Mariannahill had more than 200 monks and 127 Sisters, and ten missionary stations. There was a letter with serious accusations against Franz Pfanner. The abbot would have misused mission funds by erecting useless and luxurious buildings. He would have deprived his brothers of proper nourishment and support and neglected the moral and spiritual guidance of the monks and Sisters entrusted to his care. Fr. Franz reacted: “The blacks in South Africa, it seems, are considered half a human race and think they can be treated like cattle. When we here (at the request of the bishop of Natal) the first white orphans accepted, we thought that they had nothing better to do than scold the Bantu boys and throw stones at them. I immediately healed them of that delusion with water and bread and the threat of a firm spanking. Contempt and disdainful treatment of blacks are not tolerated with us.“ Then a storm of protests broke out against the abbot. Some representatives of the white race came to Mariannahill to point out to him the terrible, even „monstrous“ of his performance.

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It was clear that evil tongues had done their job. Abbot Franz accepted his suspension without complaint. But Mariannahill's Council indignantly rejected the defamatory accusations against the abbot and acted as one man behind him. The letter from the chapter council led to further research in Europe. The accusations proved unfounded and Abbot Franz was rehabilitated. But two years later, in 1892, a strict Visitor arrived, who again suspended the abbot. Accusation: he had allowed novices to work outside the monastery and the rules about the silence and clothing of the monks had been violated arbitrary. Abbot Franz withdrew. But his work continued. Five years later, in 1898, Mariannahill was the largest Trappist abbey in the world with 285 monks. His successor, Abbot Amandus Schoelzig, who died in 1900, and his successor, Abbot Gerard Wolpert, who resigned in 1904, remained very good friends of their old predecessor and founder. Following in the footsteps of Abbot Franz, both made – unsuccessful – attempts to get a training and novitiate house in Europe. But that could only come about when the conflict between Mariannahill and the Trappist order, between action and contemplation, had been fought out. In 1909, the year Franz Pfanner died, the separation between Mariannahill and the Trappists also came about. In that year Mariannahill had 49 mission stations. It was high time to look to Europe.

# 1911 – THE FIRST ST. PAUL

## Foundation of St. Paul

It was by chance that St Paul was not built in a region in Germany near the Dutch town Oldenzaal. It took a dentist – somewhere in a German train – to propose the Trappist Notker Vorspel to go to North Limburg in the Netherlands before Christmas 1910. He went to look he estate Klein Vink near Arcen which turned out to delight him completely. „Something I wouldn't have dared to expect. A nice, still fairly new tenant house, fields and meadows... and also clear drinking water.” The monk forgot all of de land in Germany near to the Dutch border where he actually had already an appointment with a notary about a block of heath land. Only a few days later he was able to telegraph from cold Walbeck to sweltering South Africa that he had succeeded to find a place for a house of formation in Europe, near Arcen in the Netherlands, thirty years after the foundation of Mariannahill in Africa (1882).

Also, before 1900, Abbot Amandus had tried to establish a novitiate in Bavaria. And his successor, Abbot Gerard Wolpert, personally tried for a year in Germany to get a novitiate off the ground. He had something in mind in Bavaria in particular, namely an estate near Deggendorf, and in northern Bavaria a property of Prince von Löwenstein. But he had to return to South Africa without having succeeded to find a suitable place for a new foundation in Europe.

Why didn't that work? The main reason must have been that the Trappist order had not such construction. Novices were supposed to be trained in their monasteries. It was not until 1909 when Rome authorized Mariannahill's secession from the ancient Trappist order that the way was open for the establishment of a novitiate in Europe. A house in Germany was obvious. But then they encountered the second barrier: the 'Kulturkampf', which put a lot of control over ecclesiastical affairs with the state, and the fact that the brand-new missionary congregation Mariannahill was not yet officially recognized in Germany. That was the reason why a place was sought just across the border with Austria or the Netherlands.

To that end, in October 1909 Fr. Notker Vorspel had embarked in the position of procurator in South Africa for Hamburg. At that time there was already a Mariannahill presence at some places in Europe, especially in Germany, but they were not formation houses or monasteries. These establishments, in Cologne and Würzburg for example, can best be called representation or procuration. They only took care of recruiting and forwarding new monks and money, among other things by distributing the magazine 'Vergissmeinnicht'.

The first offer of an old, dilapidated castle of the Austrian heir to the imperial throne at Feldkirch, Vorarlberg, was not considered suitable by Fr. Notker. Even when the crown prince promised to build a new monastery church, he did not accept. He more interested in a piece of heath land at Gronau near to the Dutch border, the birthplace of Fr. Notker. But when in December 1910 (he had been searching for a year) he was about to arrange the purchase at the notary, a more interesting offer had popped up.

Fr. Notker described his discovery of Klein Vink in February 1911 in the magazine Vergissmeinnicht: „When I travelled westwards in December 1910, partly with the aim of notarizing the purchase of the aforementioned heathland, I was held up. A Dutch dentist, who had previously studied in Würzburg and was well-disposed towards our mission, persuaded me to first look at the castle of an unmarried countess, which was for sale for little money. But I didn't like it. The next day I met the dentist unexpectedly again when changing a railway wagon. He insisted to meet a certain gentleman, who owned an even larger estate. The next day I received him in the mission house of the Holy Blood Sisters in Helden-Panningen. For an hour I had to listen to his eulogy on his estate 'Klein Vink'. I promised him that I would go and see the property he next Monday.

At ten o'clock in the morning he stood, as agreed, with horse and carriage in front of the railway station in Venlo. We drove on the road that Napoleon had built (Paris-Amsterdam), fairly parallel to the Maas, about twelve kilometers north. We passed the villages of Velden and Arcen and after an hour we turned off the main road. Another 250 meters and we were there. And what did I find? A country



estate, called 'Klein Vink'. Something I didn't dare to expect. A nice, still fairly new tenant house, next to it a spacious barn and further fields and meadows. On the horizon pine forest and heathland, low hills even (which they call 'mountains' here). And also, clear drinking water. Beyond the edge of the forest lies the German border. 45 minutes walking from the tenant house is Walbeck, with 2,500 inhabitants, mail, telegraph and telephone.'

### **Contract of sale 30 December 1910**

The tenant, Jan Glerum, was prepared to terminate his lease prematurely due to family circumstances, namely on 1 May 1911. And the price? „Even lower than the piece of heath that I wanted to buy first.” Within a few days Fr. Notker had the required permission from the Bishop of Roermond, and on 1 January 1911 'Klein Vink' was owned by Mariannahill.

What Father Notker describes so excitedly was in fact one of the most remote corners of Limburg, the smallest province of the Netherlands.

Without good connections, electricity or water supply: luxury things that Venlo could only afford sparingly at the time. An – especially in those dark days before Christmas – inhospitable place. „Be that as it may,“ wrote a later chronicler, not without lyrical exaggeration, „the monk hurried through the snow-covered streets of Walbeck and telegraphed to his confreres in South Africa only two words: 'Vink bought'. On the spot, the announcement was received with jubilation, because a photo was not included.” A few letters from 1909 make Father Notker's enthusiasm more understandable. He bought the estate 'Klein Vink' from Mr. Hub. Janssen van Son, from Roermond, who operated agriculture and cattle on this land. Most animals were from other owners, who paid him grazing wages. On September 2, 1909, Jan Glerum, the tenant/manager of 'Klein Vink' wrote to Janssen van Son: 'The horses have improved a lot lately, your horse has also grown extra. The cows are also standing almost as they should be. But horse merchants aren't coming yet.' Furthermore: 'On Sunday, people from Broekhuizen had come to watch the cattle and said that it has grown enormously.'

## Original Contract of sale

Heden den dertigsten December negentien  
honderd twee en veertig verscheen voor mij Peter  
Herbert Alphons Rullen, notaris resi-  
derende te Kouhhuizen, in de tegenwoordig-  
heid der beide na te noemen getuigen: \_\_\_\_\_  
1<sup>o</sup> de Welddidig geboren Heer Herbert Jans-  
sen van Son, koopman en grondgebruiker  
wonende te Noordmond, ter eenre zijde; \_\_\_\_\_  
2<sup>o</sup> de Wel Eerwaarde Heer Theodoor  
Henry Peter Vorster Voorsp. Rooms-  
Katholiek Paster en Missionaris wonende  
thans te Winburg, Beuren, handelende  
in hoedanigheid van gevolmachtigde of  
procureator van den Hoogeerwaarden Heer  
Gerard Wolpert, provoost of abt en alge-  
meene Overste van het Zendingsgenootschap  
Mariannhill, gevestigd te Mariannhill,  
Pretoria, Provincie Natal, Zuid-Afrika in

But agriculture was also done: 'The beets are in good form. Also, the peas are best... the beans will be less good... but the potatoes are good. 'And the father of tenant Jan, C. Glerum from Schore in Zeeland, wrote after a visit to 'Klein Vink', on 18 June 1909: 'The cattle really walk like jewels on the so beautiful pasture, there is enough

grass and in warm weather one will get a big cut of hay there. The rye is also in good condition, as well as the oats and also peen, peas, beans etc. In a word: 'Klein Vink' is a beautiful place and tribute and honour must be paid to the operatorowner! That was the addressee, Janssen van Son. According to the letter (2 September 1909) from Jan Glerum, the stable built on the tenant house was only new: 'The stable is neat and large, though I believe that it will cost you a lot, you could have built lighter, but then it would not have been so solid.'

The enthusiasm in all these descriptions only becomes understandable when one knows that a few years earlier this estate was still an unexplored marshy peatland. In the summer some broom binders from Groesbeek camped in shacks. They collected the heath from which they made brooms at home in winter. The name 'Klein Vink' is therefore a corruption of 'Klein Venne' or 'Venneke' ('little moor'). Hubert Janssen van Son bought this wasteland at the beginning of this century to try out the newly invented fertilizer. With success, as evidenced by the laudatory statements of the many visitors.

### Opening

On Monday, May 1, 1911, little St. Paul was officially opened by Fr. Notker and a few postulants. There was a Holy Mass in an upper room furnished into a house chapel. They let themselves the feast – bean soup taste good. In the afternoon, neighbor Hafmans, the mayor of Arcen Derks, parish priest Schram and adviser Jan van Dijk came to reception. Only a few days earlier the tenant family and another family had left. On May 4, the new superior, Fr. Isembart Leyendecker, who had been prior in Mariannahill previously arrived, along with some Brothers from South Africa. Not a man who let grow grass over something. The very next day, May 5, the mayor of Arcen en Velden signed 'at the request of the Most Venerable Fr. Isembart Leyendecker, on behalf of the Missionary Society Mariannahill' a permit for enlarging and converting a farm into a 'Missionary Monastery'. Two days later, Fr. Dominic Frey and some Brothers travelled from the procure in Cologne to Walbeck, where they were picked up by a large wagon, which could accommodate up to 10 or

12 people in case of emergency. The car was a gift from the former owner of 'Klein Vink' and did an excellent job. For example, on Sunday, 7 May, there were 16 residents and 2 guests who participated in the first Sunday Mass celebration at St. Paul.

### **Excerpt from the original sale contract**

After mass there was a construction meeting. 'According to the contract, the new chapel must be ready by the end of July next, and at the end of August also the renovation of the house. For example, the horse stable should become a dining room and the attic a dormitory. But the question is whether the urgently needed workshops and stables will come under roof before the beginning of winter', Fr. Dominicus wrote in 'Vergissmeinnicht', August 1911.

What kept the little St. Paul community busy in those first weeks?

'Vergissmeinnicht' reports, among other things: 'A tabernacle had been ordered in Roermond, but it didn't come fast enough. By Sacrament Day, June 15, „we simply couldn't stand it any longer.“ An old tabernacle was found and a white cloth and the sisters of St. Joseph from Arcen provided fabric for a silk curtain and on Sacrament Day the Most Holy was in it. 'Who describes the happiness of our small community!'

A short time later they were in the middle of the hay harvest. It had rained a lot, and when the weather suddenly turned beautiful, it was: 'Everything that had hands and feet had to go outside, in the field, to the hay harvest.'

A familiar sound for hundreds of St. Paul residents who would come after them! The quality of the soil left much to be desired, according to 'Vergissmeinnicht' of October 1911. 'It is mainly lean sandy soil, which needs a lot of help with stable and artificial fertilizer if one wants to get a bit of a reasonable harvest.'

### **Brother Barthel**

A beautiful story is the story that Br. Bartholomeus Schabel made in 'Vergissmeinnicht' of March 1912 about the first half year of St.

Paul. He was a carpenter and was sent to the Netherlands after 23 years in South Africa. He arrived in May 1911. A planer and the necessary tools had already been provided, but there was no workshop yet. Br. Leo thought he could try it in the horse stable for the time being. As said, so done. He did not have much space next to the horses and everything that belongs in a horse stable. However, he was happy to have found a place. „But my joy was not to last long. One good morning, Fr. Superior comes to tell me that I have to get out, because the horse stable has to be turned into a dining room. Well, where should I go? To the attic, there is enough space for a carpenter.” Bartholomew packed his things and went upstairs. He liked it much better there. „Especially the view was beautiful. When I opened the large roof hatch – there were no windows, of course – I looked out over the meadows in their green spring dress and over the trees. I saw the tower of Walbeck and the factory smoke of Straelen, and below me the Dutch bricklayers, who were working on our new church. In short, it was an ideal spot up there. The fresh, healthy air also did me good. I wasn’t that healthy when I left Africa, but in this Dutch spring I completely flourished. But this didn’t last long either, because the attic had to be converted into a dormitory. But obedience is Christian duty, for the religious it is doubly true. So, I left my beautiful home, descended and moved to an open shelter between the cowshed and the barn. There I worked in wind and weather until the beginning of the harvest. Then I was driven out again. The shelter became granary, and I had to see”. He couldn’t find anything anymore and just went to work under the open sky. But it was – after June – a beautiful summer, and there was almost not a drop of rain. Autumn was approaching and on the feast day of Mary’s Nativity (September 8), three Brothers arrived from Mariannahill. Among them was Br. Winfried, the blacksmith. Bartholomew:” He needed a workshop. But such a black, fire-threatening man cannot be put in the first the best space, like a harmless carpenter. He had to have his own forge just outside the monastery, and I was given the honorable assignment to build it for him.”

That was a small trick for Barthel with his Africa experience: within a week there was a wooden shed of 8 by 4.5 meters. „The blacksmith

pulled in, but so did I, the carpenter and builder. Because I thought there was room for both of us. But when Br. Winfried started working with his hammer, anvil and bellows, the sparks flew left and right, also in my wood shavings. Then it was: ‘Out with the carpenter’. The fire hazard was too great. In a hurry as if the monastery was already on fire, I left and found a whole new shelter in the basement. There it was wonderfully cool. I started to feel at home here – then came the potato harvest.” One after the other car was unloaded in the basement and soon poor Barthel had to leave the field again. This time he hit it! He ended up in the still not used new chapel. In the meantime, it was under the hood. The painter was busy there. „Here I could really stir with the long planks, because I had to carpenter pews, a prayer chair, a stage for the high altar, etc. etc. Also, the thought that I was working in a future church had something lofty for me. I thought of the many Holy Masses, communions, etc. But one day, while I’m meditating in front of me while working, suddenly Fr. Superior comes to me and says, „Br. Barthel, hurry up. Tonight, the church must be clean and tidy, because tomorrow morning the first Mass must be celebrated here!“ –I could not believe my ears, but lo and behold, a few minutes later half a dozen postulants came in. One carried a statue, the other an altarpiece, a third and fourth something for the sacristy. In short, it got serious, and then I did everything on my part to get the work done quickly. In the evening the new church was consecrated, the Most Holy was transferred and the next morning the first Mass was celebrated. I myself moved back to the basement, which was now half-cleared. I am still there, but I have already heard that they will soon be going into the carpenter’s workshop ... want to establish the old cow shed. I think it’s best. I have now learned to adapt everywhere and find every place beautiful, where the peace and blessing of God dwells, and that is the case everywhere in the monastery.”

Br. Barthel’s fear of having to move again quickly, very understandable after such a restless six months, did not yet materialize. A report from Fr. Dominic Frey shows that on May 1, 1912 – one year after the opening – the carpenter was still living in the basement, and that he had even been joined there, besides by a helper, also by the

shoemaker and the baker. But the rumor that he had to go to the old cow shed turned out to be correct. The plan was only delayed. (Br. blacksmith was still in his wooden shed on May 1, 1912.)

### **Silence**

In the autumn of 1911, Fr. Isembart wrote to Mariannahill: „We have 12 postulants here and about 10 students in Lohr. But behind both figures we should be able to put a zero! „(That was in January 1912 in ‘Familia’, a monthly magazine made in Mariannahill.) And further: „In Mariannahill we are quite cut off from the civilized world and we wonder how big our mission is. But when you visit other missionary congregations, your eyes open. There one speaks of hundreds of priests (Steyl about 800) ... Fr. Superior had been with the SVD Fathers in Steyl, near Tegelen and had been unmistakably impressed there. In ‘Familia’ of March 1912, an article by (the re-elected) abbot Gerard Wolpert followed. He wrote about a letter he had received from Fr. Isembart dated December 8, 1911. Fr. Isembart Leyendecker complained about his people, blaming Mariannahill himself. „I believe that Mariannahill still lacks a lot of good attitude. What do I have to do with the spirit, for example, that three Brothers brought with them from the different mission states from which they recently came here! Despite many exhortations, there is no silence. You can imagine, Father, that I often think: What will you tease yourself and your people if, later, by such examples, all good spirit is corrupted? Yesterday, for example, I took a carpenter to Venlo and sent them from there to Steyl. Both knew afterwards a lot to tell about the silence that prevailed there. And then our people want to tell every yoke that religious life imposes!” Abbot Wolpert writes: „We founded St. Paul because we believed and hoped for such a house in Europe to test the postulants and to prepare them spiritually before travelling overseas to South Africa.”

### **Festive stew**

Abbot Wolpert then elaborates on the reasons for making St. Paul a novitiate: „The novitiate also had to be moved to St. Paul to avoid

great spiritual damage. This damage occurred in Mariannahill from the outset by the fact that postulants and novices were almost everywhere and constantly together with the professed! Thus, little came of their spiritual-religious formation. The most important task for St. Paul was therefore: 'to give the future religious and Brothers of Mariannahill a solid, as complete as possible religious formation. On this the future prosperity of Mariannahill, of monastery and mission, will depend to a large extent.'

For his part, Abbot Wolpert will send the best auxiliaries out of Mariannahill, for" if we let them starve at St. Paul, the lifeblood of Mariannahill, Mariannahill will also die of starvation."

The superior may have complaints, but the first inhabitants of St. Paul were certainly not 'loose balls'. The son of a family from those days remembers: „They were somewhat withdrawn, taciturn, but not unfriendly people, who worked hard and prayed a lot from early in the morning until late in the evening."

The old chronicle, which Fr. Dominicus Frey began in April 1912, reported: Getting up at 3.45 and going to bed at 20.00, after a 11,5 – hours workday in the fields or in the workshops. The austerity of life then is also evident from another detail: when a while later none other than Abbot Wolpert of Mariannahill officially came to visit, a 'festive' stew was served.

### **The windmill**

A year after the opening of St. Paul, on 1 May 1912, 'the farm' was completed (as Fr. Dominic Frey reports in *Vergissmeinnicht* of July 1912). After the church and the conversion of the tenant house into a monastery, work must have been done at an incredible pace on the farm, which was not small, where a cow shed, pigsty, horse stable, milking room, hay and grain loft found a place. Not without pride, Fr. Dominic Frey wrote about the windmill, called the 'Hercules', which was placed on top of the farm: 'It means for the Netherlands, where one cannot work with an ordinary (water) mill because of the slight drop in streams and rivers, the cheapest form of motor drive. In addition to a flour mill, this must also keep a water pump, a



threshing machine and a circular saw in operation. In normal wind, the power of the mill is about 5 horsepower.<sup>7</sup>

On May 1, 1912, St. Paul had 9 Brothers, who had worked in South Africa for about 20 years, and 20 postulants, including 2 priest candidates (1 secular priest and 1 painter/photographer). Furthermore, 4 priest students – so-called late vocations, – who were taught by Canon Petrus Hochhardt and by the secular priest-postulant. Ten younger students attended the Aloysianum College in Lohr on the Main.

Four months later, Br. Bartholomew described in colors the ceremony of taking the habit of the first novices in St. Paul on the feast day of Mary's Nativity, September 8, 1912. He also listed how many residents St. Paul had at that time: Fr. Isembart Leyendecker-superior, Fr. Efreem Roth-novice master, 9 Brothers, 3 (choir) Brothers and 5 Brother-novices, 1 Father, 12 Brotherpostulants and 6 students; furthermore, Father Mayr, a canon, and a professor from Vienna. The Brother went on to write: „If everyone who started here in St. Paul had stayed, our number would have been much greater. Eighteen have already left us and returned to the world, sent away partly because they had no vocation, partly voluntarily left. How good, that St. Paul was founded! If all these had gone to Africa, what disadvantages that would have brought for them selves and for the monastery!”

### **Remarkably modern**

The brand-new community farmed well. „The hay and rye harvest this year has been very good and has been brought in dry. The oat harvest did not go so well. It rained for five weeks. The farmers in the area have lost all their oats. We were able to save a lot because we quickly put the oats through the threshing machine. But more than that, we owe our success to our ‘Zeppelin’. That's the name of our mower, which really works wonders. She mows the grain and binds it in sheaves. The potato harvest also seems to be good „, Br. Barthel wrote in September 1912. Furthermore, next year a big advantage for St. Paul will mean that a railway line is under construction

and we will get a stop here. The line should be opened in May next year. The construction of our new novitiate is going smoothly, but it will probably not be ready for December as planned. On 12 July 1912, the municipal council of Arcen en Velden had signed the permit for ‘the erection of a building on the Roode Vennen in Arcen’. Within 2 years there were two wings of the mission house under construction of the six wings planned.” Then the World War broke out, and the other four wings as well as the church never came.

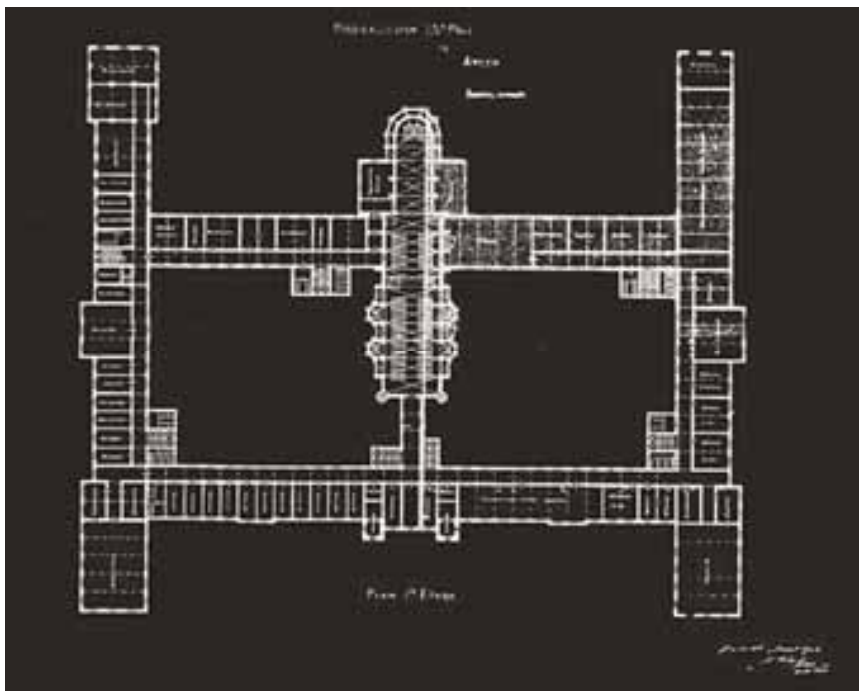
The building plans were not only grand in size and volume, but also remarkably modern. In addition to two formation facilities for young people, a cultural center was also on the program, a swimming pool for summer and winter and other recreational and sports facilities, in which tennis and bowling in particular played an important role. There would also be a Sisters Convent and a large church in the middle. Many construction meetings seem to have been devoted to a central heating system. It was the only thing that the men, who had gained all their building experience in warm South Africa, had no knowledge of. The offers show that a German company dared to build a boiler house for the enormous complex. The plant has not been completed but the Diesel generator for power supply still functioned until after the Second World War. Meanwhile, in 1913, there were heating radiators in St. Paul, while even the governor of Limburg had to be satisfied with fireplace fire and kitchen stove.

The building spirit of those German monks from Africa was watched with suspicion by many in Arcen. Because, was the mission house not going to become a ‘village within the village’ or at least getting too close to Arcen, as had happened with the SVD in Steyl? The municipality initially refused its permission to build power generators for reasons of ... noise pollution.

### **Choir stalls**

After the news about the entering of the first novices in September, it remained quiet for almost a year in ‘Vergissmeinnicht’. Br. Barthel had his hands full with all the renovation and Fr. Dominic was away for ten months. It was not until the October 1913 issue

that he wrote again: „What has changed in those months! In the past, coming from Kempen over Walbeck, I had to walk through heathland and forest for almost an hour, but this time I came with the steam tram, which has been connecting Venlo with Nijmegen since the end of May this year, with a stop near the new building, which became so high that one could already see for miles that one was approaching St. Paul.”



*The original building plans of St. Paul shows an enormous complex. Due to the interruption by World War I, only two wings (right down) were built.*

On May 1, 1913, the first wing (the northeast) of the mission house was completed. On June 1, the religious community moved in. Fr. Dominic's article also shows that this wing was considered only a first beginning.

The second wing was already under construction, 'for our students'. But that would only be about a fifth of the entire planned monastery ready. On the first floor was the new chapel. „I was particularly pleased,' says Fr. Dominic, 'that provisional choir stalls had already been placed in the new chapel, because from the opening of the novitiate on 8 September 1912, the canonical choral prayer had already begun at St. Paul's.'"

In a windowsill in the hallway, Fr. Dominic noticed a canary in a cage. The second floor housed the novices and postulants. „It's just a pity that there are still so few of them: 2 Brothers, 9 Brother-novices and 14 postulants." In the attic were the sleeping places of the Brothers. On the ground floor and in the basement were: kitchen, refectory, carpenter's workshop (finally justice for Br. Barthell!), laundry kitchen, shoemaking, the electrical power supply etc. In the old monastery ('Klein Vink') lived the students and four secular priests, who were teachers.

In July 1913, the first grave was dug in the new cemetery, for Br. Christian Krenn, from Austria, who had joined Mariannahill in 1909.

### **A white Christmas**

By Christmas 1913, the second wing of the mission house came under the hood. It was a white Christmas and Fr. Dominicus Frey rejoiced (in 'Vergissmeinnicht', March 1914): „Such a Christmas was a doubly welcome to us, 'Africans', who had celebrated Christmas in the middle of the summer for years, because it brought out our most beautiful childhood memories."

How did such a Christmas celebration go on St. Paul? „At 11 o'clock the bell called us to midnight mass. In the choir, the matutine first began according to the poignant Cistercian rite. After the Te Deum followed a solemn high mass. After the Lauds we took a few hours of rest. But at 5 o'clock everyone rushed back to the chapel to follow the many masses after the morning meditation. (St. Paul then had 5 Fathers and 2 secular priests). At half past nine Prime and Terce of a young priest from the diocese of Rottenburg. He received the white

robe of our order. After the solemn high mass that followed, we sang "Te Deum laudamus."

On Boxing Day, the students gave away a stage performance from 4 to 7 o'clock on a real stage. „The décor showed us a Germanic jungle with a pagan sacrificial site; on an oak hung, next to the sacrificial knife, the skull of a horse. The game moved us in the time when Winfried or St. Boniface traveled through Germany to preach the gospel. The warlike tribes, who used to avenge every injustice bloodily, could hardly believe in a God who died like a sacrificial lamb. At the same time, the rough warriors were strongly attracted to the love and innocence of the poor Jesus child, and so the struggle between paganism and Christianity ended with a resounding victory of the World Redeemer. It was a piece in four acts. And it was interspersed with' (tableaux vivants), singing and music. The students, between seventeen and twenty years old, were so successful that they were allowed to give another performance on Epiphany."

## 1914 THE SECOND ST. PAUL



*Only one fifth part of the original plan (see page 22) was constructed*

### **The white habit**

According to a report by Fr. Dominic in 'Vergissmeinnicht' of May 1914, in the spring of that year, so within three years of the first poor beginning of St. Paul, the second wing of the mission house was completed. „At the present time, the church and many other spaces and facilities are still missing, with which a modern mission house must be equipped, but for the time being the most urgent needs have been met and there is space available for a considerable number of students, postulants and novices. For almost thirty years the monastery of Mariannahill in South-Africa, had to do without a mission house in Europe. Many postulants stayed away; not only the strict Trappist rule, but also the great distance and the uncertainty of such a step scared them off. But now we have our own mission house in Europe. As usual, this was followed by a call to sign up for formation as a priest or brother missionary. Easter 1914 the number of students was 19. Only for the first three gymnasium classes one could go to St. Paul – then the students went to Lohr on the Main. There were also only so-called late vocations. Our three students had come from Würzburg. They wanted to spend their Easter holidays at

St. Paul and had wholeheartedly exchanged their suit for the white habit.”



*Nine years after the separation from the Trappist order a Cistercian dress was still worn in St. Paul*



*From 1911-1920 a semi-Cistercian habit was still worn  
Only one part of the planned cloister was built*

The report of the Easter celebration 1914 shows that the Cistercian tradition was still very much alive. New oak choir stalls had been placed in the chapel. A Brother-novice had made them according to the design of our Father superior. The Holy Week liturgy continued to take place according to 'the poignant rite of the Cistercian order'. This lasted until 1920. In the chronicle of that year it is mentioned that on 31 October the Roman Breviary was used for the first time for the vesper for All Saints. Also, at that time the Mariannahiller Fathers finally started to wear a black cassock with a red sash and the Brothers the black cassock with black belt.

### **On the battlefield**

On the Sunday after Easter, an English friar-novice from South Africa, and three Brothers entered the novitiate (a German, an Austrian and ... a Dutchman). In the December issue of 'Vergissmeinnicht' 1914 mention is made of 2 Brother-postulants who took the habit and the first vows of 2 Brother-novices and 1 priest candidate. But ..., "The number of entries and professions would have been greater, if it had not been for the great war to cast its shadow in our silent mission house as well. More than-20 of our novices, postulants and students, and even a few Brothers, who have long been professed, were called up (for military service) and are now on the battlefield.

„The further expansion of our mission house is of course at a standstill under these circumstances. In St. Paul, too, all construction work has been halted for the time being, because there too they have suffered greatly from the consequences of the war. Notable growth of postulants and students is also not to be expected for the time being, but we do not want to complain ... Give peace, Lord, in our day, for no one but You may fight for us!“

At the end of the war, due to the catastrophic depreciation of the German mark, the (in Germany) saved building sum turned out to be almost completely worthless. Further building could be completely forgotten for the time being. The school was moved entirely to Germany.



## Antlers exhibition

During and after the First World War, St. Paul remained entirely oriented towards Germany as a hinterland. That had always been the case with Mariannahill in South Africa. Very explainable, by the way, because Germany was the motherland for most Fathers and Brothers. From the beginning, it was always there that by far the most propaganda and recruitment of people (vocations) had happened and mild gifts came in. But there was another reason why St. Paul did not move 'on the Dutch market' in the first twenty-five years, not even to get gifts. The reason was simply that it was not allowed. After the restoration of the Dutch hierarchy in 1853, all kinds of monastic and missionary societies from Germany, Belgium, France and even England had flowed in. They attracted many young people and the bishops, charged with caring for and crewing their seminaries and parishes, decided to stem the flow. The smallest diocese, Roermond, had more than 400 monasteries and religious houses in 1932! That is why the bishop had forbidden the Mariannahillers from the outset to make propaganda or raise funds in the Netherlands. At the very beginning, local residents were not even allowed to attend Sunday Mass at St. Paul. But when the Fathers, for their part, refused to assist in the parish churches of neighborhood villages, the bishop lifted that ban. Nevertheless, St. Paul participated in a mission exhibition in Venlo in 1920. In a letter dated 3 June of that year, the Venlo Mission Committee asked the Fr. Superior 'urgently to cooperate with the exhibition, by submitting articles and objects from Your Missions and, if possible, assisting one or two members of the Order to explain the entries. You will be convinced that this is also a missionary work.'

In the Mariannahill chronicle we find: 'From 29 August to 5 September there was a big Mission Week with an exhibition in Venlo, in which St. Paul had a lot of success with this beautiful antler exhibition'. Let's assume that St. Paul did not only show up with African antlers there in Venlo. Finally, there was more to the house, if we are to believe the 'Nieuwe Venlosche Courant' of 10 September 1921, where an article about 'Klein Vink' states: 'In the monastery

there is a nice collection of African weapons and utensils, brought by the missionaries ...'

In any case, the Venlo mission exhibition in 1920 earned St. Paul the (then certainly) sweet sum of 1,200 guilders, – which the mission committee offered, 'as being your share in the proceeds of the mission week held here'.

### **Collision**

In a less friendly – and even heavy-handed – way, St. Paul came into contact with the Dutch outside world in those days. What about the registered letter that arrived from the N.V. Maasbuurtspoorweg on 19 June 1919: 'On the 17th of this year a collision took place between a vehicle belonging to you and our train 8, as a result of which the carriage of that train was damaged'. There was no insurance company involved. With a money order of fl 25, -, stamped on June 23, the matter was settled quickly and efficiently. And what about the following note from mission house St. Paul to Mr. P. van Hooren, wholesaler in Venlo-Blerick on July 7, 1932: 'We supposed to have seen your truck drive through our yard in the direction of the border on Tuesday 5 July and returned again around 10 o'clock. It is easy to understand that this causes disorder, when all are at rest. It would be very pleasing to us to know whether you are aware of the intended disturbance of peace and property rights. You don't have to have a big fantasy to suspect that the wholesaler did not transport very legal trade on that summer evening along such a quiet inland road near the German border. But at least the Fathers were silent about that; only the noise at the late (!) hour bothered them. But yes, you will only have to get up again at a quarter to five!

### **Farm**

In the course of the war 1914-18 and afterwards, the financial resources in Germany dried up to such an extent that not only the construction had to stop, but even the cooking pots became poorer. That is why more attention was paid to the farm. Of the now 180 hectares of land ownership, a lot of land had been lying fallow until

then. That was about to change, and with it a development began in which the farm would be able to mess up even the strictest order of the day and to call all handson deck at all day when the saving of the land was at stake.

On the yellowed drawings and building plans of the years 1911-1912, a development seemed to have been foreseen, in which the funds came from elsewhere (mild donors) and agriculture took only a modest place.

On the other hand, the regularity and enthusiasm with which in 1911 in the chronicles about (bringing in) the harvests were spoken of, are at least signs of farmer-friendly behavior! Now, however, people had to pay more and more attention to becoming 'self-supporting' or self-sufficient. The fields got better, the barns, stables and workshops bigger and bigger. The chicks rolled out of the incubator in bunches. By the way, it must have been a sign of poultry at the present campsite, on the hill, which was traditionally called the 'Chicken Mountain'. St. Paul's farm grew into a model company that attracted many admirers from Limburg to Brabant.

### **Bread with syrup**

It was a hard, sober and rough life in those twenties on St. Paul. Brothers, Brothers, novices and postulants stood in their dormitories at 4.45 am next to their straw bags. In the first years, the clock rang even earlier at 3.45 am, according to a note from 1912. When they came out of the chapel at 6.15, they ate breakfast, which lasted until the Second World War: baked potatoes and dry bread with syrup. (After that war, the syrup moved to the snack hour and the baked potatoes to the evening meal.) After breakfast, which was enjoyed under silence, the monastery clothes were exchanged for work uniforms and foot rags according to Russian custom because too coarse work shoes were certainly not cut to size. But, the chronicles write, one was satisfied, even with the bottle of beer, which was provided once a year, at the name feast of St. Paul, June 29 (!).

St. Paul flourished in the twenties. After the difficulties in the war 1914-18, the population was back to normal surprisingly quickly. On

December 31, 1920, St. Paul had around 90 residents, including 32 Brotherpostulants, 13 Brother-novices and 16 Frater-novices. Furthermore, 17 professed Brothers, 6 Sisters and only three priests, namely the novice master Fr. P. Giessen, a Jesuit.



*Cattle and agriculture in front of St. Paul and the farm building kept the community alive.*



*The same spot half a century later*

Following in the footsteps of Abbot Franz, both made unsuccessful attempts to get a formation and novitiate house in Europe. But that could only come about when the ongoing conflict between Mariannahill and the Trappist order, between action and contemplation, had been fought out. In 1909, the year Franz Pfanner died, the separation between Mariannahill and the Trappists also came about. In that year Mariannahill had 49 mission-stations. It was high time to look to Europe.

Until the thirties there were Sisters at St. Paul. The Sisters were from the Congregation of the Precious Blood, also founded by Franz Pfanner. In the annual report of 1920, on 30 December, there was also mention of six students who could not yet leave for Reimlingen because of diphtheria. An unknown number of – healthy – students travelled that day with a Father to Germany, where a new mission house had just been purchased in Reimlingen. This was related to the dissolution in 1920 of the mission school (Humanities) on St. Paul. In the first ten years there was a formation program for 'late vocations' – incidentally no Dutch – run by some diocesan priests and lay teachers at St. Paul. In the meantime, a mission house for young boys had been founded in Lohr, Germany, which in 1920 had 65 seminarians. Mission house St. Jozef in Reimlingen was specially intended for late vocations.

Most of the St. Paul inhabitants in those years were Germans, including from Schleswig-Holstein, Berlin, München and Saarbücken. There were also Austrians, Swiss, a few English and Americans, but especially more and more Poles. The house had something international, even though the official language was German. But the Poles kept their national language alive among themselves. St. Paul soon proved capable of sending about 30 to 40 young people a year, who had passed through postulate and novitiate, to South Africa. Their travel money, in addition to the maintenance, clothing and the entire household, could largely be paid for by the farm. In that enterprise, the Africa-goers had already left the necessary drops of sweat themselves.

## Debt Mountain in Würzburg

St. Paul was given a new burden when in 1927 the monumental Pius X Seminary was built in Würzburg for the priest-candidates who had to 'do' their philosophy and theology there at the university. The fact that this major seminary, also intended internationally, was built in poor Germany at that time and not, for example, in England or Rome, was of course due to the strong ties with Germany.

But the building sum was high, and the Reichsmark was constantly plummeting. That is why the 'rich' house in Holland was not only given as collateral, but also had to contribute significantly to pay off the mountain of debt. For this purpose, loans also seem to have been given by the Dutch, but in the Second World War all addresses, and debt securities were lost.

At St. Paul, people did not seem to have been very awake by the new tax package, because in 1927 they seriously thought of a second home: a boarding school in Geldern, not far from the Dutch/ German border. A former barracks would be bought and rebuilt for this purpose. But the bishop of Münster – as it said on 3 September 1927 in a report of the 'Niederrheinische Landeszeitung', did not give permission. Why the bishop said no, the history does not mention.

What undoubtedly woke people up was the fire, which (according to a report in the Venlosche Courant) caused the farm to go up in flames for a large part on 3 October 1928.

## Thumbs up

Daily life on St. Paul's went in a strict, monastic rhythm for those years, with very little variety. The rule of Benedict inherited from the Trappists was still quite literally adhered to, although the constitutions of the congregation were content to live the three vows 'in the spirit of the rule of Saint Benedict'.

The story goes about a Brother, who cut himself off a thumb. With this bloody piece of evidence tied in a handkerchief, he went to the superior to confess to him on his knees that he had 'done something wrong,' as the rule for minor disturbances prescribed. But

only his thumb has remained in Holland. He later left for Africa with nine fingers in good mind and – allegedly – lived happily ever after there.

That even before the Second World War on the almost entirely German St. Paul, some had already struggled to keep the bow tense all the time, reveals the discovery of a subterranean ‘recreation den’, which some Brothers had dug in silence. The chronicles speak of a ‘Spelunk’, where the ‘losbollen’ occasionally entertained themselves with harmonica music and some homemade wine. The superior seems to have taken the case rather lightly; he must have even laughed when he spoke in the refectory about ‘some cavemen among his fellow Brothers’.

In 1929 the ‘crew’ on St. Paul was still decent: 13 Frater-novices and 33 Brother-novices in addition to the professed Brothers and the Fathers.

But there was still a decline, which would continue in the thirties under the influence of the political-economic situation. The crisis was in full swing, and especially in Germany the situation quickly became less stable, until Hitler came to power in 1933. The flow of mission candidates from Germany then dried up so quickly that in 1935 it was decided to abolish the central formation house for Europe and the United States. It is remarkable, by the way, that in ‘Vergissrneinnicht’ of May 1934, a cry for help appeared about lack of space in the house chapel: ‘Unfortunately, the Fraters-and Brother-novices on St. Paul have to make do with a much too small and insignificant chapel. We urgently need a new chapel, albeit simple, but large. Who wants to help? Who provides building blocks? ...’ It didn’t happen anymore.

### **Foundation of Dutch branch of Mariannahill acknowledged**

The General Council unanimously agreed that a Dutch missionary seminary should be started at St. Paul. The head of the school was Fr. Bernhard Barbian, a former Trappist of the abbey of Echt. This was item 20 of the minutes of the meeting of the General Administration on 26 and 27 March 1935. And in the ‘Nederlandsche

Staatscourant' of 3 and 4 May the foundation of the 'Vereeniging Mis-siehuis Sint Paul', being the 'Dutch branch of the Mariannahill Mis-sionary Society in Pinetown, province of Natal in South Africa' was announced. Purpose of the association: 'Formation of candidates for the clergy for the benefit of the foreign mission of the mentioned Missionary Society for the spreading of the Roman Catholic religion'. In an audience on May 17, 1935, the bishop of Roermond, Mgr. Lemmens, gave his permission for a Dutch juvenate with the right of propaganda. These official starting shot for a Dutch St. Paul not only meant the beginning of the end for the German-oriented St. Paul, but more importantly: the definitive change of the initial ideal of one European house of formation and a novitiate house. All German novices (Dutch were not yet there) moved to St. Jozef in Reimlingen. The anniversary photo at the 25th anniversary of St. Paul in 1936 shows the first Dutch faces. The formation for priest candidates had started in the summer of 1935 with the first Dutch students among them Leopold Al, Gerard Hovens Alfons Ineveld. In the mainly German-speaking community this must have been a historical event, but the chronicles are very sober about it: 1-2-1936; 'Fr. Adelhart gives Dutch lessons to the Brothers 23-8-1936; today at the table for the first time Dutch reading aloud on 15-10-1936. At the ceremony of admission to the novitiate, all were Dutch for the first time. Fr. Superior gives his first Dutch sermon. Of course, the language problems were not off the air and, moreover, the foreigners law prohibited teaching by foreigners. Dutch-German relations deteriorated noticeably as the Nazi regime showed its true face more clearly.

### **Sober celebration**

On May 1, 1936, St. Paul celebrated its 25th anniversary, but it became a sober celebration. Fr. Superior wrote to the Nieuwe Venlo-sche Courant: 'Because of the difficult times, we have decided not to hold external festivities and instead will remember our benefactors and friends in our prayers in a special way on that day'. On the occasion of the silver jubilee, an enthusiastic Dutch supporter of the



Mariannahillers wrote an article in the *Nieuwe Venlosche Courant*, which included this: 'Nowadays the large Mariannahiller settlement is rising near the national road. Students from all over the Netherlands are preparing for religious and missionary life. On their land, intensively cultivated, growing abundant rye and wheat and the lark, all are thanking the Creator, exulting upwards. Large herds of cattle graze in beautiful clover pastures. Once this plain did not give a complete piece of bread to a poor broom binder family, and now it gives food to hundreds.

In the first group photo, in 1935, we count nine Dutch students. In 1936, two classes of the seminary were already 'operational', but they did not only start with 12- and 13-year-old. Older boys, who had already followed (part of) their gymnasium education elsewhere, were also welcome. At the end of June 1937 there were 31 students in the group photo and a photo from 1939 shows no less than 17 fifth-graders! In the same year, 11 Brothers, novices are in a group photo. In a newspaper report from 1938 or '39, mention is made of the final profession of the first two Dutch Brothers, Gerardus Janssen from Tegelen and Patricius Verdijk from Well. Only for a short time did they and some other Dutch clerics from the first hour their philosophy and theology studies in Würzburg. The last year before the outbreak of the war they continued their studies in Nijmegen.

## BEGINNIG OF WORLD WAR II – 10 MAY 1940

At four o'clock in the morning of 10 May 1940, the peace on St. Paul was cruelly disturbed – as in the whole of the Netherlands. German tanks rolled past the farm and the monastery in the direction of the Maas Line.

The German occupation initially did not change much of the life on St. Paul, but – according to a chronicler who was there himself – ‘the joy of the spirits was gradually affected by the fact that everything German came to be regarded as something hostile, even though the leadership did its utmost to bridge the often flaring up contradictions’. In March 1941 the main building St. Paul had to be evacuated in a few hours by order of the SS. St. Paul became barracks and its inhabitants disappeared in all directions. Fr. Hermenigild Peeters wrote down how it went on: „The students found a home in Lomm (in the now demolished church), in a school of Lomm and in the patronage of Broekhuizen with the cow-shed of farm Reinders as a dormitory. Six months later they moved together to a long-uninhabited castle in Blitterswijk, where Dominican Fathers came to lead the major seminary study program and, like everyone else, settled for the attic rooms dripping with moisture. Nevertheless, new plans were made to restart the almost extinct boarding school and despite the primitive housing and the night bombers flying over from England towards the German industrial area (Ruhrgebiet), a first class of about 20 students was started in 1942.

The remaining community on St. Paul, which had made the chicken houses habitable as best it could, shrunk; because more and more German Fathers and Brothers were forced to work for Hitler's war machine. Nevertheless, they even managed to recruit some new members.

Only in 1944, when it became too dangerous above ground, they moved to the concrete basement bunkers of St. Paul, where soon numerous residents of Arcen and the entire occupation of the children's home 'Nazareth' in Venlo found a bomb-proof accommodation. Together, that must have been about 500 people.

At the beginning of 1945, by order of the occupying forces, a general evacuation took place to the north of the Netherlands, and still today some veterans in Kloosterburen in Groningen are good acquaintances.

It was much more dramatic in the old castle in Blitterswijk. After relatively quiet years, in which many people were in hiding and escaped pilots of crashed bombers were offered a helping hand, the old castle began to shake to its heavy foundations, as the famous tank battle at Overloon spread its fire and death-breathing influence miles away.

The cellar rooms were divided for the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood from Tienray. About thirty men, who were chased or felt threatened by the increasing raids by the German military police were in hiding and also some displaced had found a shelter. It had been wise to leave the young students at home after their summer holidays. From mid-September to the 17th of November 1944, people sought distraction by candlelight in everyday moments of prayer and on cheerful evenings or the clandestine slaughter of pigs or in listening to the messages of the English radio channel on the crystal receivers.

### **Castle exploded**

In his book about the history of Blitterswijk, P. Beterams tells some events from the time in which the Mariannahillers were the lords of the castle. 'Once they escaped a great danger to life. The widely feared Grüne Polizei raided the castle. They knew that certain men were hiding from the German military police. They had hidden themselves in a part of a large corridor, which was divided in two by a high cupboard. Apparently, they were kept safe.

And further: 'In the autumn of 1944 it became even more anxious. German quartering was given. Cars and motorcycles roared off and on. On one day, a truck with hand grenades exploded near one of the community buildings (killing five German soldiers) and wreaked havoc.'

The village gradually became a front area in the last months of 1944 and the occupying German soldiers had left in the meantime. Then came the day when the castle had to be cleared. Fr. Marcel Noten remembers that day well: „On the last Sunday of October, the order came in the afternoon that all the inhabitants of the castle had to leave their accommodation in the cellars. While the residents were designated a place outside the walls opposite the Protestant church, a truck with dynamite arrived in the courtyard. Soldiers applied rods of dynamite to the walls of the castle. The next order: Lie flat on the ground! And with thunderous violence, the castle flew into the air. After the signal ‘Safe’ the residents were allowed to return to a big mess. After some digging, they discovered that the cellars had remained intact. They re-established themselves as good and as bad as possible, until they were awakened by the German ‘Green Police’ in the early morning of 17 November.” The community had the dubious honour of making the last journey with the Maasbuurt Tramweg, which was only pulled by a tractor and only consisted of open coal wagons. They were evacuated via Germany traveling during several dangerous days to the northern provinces of the Netherlands. After the war, the community of Blitterswijck could not return any more to their castle, which was been totally ruined.

### **Eighty-eight direct hits**

The first to return from exile from the north of the country (May 1945) must have lost heart when they stood in front of the badly battered St. Paul. The southern part was more ruined than anything else. Roof and exterior walls, especially the west side, were bombed with 88 direct hits. Almost nothing was left of the establishment, the livestock had been looted, the forests badly hit, the fields and the soil neglected.

While one after the other returned to St. Paul in the spring of 1945, Fathers, Fraters and Brothers began the provisional repair work. Without decent living space, without material, without machines, without power. Cardboard doors, plastic roofs and other emergency facilities were installed, while the British liberators were still

stationed at St. Paul. Meanwhile, on the German side of the border, the St. Paulers, who had survived their military service on the various fronts, trickled into Reimlingen, expecting to soon be able to return to St. Paul. But the Dutch authorities did not want to let a German face cross the border under any circumstances, not surprising of course. With a lot of good luck, a few Brothers managed to smuggle in, but for the most part the young Dutch Mariannahillers were on their own. However, financial help came fairly quickly. An action in the municipality of Nootdorp (North Holland), the efforts of the well-known radio speaker Fr. Henri de Greeve, help from the sisters of the Precious Blood in the form of beds and other furniture, and the ongoing compensations from the government made it possible to reopen the school even in the summer of 1945. In a house full of rats, without proper washing facilities and with a great shortage of teachers, it was a hard re-start. Because the food was even more sober than in the war years, the youngest inhabitants received a weekly ration of chocolate, southern fruits, bananas, figs and so on. Delicacies that most of them had never seen before.

### **A Dutch CMM province**

In the midst of the first repairs, the Superior General, Fr. Reginald Weinmann, had come from England and proclaimed that as of September 10, 1945, the Dutch Mariannahillers would form their own province. That is to say, it actually became the Dutch-English province, of which the Superior General would provisionally be the superior. The first Dutch house superior was Fr. Remigius Peeters. At the request of Bishop Lemmens of Roermond, the Superior General decided in May 1946 to also appoint Dutch Mariannahillers to other leading positions. The school was first led by Fr. Pacificus Wijsman, later he was replaced due to illness by Fr. Chrysantus van den Idsert. Fr. Hermenegild Peeters became prefect of the juvenists, as the young Brother candidates were called. And the Fratres left for Fribourg in Switzerland to finish their studies with the Dominicans.

On March 25, 1947, there was a substantial expansion of 'the staff': six Fratres were ordained priests. Two of the six immediately left for Rome to continue their studies, the four others were involved in

teaching the students, so that a number of lay teachers could be replaced. With these six, the number of Dutch priests came to 15. In that year, 1947, 90 minorseminarians, 14 juvenists, 12 professed Brothers, 12 Brother-novices and a novitiate for major-seminarians populated St. Paul entirely. To the 12 Brothers – assisted by the novices-, fell on the never-ending task of restoring and modernizing the house, enlarging the classrooms, setting up a recreation room, renewing the chapel etc.

### **New extension**

As if that were not enough, in April 1947 a start was made with the new building, actually an extension. The south wing had to be 12 meters longer to provide space for a guest department with main entrance and for the novitiate. But the new construction stagnated enormously due to a general lack of building materials and money. In the meantime (1948) the space shortage became more acute. Contrary to the decisions of the general chapter, the young Fathers and Brothers still had to wait for their own room. It was not until 1949 that the new wing of the building was completed and the otherwise completely restored main building could be festively opened by the bishop of Roermond.

In that year, the number of Fathers had already exceeded twenty. Practically all were employed in the formation courses. The school had six classes with 80 students for the first time. Two Fathers left for Canada to work at the Mount St. Anne seminary. The (re)building had not come to an end. The basement was partly recreated in a large auditorium, a changing room for the Brothers and showers. The Fathers built and bravely dragged along. Fr. Eduard Luyten at the auditorium, Fr. Carolus van Velzen at the showers, Fr. Remigius (superior), Fr. Suitbertus v. d. Werf (now director of the school) and Fr. Eduard improved the boys' dormitory. Fr. Suitbertus also set up a lottery for the purchase of dormitory curtains, carpeting and new beds. Under the architectural direction of Fr. Martinus v.d. Kolk, the cowshed was completely modernized and equipped with automatic drinking bowls, among other things. After that, Fr. Martinus built a new garden house with greenhouse. Shortly thereafter in 1950 he and

Fr. Benno Vriens left as the first missionaries sent by the Dutch province to South Africa.

### **The last German Mariannahiller confreres**

In these years St. Paul said goodbye to the last German confreres, who had worked on the reconstruction after the war. In 1946 Br. Ignatius Rimmel died, 83 years old. He was one of the pioneers in Mariannahill and very popular. A specialty of his was dentistry and the story goes that in Africa he simply kept the head of the patients between his knees when pulling his molars. In 1951, Br. Canisius Kohl died, who led the administration in the years after the war. In the same year, Br. Roland Michelkens, tractor driver, also died. He succumbed to the surgical removal of grenade splinters. Two German Fathers, Leo Poser and Othman Baumeister, had left St. Paul in 1947 and later went to Canada, and Fr. Herman Arndt, who had been superior and novice master at Paul, left for South Africa in his old age. At about the same time, the Germans Br. Adalbero and Fr. Winfried Hastreiter left for their homeland. In the cemetery of St. Paul, another Mariannahiller and St. Pauler from the first hour is buried: Br. Nivard Streicher. As a skilled architect, he has a lot of the Mariannahiller buildings in Africa on his name. He even received building assignments from the then colonial government. Especially a bridge of his is known as an architectural work of art. In any case, the job earned him an award and free travel throughout South Africa for the rest of his life.

Besides this Br. Nivard Streicher, there was also another Br. Nivard, named Middelhof, a Dutchman who lived in the Mariannahill Monastery in South Africa. The Dutch Nivard Middelhof once visited St. Paul. He was there for five weeks and repaired the cracked bell of the old chapel.

### **Major seminary at 'de Kippenberg'?**

The space shortage was increasing by the year, but there was no money to expand considerably. There were many mouths to fill and the boarding money of the minor seminary and juvenate was far

from sufficient. The most pressing problem in the early fifties was finding shelter for the own Dutch scholasticate, or major seminary formation. There has been a long talk and the mother house Mariannahill Monastery in South-Africa even seems to have had money to build the first settlement of St. Paul in 1911 with chapel and to set up houses elsewhere; could the mother house not pay for establishing the scholasticate on the chicken farm hill? An insider wrote about the resistance that this plan evoked: 'The sector of the farmers, who still loved pig pens and a cowshed above all else, was one hundred per cent against it, which did not come as a surprise.'

After knocking in vain at other major seminaries in the Netherlands, it was decided to transfer the higher studies to Detroit, where the American Mariannahill procura had been established for years. But this American move also did not take place, reportedly because the residence permits were not issued. After another failed attempt to open a house in the Dutch annexed area of Elten at the border with Germany, which fell under the diocese of Münster, the Brothers were finally put on the train to Würzburg, to the Pius-seminary, for which St. Paul had given big financial support before the war.

A few years later, when the Dutch province was finally able to provide the required teaching staff and a house as major seminary, there were no more students ... But in the early fifties one could not even expect that.

### **Beyond the Roobeek**

The aspirant-Brothers or juvenists, left St. Paul first before the clerical seminarians. From now on, they crossed the Roobeek daily to get their formation at the vocational school of the Brothers of Seven Sorrows.

Admittedly, it was only a small jump over that small stream, but still, it meant exchanging an outdated learning system of St. Paul for a recognized and up-to-date vocational training institute.

Meanwhile, in 1951 Fr. Remigius Peeters had begun his third term as house superior. In the same year, the Brothers were ready to install a new central heating system, using the existing old material. The



novitiate got its own refectory and chapel and a Trappist from Tege-  
len, Fr. Victor, made stained glass windows in the refectory corridor.  
But also, the entire chicken farm had to be slaughtered because of an  
infectious disease. Fr. Hermenegild Peeters began his career as a  
novice master, and Fr. Vianney Boeren became prefect of the ju-  
venists. And in that year St Paul was able to send out two missionaries  
again: Br. Arnold Albers, who went on to run a farm in the South  
African Ixopo, and Br. Willibrord Bakker, who became a gardener in  
Mariannahill.

The year 1952 brought a success for the minor seminary of St. Paul:  
the first candidate for the state exam A passed in Amersfoort. A step  
further was on the road to a gymnasium with qualified teachers, who  
would soon deliver full-fledged university candidates. At their own  
major seminary, their own professors would have to teach! In the  
eyes of the boys, the construction of a real football field with real lime  
lines was certainly much more important. And furthermore, the  
modernization continued immediately by home phone and a new car  
depot.

### **Electricity and water**

In 1953, a frequent interruption of the electricity came to an end:  
the sudden failure of the power, for example in the winter under  
the study time of five to seven o'clock in the evening. No nicer sensa-  
tion, no better excuse for an ill-prepared test the next day! But pro-  
gress had to spoil the fun once again: the connection to the provin-  
cial electricity grid was established. Until that day, St. Paul's power  
supply depended on a huge diesel engine, which thundered in the old  
chapel and occasionally refused service.

Now the water supply could also be brought up to standard. In the  
dormitories upstairs in the house, the pressure was often so low that  
you barely got enough water in your sink to wash yourself. In winter  
it was also important to first defrost your rigid frozen washcloth.  
And if there was water, there was sometimes so much rust in it,  
that 'washing' (at about six o'clock in the morning) became a job, of  
which later generations can no longer imagine at all.

But the new power supply made it possible to pass the pumped-up water through new filters and sufficient pressure through the house. The first to benefit from this were the chickens, who received a self-built drinking water installation.

But other than direct basic facilities could gradually receive attention, as evidenced by the arrival of a real organ in the chapel, and of a pond, an aviary and a deer camp in the park.

### **Mission exhibition**

In 1953 Mariannahill-Nederland participated in the general mission exhibition. Looking back, Fr. Vianney Boeren recounts: „There was a condition in the beginning. Each congregation had to fill a stand. We dragged everything we had from Africa. Stuffed beasts, beads and all. It was poor trump card, because for every purchase, for example a piece of velvet for a background, you had to ask for money from the superior. There were three of us who could take care of our exhibition stand.”

With that exhibition they moved from one deanery to another. A lot of people were attracted. Fr. Radboud Kempkes sent the first good slides of the coral islands in Papua New Guinea with stories about life on those islands. Such an island, the size of a football field was Por, where the missionary lived near to a school. Every morning the children from other islands came to the school. After school they had to bring a little sand from the sea on the beach to strengthen the island. „Yes, you told stories like that. I was happy to do it”, Fr. Vianney Boeren remembers.

„Later it all became better and more responsible, when the exhibition was divided into themes. From Africa, for example, you got three stands, one about urbanization, one about animism and one about racial problems. In 1967 or 1968 they stopped with that exhibition.”

The motto with which Mariannahill presented itself at that exhibition was:

‘Better fields, better houses, better hearts.’ That was the motto of one of the most striking Mariannahillers after Franz Pfanner: Fr. Bernard Huss, ordained a priest in Mariannahill in 1900 and died in 1948. With

his views on integrated missionary work and development, he attracted attention throughout southern Africa. He is called the great 'social missionary' in South Africa.

Fr. Bernard Huss understood that the black population needed new, educated leaders and was at the cradle of various colleges, agricultural and vocational training. He wrote books on agricultural development that are still in use, founded the first Catholic black farmers' union in Natal, opened agricultural winter courses, but also did a lot in the cultural field, especially musically. Before the word 'development aid' was invented, this missionary had been busy with it for decades.

### **Moving to Eysden**

In 1953-54, the population of St. Paul kept growing. The house was bursting at the seams. After the move of the major seminary students to Würzburg in 1951, it was now the novitiate's turn to leave the base at St. Paul. At the beginning of 1954 a private house was bought in Eysden, south of Maastricht, a former convent of French Franciscan Sisters.

The old cloister had to be thoroughly restored and rebuilt.

On 9 September, ten major cleric novices and ten Brotherpostulants moved to Eysden under the leadership of Fr. Hermenegild Peeters. In total, around thirty people came to live in this second house of Mariannahill in the Netherlands in the south near de Belgian border. In North Limburg, the Mariannahillers in St. Paul were known as 'the Fathers of Klein Vink', the original name of the estate. In addition, they were often confused with the Fathers of Mill Hill, who also wore a black cassock with a red sash. With the help of professionals, the house was transformed into a comfortable place, where 'the flower of Mariannahill' could flourish in the Netherlands in a quiet village.

In the twenty years that followed, 'Eysden' would have to deal with about 120 novices. Among other things, the novitiate house gained some regional fame – and modest income – with the exploitation of a unique hot spring in a bathhouse. One of the nicest stories from this

island of reflection and tranquility is that of a fire that broke out while the religious community was in the chapel. Local residents alerted the fire brigade who soon mastered the fire. But in the meantime, one of the novices came out of the chapel to ring the angelus. He saw lot of people at the end of the corridor and crowds but did not react properly and stuck to his task of ringing the bell.

## Progress

In 1954, two more Fathers left for South Africa: Nicodemus Kops and Theodor Zeegers. And in parallel with the growing economy that gripped the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, St. Paul became more and more captivated by 'progress'. For example, a model forge was set up in the old chapel. The most modern machines were installed in the 'carpentry shop'. In the former tenant house, the 'painter's shop' and the shoemaking shop also found shelter. On the farm, an installation for electric milking and also in the kitchen beautiful steam boilers were placed and the stainless steel made its appearance.

The classrooms underwent a bit of modernization by installing windows to the hallway and by a thorough painting of the wall. Around St. Paul, impressive lawns appeared after the design of a real landscaper. For the lawn construction, example, St. Paul received a 25,000 subsidy from the government. And anyone who studied at St. Paul in the fifties will remember massive activities like the potato harvesting. Three school days were sacrificed to this in September. They were the only affordable workers in the ninety fifties. With the help of gifts of things as a billiard table or a new radio in the recreation room could be acquired.

By the way, working was an indispensable part of the St. Paul upbringing. Who will forget about picking beans together with Br. Engelhard? Not to mention the countless household chores, which had to be refurbished according to schedule, from scrubbing corridors and stairwells to cleaning toilets or 40 to 50 sinks in winter with ice-cold water. Among the fun jobs was the weekly changing role of 'table servant', who offered the advantage that you had to eat after dinner

and then sometimes got something extra from Br. Alfons, the cook. A very responsible job was the shopping service to Arcen. Every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon two boys went to Arcen with a pony cart to deliver a load of packages with dirty laundry at the post office and to pick up a load of postal packages with clean laundry with a letter-and-candy-from-home. Near the Sinterklaas days you even had to take a real horse and a big cart! 1954 was another milestone: in October Fr. Remigius Peeters was appointed provincial superior of the now completely independent Dutch province. Until then, the province had been governed from afar by the Superior General.

### **Lots of music for the future**

1955: twenty years after the start of the Dutch mission seminary. In the chronicles this year it says: 'Vivat, floreat, crescat' (It lives, blooms and grows.) In Eysden, an old Capuchin monastery was found and still in use as a residence for South Moluccans or Ambonese after the independence of Indonesia from the Netherlands, the future scholasticate? The upcoming philosophy and theology professors would soon come from the Rome, and a few years later from the Nijmegen University. Fratres Paulus Lute, Jozef Duijkers and Ambrosius Lenssen would be ordained priests in a few months and then start their doctoral studies in Nijmegen. And St. Paul itself finally buzzed like a beehive of promising new Mariannahiller generations! The house in Eysden, a little more than a stone's throw from the novitiate, was purchased in the summer of '55. It also got a name: St. Jan, and a superior: Fr. Suitbertus van de Werf. He had been relieved a year earlier, in 1954, as director of the school by Fr. Gerardus Hovens. Meanwhile, Fr. Vianney Boeren had become Superior of St. Paul.

In this year, 1955, there was a first step towards what would play a leading role in the last days of the building of St. Paul, some 20 years later: providing accommodation to holidaymakers. In the weeks when the school youth celebrated the big holiday at home, St. Paul received groups of nature and relaxation seekers from France, West

Germany and their own country. Reason: some reduction in the financial burden. Another additional income of a much more remarkable character was a year later, in 1956, the production of no less than 10,000 crates for a chocolate factory. A cat in distress makes crazy jumps! A cave cellar space had been recreated for weeks in a noisy carpentry hall, where many a younger and older St. Paul resident has beaten himself on his thumb.

But even the enterprise did not sit still. The chicken farm was expanded, and the pigsty modernized. The latter turned out to be at such a high level that even a Danish agricultural delegation came to take a closer look.

The culture received unprecedented attention in 1956 – the interest of the new house superior will not have been strange to that. Two young artists made a number of wall paintings in different rooms of the school, and students of the Maastricht drama academy brought relaxation to a high level several times.

Besides, no matter how prosaic and pragmatic the struggle for existence on St. Paul was, the Dutch Mariannahillers were certainly not ‘cultural barbarians’. The amateur theatre was at a decent level and the choral singing was not of the air either. Fr. Clemens de Man played a large part in both. Examples of folk culture were undoubtedly the annual Sinterklaas performances, often delights of cabaret fun.

### **A new Mariannahill mission area in Papua New Guinea**

In 1956, a kind of propaganda team was also formed. It was only after the war that propaganda had actually taken off. (Until 1936 there was the propaganda ban for the Netherlands of the bishop of Roermond. And a few years later, war broke out.) In addition to Br. Gerardus Vermeulen, who had been ‘on the road’ for several years, more Brothers and also Fratres started to travel through the country. In the early sixties, a total of ten men even worked in propaganda.

In addition to the permanent presence at the general mission exhibition, there was the magazine ‘Pioniers’, which started fairly soon after the war, which had reached a circulation of 13,000 in 1956. In the

years that followed, another 1,000 subscribers joined in 1967. Mariannahill stood in front of the congregational group, together with twenty other missionary orders and congregations, to 'hand in' its own magazine for a joint monthly magazine on missionary and development matters: SAMEN (Together). Mariannahill was still one of the participants in the Joint Mission Publicity Foundation, which published the magazine-currently with a circulation of 50,000.

In the meantime, the provincial superior had also left St. Paul and settled in Eysden. St. Paul was packed to the brims in 1956/'57 with 17 Fratres, 35 Brothers, 1 postulant, 75 juvenists and 85 minor-seminarians, together 213 people. In the novitiate house in Eysden lived 4 Patres and 6 Brothers, 5 Frater- and 15 Brother-novices. And in German and Switzerland, respectively in Würzburg and Brig, studied 32 Fratres. The Dutch province could look forward to a bright future. A year later (1958) the province succeeded in sending no less than 5 priests and 3 Brothers to what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The growing apartheid problems with regard to South Africa blocked the applications for permits of Dutch missionaries who were waiting endlessly to enter the country.

In order to find a way to send waiting missionaries to a mission area, the Dutch province submitted an official request for a new destination. The then Superior General Fr. Ferdinand Holzner passed this request on to Rome and Pope John XXIII assigned the area of the Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea with Lae as capital of a new diocese to the Mariannahillers in June 1959. Fr. Renatus Hafmans was recalled from Rhodesia and left for New Guinea in March 1960, together with the Fathers Kempkes, Mulderink and Van Lieshout. Fr. Harry van Lieshout would be consecrated bishop of Lae six years later: the first Dutch Mariannahiller bishop and the youngest (35 years) in the world.

The deployment of the people to New Guinea has been done much more systematically than the previous deployments to Africa. The first four travelled for a year to all kinds of mission posts of other congregations and were able to make useful observations, before arriving in their assigned area around Lae. In that year they learned a lot, including how not to do it, and laid the foundation for a new way

of church building, not so much for the people, but together with the people.

### **Transfer to Mook and Venray**

A new very drastic exodus from St. Paul took place in 1959. Since the diploma of the minor-seminary at St. Paul did officially not mean anything. A recognized gymnasium in the immediate vicinity could not be found and, moreover, there was the constant space shortage on St. Paul himself. The gymnasium of the Passionist Fathers in Mook seemed to offer a solution. There, as expected, a recognition could come at any moment and in the perspective of this a villa in Mook was purchased. 'Eldorado' was the name of the house, but that did not apply to the housing of the boys. They were housed in barracks behind the villa. After all, it would only be temporary.

And so, in September 1959, the 'students', as they were always called on St. Paul, started their daily study with the Passionists on the Rijksweg in Mook. But 'Mook' was a big disappointment. The recognition of the gymnasium of the Passionists was not yet given. Fortunately, when it became clear, a new construction had not yet started.

Nevertheless, Mariannahill was again fairly quickly around the table with a builder, but this time in Venray. There, about 20 km from St. Paul, the recognized gymnasium of the Franciscans offered a solution. A new house had to be built for the St. Paul seminarians. Construction began in early 1962, after numerous construction meetings had been cut from the original drawings.

The first stone read: 'In nomine Domini' (In God's name). With a debt of almost 1 million guilders, the new 'Mission Seminary Mariannahill' was completed and in November 1962 the boys were able to move into a half-finished house. There were forty of them. Finally, a recognized education plus a good housing in a CMM owned mission seminary was a positive development. But at St. Paul, the educational facilities and the quality of life for the Brother-candidates deteriorated despite the good relations with the school of the neighbors, the Brothers of the Seven Sorrows.



Why not also to Venray? That question came up in 1965. All the schools were there, and the house still had enough space. And indeed in 1967 the Brother formation also moved to Venray. The house there was full at the time, but St. Paul was almost empty.

### **Celebration of 50 years St. Paul**

We have to go back to the beginning of the sixties. In 1961, most of the Mariannahillers had little idea of which thunderclouds would soon gather over their enterprise – and in the hearts of many a confrere. Just as few people in church and in society as a whole suspected how tumultuous, confusing and in an atmosphere full of crisis during those sixties would end. However, there was still a reason for a celebration in 1961. After all, St. Paul existed for 50 years. And what had not been achieved since that first uncertain and poor beginning on 1 May 1911? In his speech on this occasion, Fr. Gabriel Stikkelbroeck expressed the feelings of practically every Dutch Mariannahiller, feelings of unease and even disgust, in the first years after the war, of everything that was German.

„We have moved away as Mariannahill from the paternal home of the Trappists in South Africa but... and we (Dutch Mariannahillers) are still coming of age very soon, an artificially accelerated growth perhaps! That we were considered adults is evident from the fact that we have recently managed our own mission area in Australian New Guinea, where nine of our confreres now work,“ the speaker said. He called the Mariannahillers ‘emigrants’ and did not even mean as moving missionaries, but their origin and departure (as a congregation) from the Trappist order. ‘All emigrants are tempted to idealise their country of origin. We do too sometimes. For example, the tendency in the congregation to cherish the traditional monastic forms more than to formulate an intelligible message for the world.’ We are just a small corner of the church. We will only exist as long as the church needs us and no longer. God forgive that we will never expend our energy in a struggle for things that are over. A rule, an order and a congregation are also culturally and historically determinate and can lose their meaning if they do not grow with them.”

And he recalled Abbot Franz's words: 'Exi de terra tua', Leave your country. Those words, once spoken to Abraham we should use as a guide, in the certainty that every country, including that of tomorrow, is God's land. This is where, albeit carefully and beautifully packaged, for the firsttime open criticism of the way the congregation developed: *from* the world instead of *towards* the world. Just at a time when Pope John XIII was throwing open the doors and windows of a musty-smelling church.

### Tensions

The tension between these two movements was perhaps felt most strongly by the seminarians in Würzburg. There, the contradictions between contemporary insights, which took an increasingly natural place at the Würzburg university, and the rigid spirit that tried to maintain itself at the Pius-seminary itself, became increasingly irreconcilable. There, behind the study table of many a student – so to speak – Vaticanum I and Vatican II collided, while the latter was in full swing. It became too much for several of them. From 1960 onwards, fewer fratres left for Würzburg every year because fewer and fewer novices entered in Eysden.

One of the Fathers, at that time novice master in Eysden, Fr. Hermenegild Peeters, described the sixties, from his own view of things, as follows: „The progressive storm, which would drive the stale air out of the bastions that had been closed for too long, ripped doors and windows of the mission house St. Paul so wide open that no one was able to close them again at the right time. Anything that even seemed to be traditional was referred to the waste room. Not only in a figurative sense, but also literally, a lot went for the axe, with which many a contemporary antique dealer, happy with an old coffee grinder, would have been in the clouds. The spirit of the Council rolled over the world like a tidal wave. The People of God of St. Paul also enthusiastically joined the church along the way. For many, this spiritual march was very beneficial. Along the way he made discoveries and, of which he could only have dreamed.”

The church had become more global than ever before, and the mission area was no longer exclusively characterized by the difference in skin color or distance. The interest in the traditional missionary faded. The missionary, for his part, far from the motherland, felt abandoned and his sense of growing uncertainty also affected the mood in his former mission house. Also, in St. Paul, the consequences of the tensions were noticeable. Limply hung the cord of the chapel bell, now that the common prayer was no longer up to date. Perhaps it had been revered for too long on fixed formulations and for many the morning meditation had been no more than a continuation of the aborted night's sleep.

### Brazil

It is not for nothing that the novice master, Fr. H. Peeters, described the effect of the progressive storm on St. Paul in a rather relativizing tune.



*Fr. Anthony Lute in one of the basic communities in Vitoria / Brazil († 1999)*

After all, many young and older Mariannahillers made often shocking discoveries, great uncertainties and drastic decisions for their future

lives, which were forced upon them. The Dutch do not express themselves easily about this. As men among companions, you make a joke about it. But it is clear that the spirit of the council fathers was really the spirit of looking for many new ways, inside or outside the familiar monastery walls.

One of these new roads led to Brazil, where in 1965 a group of Dutch Mariannahillers left under the leadership of Fr. Anthony (Paulus) Lute. They ended up in the slums of the coastal city of Vitoria, a new mission area for the Dutch province. Unfortunately, Fr. Anthony Lute was the only one of the Dutch confreres who lasted. He remained a full member of the reborn church of Brazil; the church of the grassroots communities, of the land conflicts with the rich landowners, the church that increasingly chooses for the poor of this world.

Working there was certainly an important attempt of renewal by the Dutch province. But the attempt failed. 'Brazil' could not be a source of inspiration and stimulus for a new generation of Dutch Mariannahillers. Probably the initiative was taken too hastily and was poorly prepared. But perhaps the crisis in church and society was just too deep to be able to pay attention to something other than one's own problems, both on St. Paul and in Venray, Eysden or Mook.

### **Collaboration attempts**

There are two more remarkable attempts at innovation from the midsixties. These concerned the formation courses. The first was an attempt to set up a joint formation with various other missionary congregations in the Netherlands. It has remained an attempt. The enthusiasm among potential partners turned out to be too low. This was followed by the decision already discussed above to move also the Brother formation to Venray.

But before that, another innovation attempt: to set up a combined minor seminary program in the Netherlands. The then rector of the mission seminary in Venray, Fr. Gerard Willemse, together with Fr. Frans Tausch, had many conversations to get other missionary congregations enthusiastic about the idea of, for example, six or four

joint regional minor seminars in the Netherlands. Although the interest in this plan was greater than when it came to a joint higher formation, the discussions were so slow that at the end nothing came to realization. In the meantime, a General chapter was held in Würzburg in 1967. There the Dutch provincial Fr. Jozef Duijkers was elected as a member of the general council. Fr. Frans Tausch became his successor as provincial superior and rector in Venray and Fr. Gerard Willemse became superior of St. already been decided to sell the houses in Eysden, the novitiate house and the never used St. Jan, and El Dorado in Mook which had become a provincial house after the students left in 1963. In March 1968, the most difficult decision was made: stop the entire minor seminary and Brother formation in Venray.

### **No staff**

In the meantime, Venray was the only house in the province that was still full. Sixteen years later, Fr. Gerard Willemse said: 'We did not stop because we had no boys, but for a number of other reasons. Firstly, we had no staff to properly guide the students. Look, you used to have 80 or 100 boys and two Fathers took care of them. But there was also a change in the views about the education. In Venray we started working with groups of 12 or 13 boys plus a group leader. There were too few of us, so that more and more group leaders had to be attracted from outside. But that costed a lot of money and we were nowhere financially anyway. The Dutch province was horribly in debt and, for example, could not meet its obligations towards its own people at all. There was no money for social services. The second reason to stop was that the results were not good. From Venray only a few students entered the novitiate, but in the end they all left. I was rector of the seminary from 1961 to the end of 1967 and from all those years one became a priest (Ton Bakker). Well, that was clear, wasn't it?' And you can't say that Mariannahill-Netherlands hadn't done its best to attract young blood. As described earlier, in the early sixties there were no less than ten men working in propaganda. But that lasted until about 1964.

A third reason for the closure of 'Venray' as above mentioned was the far too slow progress of the discussions about cooperation with other congregations on formation. In fact, this was a last attempt to draw candidates (or 'vocations' as they said) in the old way.

The last, but not the least important reason was that the overpriced courses, which moreover no longer produced results, prevented too many of their own people to be sent as missionaries to our mission territories. The latter was so important, because it also gave the final closure of 'Venray', which in itself can be admitted as a failure, a very positive turn. Anyone who wanted to, could now go to one of the mission areas and also some money could be gained from the sale of our properties. But that was not immediately clear to everyone. The people from the various – sold – houses grouped together in one house, the house where it had all started and that had now again become the only house in the Netherlands: St. Paul.

### **Panic situation**

The decision to close 'Venray' had far-reaching consequences. It basically meant a kind of time bomb under the Dutch province. The then house superior, Fr. Gerard Willemse: „The end of the formation means, certainly for the feeling in those days: Well it is over. The objective of the community of St. Paul had become completely unclear. Because all those Fathers and Brothers had always stayed here – often had to – because of education and formation.”

The current (1982) provincial superior, Fr. Vianney Boeren, puts it his way: „The proceeds of the agriculture had always been for the formation of new members. The Brothers knew: if I milk the cows here, feed the pigs, bring in the harvest or whatever, I do it – even if indirectly – for the missionary ideal, so that those boys can later leave as missionaries. That ideal now dropped. They all felt, more or less consciously, floating a bit”. As already mentioned, fortunately for a number of people, the Dutch province in those years 1967-68 gave everyone who wanted and could, the opportunity to work in Africa, New Guinea or Brazil. At that time, ten more people left as missionaries.

For those left behind, Fr. Gerard Willemse describes the situation as a panic situation. „Everybody sought his own way and followed his private interests. They started messing around for themselves. Some found a new task, in parishes for example. A number of them, especially young people, resigned. Yes, it was a panic situation.”

In the words of Fr. Hermenegild Peeters, whose ‘memories’ were quoted earlier: ‘... It was getting colder day by day in the increasingly crumbling St. Paul. The younger generation had largely left or gone to the mission. Older people looked for work elsewhere, in the Dutch church province or in Germany. How could a shrinking community give new impulses to an enterprise that was threatened by short circuits in every nook and cranny? ... One could wander through the house and almost accidentally meet someone. The workshops began to look like abandoned factory buildings, and the fields were deserted had never been so passive. Even more worried was the ever-growing mountain of debt and the care for elderly and sick confreres.

### **Missionary profile**

During an audit of St. Paul in the years 1967-68 it had already become clear that only the livestock farm could remain afloat, if, as in Venray, the work would be done by paid forces. But that was precisely the problem.

As long as wages did not have to be paid for the work, St. Paul could have continued to run all these years. Now there were simply no more men available. Even though the cowshed had just been modernized, the enterprise would no longer be able to afford enough to keep St. Paul and its residents alive. This could mean anything to the confreres in New Guinea, Africa and Brazil. However, no one wanted to sell either. After all, what kind of future did the Mariannahillers still have here?

‘The first thing,’ said Fr. Gerard Willemse, ‘that we said as a board was: What purpose do we still have as a group? And we have stated very clearly: our first goal here is to be missionary. That

means: the support of our missionaries is a priority. That was one. But the other thing was: How can we be missionary with only the mission house, the enterprise buildings and 180 hectares of land, but almost no more personnel to do the work it? Moreover, the seminary and the enterprises could not have been realized without many contributions from the Catholic Netherlands. That's why we didn't see anything in sales. At the very least, all this should be given a social objective, so that we would stay close to the intentions of all those givers.' But how?

### **Disabled**

There was one period in the year when the largely abandoned St. Paul was buzzing with life and pleasure. That was the holiday season, in which many dozens of disabled people experienced the weeks of their lives with the 'Zonnebloem' (Sunflower), a Red Cross holiday organization for disabled.

Many other groups also came, and more and more campers pitched their tents near St. Paul. That is why it was not surprising that, when Fr. Frans Tausch came into contact with Arie Verberk in 1968, it immediately clicked between both. Arie had been looking for an old monastery or something similar where healthy and sick people could be able to have a holiday together. St. Paul had the space and an ideal natural environment. From then on it went smoothly. In 1969 a foundation had already been set up, with Frans Tausch as chairman. There were great plans on paper for a recreation center, where the sick and healthy, young and old, mentally and physically disabled and their family members, caretakers and friends, could celebrate holidays. For this purpose, St. Paul would have to be thoroughly renovated and adapted.

Fr. Gerard Willemse: 'But when we brought in craftsmen, it turned out that the old St. Paul could not be rebuilt. It sounds incredible, but it wasn't strong enough. That is, the floors were too weak. Secondly, the windows were way too high everywhere. If you wanted to look outside, you had to stand. Not an ideal living space for the severely handicapped. And thirdly: renovation would be more expensive than



demolishing and building something new'. Road plan! That was at the end of 1968. And with this it was already clear, what became official a year and a half later, in 1970: St. Paul would have to be demolished.

But first the recreation project had to get off the ground. Contacts followed with the associations of and for the disabled and with the Ministry of Social Affairs. There was a firm expectation that instead of the ungovernable St. Paul, special pavilions could be built for prescribed holidays of severely physically disabled and sick people, which would be paid for under the AWBZ. But the private investment would become so high that one had to forget that idea for the time being.

The creation of a separate foundation 'Het Veldkamp', in which the recreation company had to be housed, was a very clear choice. The house community of St. Paul and Mariannahill-Nederland were not allowed to merge into the holiday project and thus run the risk of losing their own face in no time. The foundation gave a new purpose to part of the grounds of St. Paul. Conditions were that the land had to be used for 'integrated recreation' and that any positive balances had to benefit projects in the Third World. This definitively dealt with what had determined the face of St. Paul to a very large extent from the very beginning: the enterprises, especially the farm. Both before and after the Second World War, St. Paul had known a very varied range of enterprises in accordance with the Benedictine tradition, to be as self-sufficient as possible as a religious community.

In the first place there was the agricultural enterprise that every year cultivated dozens of hectares with grain, sugar and fodder beets, potatoes, corn and even once made room for a huge plot of strawberries, that yielded a lot. Livestock farming brought it to impressive numbers of animals in several years. In different peak years there were 400 pigs, 80 cows, 30 horses, thousands of chickens. The 'chicken hill' also housed a few hundred Christmas turkeys for a few years. Furthermore, the horticultural farm with some orchards, vegetable greenhouse and bee huts, and (in the tenant house) the carpentry shop, painter's shop, the forge, a small bookbindery, and – until

1953 – the power station. Indoors there were the tailoring, laundry, linen and ironing room, kitchen, bakery (the flour came from the own grain mill), butcher's shop. Before the war, St. Paul even had its own small printing house and a tannery.

In 1969, the new Klein Vink Foundation started with the construction of a campsite on the spot where once thousands of chickens scurried and cackled. A year or so earlier, this had already been initiated, when a number of chicken coops had been converted into holiday houses, which were given nameplates such as 'Casa mia' and 'Huize Tevreden'.

In the years that followed, where until then beets, corn or potatoes grew, no less than 220 holiday bungalows arose, fully adapted to habitation by wheelchair users and other disabled people. Around the bungalows, extensive lawns, greenery, hills and ponds were laid out. The hayloft became a sports loft, the granary attic became a hall which was also used as church on the weekends, the cow shed became a meeting hall, the milking room a supermarket, the horse stables a kitchen and the pigsty turned into a restaurant.

In the old (first) St. Paul, the enterprises made way for a café, and later a reception area, offices, a nursery and even a kidney dialysis center.

Brother Barthel, could not have imagined this in his wildest dreams. And in May 1975, Mrs. R. van Soest-Jansbeeken, mayor of Arcen, came to open a beautiful indoor swimming pool, which was placed on the spot where the former field barn and wagon shed stood.

### **In the Maas**

With this pool, a 62-year-old St. Pauler dream came true. The first inhabitants, who had just come here from Africa, had reserved the basement of an entire wing for it in their construction drawings, just as they had planned bowling alleys and tennis courts. But the First World War was the end of these plans.

Nevertheless, a few years after the war, a report appears in the chronicles about construction plans for a swimming pool at the Roobeek. Apparently not everyone was equally enthusiastic about the idea, be-

cause there were quite a lot of meetings about it. 'People' feared that swimming would disturb the religious rhythm. This appears, says Fr. Peeters, who had discovered this in the chronicles, 'the reason why no further mention has been made of it and the water has given way to the stricter religious observation'. But the swimmers managed to find their water, according to fragmentary reports about the various dives that the first St. Paulers 'between Maas and Rhine' have taken in various basins. Just before the Second World War, the Witte Berg in Arcen was a refuge for the stubborn water rats and during the war years the Roobeek was used for some time for swimming. At St. Paul, the plan for a swimming pool in the basement must have been suggested, but because of the immense costs, it was never seriously discussed. However, at that time the nearby estate De Hamert made a private piece of swimming water in the Maas available, where several vintages of youth still enjoyed swimming despite the thick layer of gray river clay blubber. In the course of the fifty years, the neighbors, the Brothers of nearby St. Joseph Technical School built a beautiful outdoor swimming pool, which St. Paul – albeit at set hours – gratefully made use of.

In 1975 a modern indoor hot water bath was built. Because of the special facilities for the disabled, it became extra expensive and still weighs disproportionately heavily on the exploitation of Klein Vink.

### **Recreation for everyone**

'Look, we call it 'integrated recreation', what we have to offer here at Klein Vink. That means: holiday accommodation for everyone, but with a special place for the disabled. We create here the possibility that people meet each other, the healthy and the disabled. But everything in complete freedom. Nothing is prescribed, everyone has their privacy'.

Arie Verberk, director of the Klein Vink foundation from the beginning, does not tire of promoting his life's work. In 1968 he gave up his job at the social service in Gemert to give his strength to the construction of Klein Vink. Time and again he emphasizes the unique character of this recreation center: 'We are a company here,

trying to make the economy subservient to the people. The set-up must be economically justified but is nevertheless aimed at the objective of the foundation.’

In addition to integrated holidays, this objective also included that any surplus balances were intended for the Third World. This was laid down in the articles of the association of the foundation. And thanks to the work of the foundation, Mariannahill has been able to do more for the missionaries and their work in Africa and Papua New Guinea in the last ten years than in all those years before.

For Arie Verberk, too, the care for St. Paul and his residents appears from the outset to have been at least as important a motivation as his involvement with the disabled fellow man. ‘Many Mariannahillers were skeptical in the beginning. But by participating, they started to see a common goal in their lives again and they found a new security together. We would have fallen short if we had not been able to achieve that security and meeting place for the Dutch Mariannahillers.’

Indicative of the will to continue to maintain the bond with Mariannahill is the name change in 1982 of the Stichting Het Veldkamp into: Franz Pfanner Stichting. ‘Klein Vink’ employs about thirty people. Some of them are religious of St. Paul, some are people from the area and another part are residents of the Family Replacement Home. That has grown out of the former care of the less mentally gifted. They belonged to the St. Paul community. Several Brothers have given much care and time to these people. Later the Family Replacement Home – housed in a new housing – fell under a separate foundation. Arie Verberk was proud that, as he said, ‘Klein Vink has been built together with the religious and the residents of the Family Replacement Home, as a starting point for the way in which you have to do things. But it’s a task you’re never done with,’ he said.

### **New field of activity**

The vicissitudes of the community on St. Paul are a very different story. Until 1969, St. Paul and its enterprises could not be thought of in isolation. Logical, because life on St. Paul literally depended on all

that work, which mainly the Brothers took care of. With the combining of the land and the enterprise buildings in a separate foundation, all activity suddenly became separate from St. Paul. And that was the intention: After all, the community at St. Paul had to focus on its role as a missionary agency. The confreres in the Third World, or in the mission, and their work became the main focus of the Dutch Mariannahillers. Their activities were to remain missionary activities.

That did not alter the fact that very friendly and close contacts grew between Mariannahill and the foundation, after many initially had the necessary difficulty with the 'wild planning'. When the foundation was created, every Mariannahiller, who saw the end of 'his' business, or profession, sealed, was free to choose a new field of work. There was no obligation to work in the recreation enterprise. But it would come as no surprise to anyone that several Brothers, who had lost their old 'job', joined the foundation to have work in the office, in the supermarket or otherwise.

By the way, how were all these stormy developments elsewhere in the Mariannahill congregation appreciated especially by the central government in Rome? After all, it was not nothing that the spiritual formation house St. Paul – once even the only one in Europe – was recreated in a worldly holiday resort. The general council had been very disappointed by the decision in 1968 to stop the formation work. On the other hand, the ideas of giving the area a recreational destination were gradually approached positively in Rome, in particular because of the spacious place it reserved for the disabled people. The general council was so positive that in 1972 the Superior General asked the Dutch provincial why the construction of the pavilions for the disabled had not yet started? The congregation wanted to contribute financially, he said. The Netherlands did not respond to this, because according to the entire set-up, Mariannahill as a congregation was not allowed to become involved in the recreation project financially and /or commercially. But nevertheless, the warm interest of the general administration was of course pleasant.

## 1974 THE THIRD ST. PAUL

And so, in the early seventies the cows, pigs and chickens had made way for a modern recreation park with children playing, fathers and mothers bathing and wheelchair users enjoying nature. The land and the enterprise buildings had been given an excellent destination. But how did the inhabitants of St. Paul fare?

When it was clear that the mission house could not be rebuilt and therefore could not be of any use to the recreation business, it did not take long before everyone understood that St. Paul had to go under the demolition hammer. But that also meant: building something new, smaller and more tailored to the new objective: missionary practice.

On the football field, near the cemetery, 'Maria grotto' and former volley field, the first shovel was put in the ground in September 1973, and on May 1, 1974 it could be officially opened: the third St. Paul. A simple, but stylish building in pavilion form. All in low-rise buildings, because climbing stairs would only become more difficult for most Mariannahillers in the near future. The pavilions, which originally together contained thirty rooms, were connected to each other and ended up on the beautifully situated community spaces. And all that lied in a corner of nature, which has become rarities in our regions. Rightly so, as the chronicler says: a house „where both the workers of the third and those of the ninth hour can feel at home.“ The highlight was a tropical courtyard, an apparent nod to returning missionaries with homesickness. Unfortunately, this part of the tropics would have to be demolished a few years later due to damage to the building.

On the day of the move, „the sky cried,“ says the chronicler. But not the residents. Yet strange, he continues, 'after so much emotional resistance in the past'.

On May 1, 1974, the solemn consecration of new St. Paul took place 111, 63 years after the start in St. Paul and 61 years after the opening of St. Paul II in 1912-14. For the opening ceremony, the Superior General, Fr. Pius Rudloff, had come over. By the way, everyone was

there. Almost all so-called ‘extranei’, the Mariannahillers ‘outside the walls’, working elsewhere in the Netherlands or across the German border. But there was also, for example, a strong German delegation. including Fr. Liborius Reuss, who had been director of the school and superior at St. Paul from 1938 until the war years and had not yet forgotten his Dutch.



*The new Chapel of St. Paul III built some years later*

### **More anniversaries**

While in that spring of 1974 the approximately 20 remaining St. Paulers tried to find their way in the new house, the silence in the old St. Paul had become almost complete. However, the kitchen annex butcher's shop, etc. still functioned for some time, and in the weeks after the move alone, the chronicles reported the visit of 250 elderly people from Gemert, of various groups of disabled people and a meeting of pastoral workers. Office, meeting room, the for-

mer chapel (only in use on Sundays), library and archive were carefully closed.

In the meantime, more and more St. Paulers had become aware of their disappearing years of youthsomeness. Brothers had moved to the hospital, Fr. Tausch, for example, and the Brothers Athanasius, Henricus and later Engelhard. There was another remarkably recurring, but more joyful, phenomenon, which indicated how the years were going to count: every few months a silver professional or priestly jubilee was celebrated during this period. Br. Engelhard even celebrated his 40th anniversary of his profession in the summer of 1975 with many families from the Heimat. In addition to some home, garden and kitchen news, the chronicle about this period mentions the establishment of the Working Group Papua New Guinea, which was closely linked to Mariannahill, which in the following years would do much important work for a better image of and understanding of this young country and the role of the church there. But the chronicle also reported the ban on having private television sets in the rooms. The community, after so many years of crisis, had become a fragile but all the more feeling at home as a family.

### **Decay of the old building**

While the new St. Paul began to get something familiar, also for missionaries on home leave, the old St. Paul fell more and more into disrepair.

Not only time did its job, but also several holidaymakers, who continued to populate the house in groups from time to time, had an important part in this. The walls were chalked, doors were forced or kicked in, statues and paintings were destroyed and stolen, or let's say: taken home as souvenirs.

At one point they discovered the theft of a station of the woodcut Stations of the Cross from the chapel. Before it ended up in the chapel in 1947, this Stations of the Cross had hung in the forest in previous decades. Big alarm! Until it turned out that Fr. Vianney was the perpetrator. Out of concern that the looting of St. Paul would cause too much damage, he had the theft simulated. Promptly, the



Stations of the Cross were brought to safety in the new house. And in 1978, the inevitable happened. The old St. Paul was demolished.

### **Feeling at home**

Of the panic situation, which dominated St. Paul in the sixties, early seventies, there is little to notice in 2022. As early as 1979, by the way, the Dutch provincial could say in his report to the general chapter: ‘The storm, about which I spoke at the previous general chapter in 1973, has subsided’. Of course, people have gotten older. The average age on St. Paul now hovers at that time around ninety years. But more has happened. Fr. Willemse said once: „When I became superior at St. Paul at the end of 1967 I said: The only thing that I think should happen at the new St. Paul is that the people who are there will feel at home. That they live, can breathe, and don’t feel trapped. Because I think it is especially important that the group gets that feeling here, before perhaps missionaries from Africa and Papua New Guinea come back. So, just make a home, that’s all I needed for the time being. Well, at least we’ve achieved that. Everyone feels at home here in its own way.

The evidence for this also comes from the other side. From Papua New Guinea, for example. The men there did not have it easy in those years, say 1968 to 75, because they did not understand the whole situation in the Netherlands. They thought: They’re just breaking down there. And when they came here on holiday, they were completely discouraged and actually happy when they could leave again. But when one of them was on holiday a few months ago, he once said one evening: ‘Now I know where I’m going, if I have to go back to the Netherlands: just to St. Paul. I will feel quite at home here and there is also plenty of work.’ Look, that’s the point. If you’re talking about St. Paul as a missionary process. then I say: It succeeds.”

### **Tough conversations**

Fr. Boeren, provincial superior and at the same time parish priest in nearby Herungen, Germany, a man who has experienced the

province from the beginning, said: „The bond with our missionaries has never been as strong as it is now. They all feel: there is a home here. In the past, this was not the case. Then they were also not insured and so on. Now the health and AOW premium are paid for them. In addition, we can now provide more financial support to our mission areas than was ever the case in the past. That all comes from the proceeds of Klein Vink. „The missionaries say themselves.“ Fr. Gerard Willemse added: „When I come from Papua New Guinea to St. Paul now, I can talk to people about my work. They care. In the past, no dog was really interested in their stories. Because everyone was working on their own business. Jan talked about the pigs and Piet about the cows. And that missionary was sitting there. Perhaps since those enterprises, with their business concerns, are now out of the door, you get much more openness to what is going on in the mission areas. You can even hear spicy conversations now. And we notice here that there is a difference between missionaries from different countries, South Africa or Zimbabwe or from Papua New Guinea.”

That’s not surprising. First of all, there is the great scandal of racial discrimination under the apartheid regime in South Africa, which places working there under its own tensions. Furthermore, at Mariannahill in Africa, the missionary traditional methods are more important than in Papua New Guinea, where the Dutch could practically start new in 1960. They could more easily connect with the new thoughts about church building and with the aim of having the people there take over the work as soon as possible, according to their own culture. An important difference was also that the people in South Africa were still fully counting on ‘Nachwuchs’, on young successors, while those who started in New Guinea did not count much on more Mariannahillers after them. Moreover, Mariannahill was (and is) in South Africa with large possessions. And possession makes conservative, that’s inevitable. In Papua New Guinea Mariannahill owns nothing at all.

Be that as it may, highlights on St. Paul have become the ‘Africa-and New Guinea-days’, where missionaries, family members, ‘supporters’ and St. Paulers have become increasingly close to each other in recent

years. The Working Group Papua New Guinea in particular has had the opportunity to give substance to the role of St. Paul as a 'home front' on such days of meeting another with Missionaries on leave. Several members of the working group have worked in Papua New Guinea themselves, which of course has made the ties strong.

St. Paul became a meeting place and home for the missionaries. But there was is more. Every summer, thousands of holidaymakers settled down at the campsite and in the bungalows of Klein Vink. In the holiday months, around 3000 people are permanently bivouacking on the site. „And as a religious community, you can't afford to stay away. We have a pastoral responsibility here', said Superior Gerard Willemse. „The church must be here. Look, of course, we sometimes have a conversation with some holiday guest. But more can be done.”

### **Mission also happens here**

There were serious plans to build a new chapel for the residents of St. Paul and for the holiday guests of Klein Vink. Fr. Willemse said about this: 'Everyone is enthusiastic about our church building plans, and that is great, but they still have consequences. Firstly, we will then be able to make less money available for the missions in the coming years. Secondly, at St. Paul, I am responsible for pastoral care. But I also don't have eternal life. It could mean that we have to call on the missionaries to, for example, bring a Mariannahill member back to St. Paul for this holiday chaplaincy. And I liked that one of our missionaries who was visiting here said: 'I understand that those 3,000 people here in the summer need pastoral care just as much. I don't see why you can't work as a missionary here too.' That's what he said and that pretty much indicates the change. Mission doesn't just happen far away, in South Africa or Papua New Guinea, but just as well here. But you can't program such discoveries from above. Such things grow.' For the intention of pastoral care of the holidaymakers, a special house was built for the tourist chaplain, where people could meet him.

## 1985 With seventy members

At spring 1985, 20 Mariannahillers, 5 Fathers and 15 Brothers lived in St. Paul. And a woman: Stien de Best. A quarter of a century ago she came to Mook to do the housework, when the priest students in and especially behind Eldorado stored their bivouac. Since then, she had remained loyal to Mariannahill in her own humble way. At the end of 1984, St. Paul celebrated her silver 'jubilee at Mariannahill'. She is buried on the cemetery of St. Paul.

In total, there were still seventy-one Dutch Mariannahillers of whom 43 Fathers and 28 Brothers. There were 13 living as so-called extranei in the Netherlands or elsewhere, 14 working in South Africa, 8 in Zimbabwe and also 8 in Papua New Guinea. Furthermore, some of them in Brazil, the United States, Canada, Rome, Spain and England.

## The spirit of La Trappe

There was still one man alive in 1961, who had experienced St. Paul from the very beginning in 1911: Jan van Dijk. He was 85 years old and lived with his wife in the retirement home of Well. His parents had a horticultural business near Klein Vink and when the Fathers came from Africa, his father, Jan van Dijk Sr., became their advisor and interpreter. Jan Jr. also spent some time studying with the Fathers before 1920. („I picked up the mail for St. Paul many times in Walbeck.“) He didn't last that long with the Fathers in their house. It was too strict for him with those monks. 'Yes, they really were monks. Do you know how the stop of the bus transport at St. Paul was indicated in the transport guide? „Stop Trappist Monastery Arcen?'. Yes, that was the spirit of La Trappe. This lasted a long time at St. Paul.'

With that, this eyewitness of the first hour hits a nail on the head. Until the Second World War, the spirit of La Trappe (as the cradle of the Trappist order in France is called) passed with monastic rigor through the high corridors of St. Paul.

In the constitutions of the congregation it may have been called 'the spirit of the rule of St. Benedict', but it was often too rigid, too literal for many Dutch people – just like Jan van Dijk. In the Dutch prov-

ince, certainly in the 50s, the spirit of the time prevailed: construction and growth were the passwords. Doers were asked, not so much thinkers. They were looking for their own style, but it never became their own spirituality. The question is whether it was possible.

### **The spirit of Abbot Franz**

This book is about Mariannahill in the Netherlands and especially about St. Paul. In fact, in almost three-quarters of a century there were no less than three 'St. Paul's', three buildings. But of course, it was mainly about the St. Paulers, the many hundreds who spent some or many years of their lives there. Everyone came up with an ideal. Some saw that ideal become reality, many saw it die. This life was almost always accompanied by sadness and inner struggle. There has been some struggling in those sleeping cells and rooms up there in the great St. Paul II. And that concerned those who sooner or later left and went their own way. But also, many who stayed, saw an ideal or a piece of ideal slip through their fingers. Many never asked for the work they had to do. And where do you stay with your mission ideal, when you come to understand that it will never become a reality?

Also, as a group they had their dreams, those St. Paulers. That started with the first pioneers who still settled in Trappist cloth in that tenant house and saw their dream of a super-large St. Paul go up in smoke through the First World War. Nazi Germany shattered the second dream – albeit temporarily –: the initial Dutch seminary formation. And another 25 years later, the dream of a thriving, mature province with its own education proved unattainable, because no one wanted to join. Yet there was always that stubbornness, with which Franz Pfanner at the time gave his tired men courage: 'Exi de terra tua'. Go, try it somewhere else. Or in some other way.

### **Find new ways**

The St. Paulers from before the war, but certainly also the Dutch from after the war did this several times. To Papua New Guinea, to Brazil, or closer to home: to Mook, Venray... It didn't always work

out for a long time. But after all, Abbot Franz didn't succeed always either. The last new path they took was when, at the end of the sixties, they put everything on one map, stopped a pointless education, sent everyone who still wanted to enter the Third World, and put everything they owned in land and buildings into a completely new and daring project: The Recreation Park Klein Vink.

The project succeeded, and one can say that the Dutch province, when it seemed to have started its own autumn, continued more than ever with missionary work: in numbers of missionaries, in financial support and in availability as a process. Serving young churches, however different, in Southern Africa, in Papua New Guinea and a little bit in Brazil.

In fact, much of what was done was really in the spirit of its founder, Franz Pfanner, while neither in the congregation nor in the Dutch province much attention has been paid to the figure and the thoughts and writings of Franz Pfanner. A man who in his time himself became so at odds with the spirit of La Trappe because of his faithfulness to the missionary mission of the gospel! Could a spirituality in the spirit of this historical predecessor, his pragmatic and down-to-earth attitude, have inspired Dutch Mariannahillers? Or should we not simply conclude that the Dutch Mariannahillers – more in silence and without wasting many words – also have been moved by his peculiarity of mind and acting, but thoroughly missionary abbot Franz?

F.L.

*Revised text*  
*Jan Landman, 100 years Mariannahill-75 years St. Paul,*  
*Amsterdam 1985*

# THE FATE OF THE MARIANHILL COMMUNITY OF ST. PAUL DURING THE WORL WAR II

*In the year 1944, the invasion of the allied armies on the beach of Normandy initiated the beginning of the end of World War II. What happened to the mission house St. Paul during the years 1940-1945 of the war? Fr. Winfried Hastreiter CMM has left us a comprehensive eyewitness report of 54 pages on this period which was published in the Mariannahill Missionskalender 1947 under the heading 'Holland unter der Zwingherrschafft des braunen Tyrannen'. Some episodes of this period are based on this article of Fr. Winfried as well as personal memories are summarized in this article.*

## **St. Paul at the beginning of WW II**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, the Second World War began in the Netherlands.

This day was also the first milestone in the war chronicle of St. Paul.

From 3.00 in the morning onwards, hell seemed have broken out. Storm commandos of the German army invaded with armoured vehicles from the German border (1 km from St. Paul) into Dutch territory. With a thundering roar they advanced past the mission house over fields and meadows towards the Maas, shooting at the positions of the Dutch defence line along the river. At that early hour in the morning the Mariannahiller community was woken by roaring artillery shooting.

The invaders bombed the town Venlo and the Maas Bridge as the Dutch army exploded trees which were previously charged with dynamite to block the roads to slow down the German advance.

As St. Paul stood in the line of fire, students jumped out of their beds and watched with wide eyes the passing war machinery moving in the direction of Arcen. There was loud shouting throughout the house: „The Germans are coming”. All students were quickly directed to the cellars, no-one thought of school and their studies; their heads were full of war and again war.



*St. Paul – 1913-1949*



*St. Paul extended 1949-1978*

After a couple of hours, the situation calmed down a little and the community resumed the daily routine by assembling in the chapel. But it was difficult to concentrate on prayer; during Mass



heavy explosions were still heard that made the windows rattle and the walls shake, while everybody was anxiously waiting for a possible direct hit by a grenade. By noon, the war machinery had already advanced some 50 km further to the west. After a few days the government had to surrender because Rotterdam had been bombed and therefore the population of other cities had to be saved from further destruction. After four days the whole of the Netherlands was occupied territory. At first, life at St. Paul's was not much affected. The inhabitants had been lucky; on the day of the invasion they found a grenade near the chapel that had not exploded, so, the community had escaped a possible carnage. Also, fortunately, Arcen was not destroyed on that first day. Only a few houses near the Maas were hit.

### **St. Paul confiscated by the German army**

A 'New Order' that was proclaimed soon resulted in major changes in the society. To begin with, religious houses, church institutions like orphanages, old age homes, community buildings, sanatoriums etc, were confiscated. The inhabitants were forced into the street and these buildings were used as army barracks, military institutions, army hospitals, canteens for officers, etc.

The second milestone of St. Paul's chronicle was on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1941.

At 10am SS officers arrived with the order that the house had to be vacated within a few hours. By 16.00 everybody had to have left the building with only as many personal belongings as he was able to carry. All doors of the building were sealed including the library. When afterwards the community needed books for the school, some Fathers managed secretly to put ladders against the windows, break the glass and entered the library to take away what they needed. Some confreres had to stay watch to monitor the movement of the especially appointed military watchman. After the invasion the students were sent home for the time being, while the religious community was accommodated in the old St. Paul building, in the chicken farm and in other suitable facilities in the secondary buildings. Fathers and

Brothers with a German nationality were conscripted for the German army.

Two months later, 240 soldiers of the German Air Force were quartered in St. Paul and filled the building. They had to maintain the enormous search lights that were installed near St. Paul for searching overflying allied bombers at night on their way to the industrial area in Germany; when an airplane was caught by the bright beams of the search lights, it became a target for anti-aircraft guns and jet fighters.

### **St. Paul a children's home**

When in April 1943 the children's home 'Nazareth' in Venlo, run by the Charity Sisters, was confiscated, over 200 children with the Sisters were moved to St. Paul. At that time the building was temporarily not used by the Wehrmacht. The arrival of this big crowd of children brought new life to the place. Compared to their house in the city of Venlo the children felt like being in paradise in the large grounds with lots of woods and fresh air around the house.



*Castle of Blitterswijk dating back to the 16th century under Spanish supremacy*

## Danger from the sky

During the war, squadrons of bombers flew countless times in the night over the area of St. Paul to the industrial Ruhr region, some dozens of miles beyond the German border. This would mean a great danger for Germany if they were not spotted and their arrival reported to the German air defence command at the North Sea coast. When aircraft were spotted, the night sky over St. Paul and Blitterswijck was instantly filled with light from the search lights. As soon as an airplane was seen, the anti-aircraft guns and jet fighters would come into action. When an aircraft was hit, the first thing the air crew did was to drop the bombs instantly before they reached their targets, no matter if inhabitants were on the ground. That was the reason why as soon as the airplanes began to approach, the sirens started wailing to alarm the citizens so that they could flee into secure places as soon as possible. The cellars of the castle in Blitterswijck provided a relatively safe place of protection for the community and students, where they spent countless hours during the night in those war years.

The danger from the sky were not only prematurely dropped bombs but also damaged und burning bombers swerving around before they crashed and exploded on the ground leaving behind a trail of destruction.

Watching air fights and burning bombers on their way down was always a terrifying experience as if witnessing apocalyptic scenes of destruction.

Occasionally crew members were lucky to jump out of the falling airplane seconds before it crashed. If they were not caught by the occupying army, they were taken into security by members of the resistance movement. This organisation had an effective network of members who channelled pilots via many contact points to Southern Europe where they could escape into unoccupied regions. In Blitterswijck, Fr. Leopold Al was also a contact person. When such stranded crew members were in the house, students were strictly kept behind closed doors. When Fr. Leopold was in danger of being arrested, he had to go underground until the end of the war.

## THE MARIANNHILL COMMUNITY OF BLIT- TERSWIJCK AT THE END OF 1944

*The adventures of the Mariannahill communities in Blitterswijck and St. Paul were quite dramatic in the last 10 months of WW II. The second part of the story of Fr. Winfried Hastreiter CMM (Mariannahill Missionskalender 1947) is summarized with additional information from a war diary of Fr. Liberatus van Velzen. Some senior Mariannahillers still remember this dark period of more than 70 years ago.*

### **Autumn 1944 – Blitterswijck near the frontline**

When the British troops had moved into Venray, a township 8 km away, Blitterswijck came within reach of the British artillery. It was the beginning of October 1944. The CMM community was forced to move into the cellars of the castle. The students of the minor-seminary had not yet returned from the summer holidays to at the beginning of the school year in September. The vaults of the cellars of this ancient building of the 12th century with 170 cm thick walls were dark. There was only one window in one of the cellars. The cave dwellers gathered around this only font of light to get fresh air by turns. Another cellar was reserved for five Sisters of the Precious Blood with 20 postulants from their mission house in the neighbouring village of Tienray. A family with four children lived in another cellar. Furthermore, there were 20 young men hiding in the lowest cellar to stay out of sight during the raids which captured men for forced labour in Germany. At that time, Fr. Leo Poser was the superior of the community of about 20 Mariannahillers and 2 Dominicans and refugees from Venlo. There were also some German soldiers staying in one of the side buildings. One day a vehicle loaded with ammunition was parked near this building when it exploded, killing two soldiers. Grenades were flying back and forth between both sides of the fronts. For six weeks, the Mariannahill community lived this catacomb life in the castle until they were afflicted by major troubles.

## The Mariannahillers evacuated

Suddenly, on 17 November 1944, soldiers appeared at the castle and commanded the Mariannahillers to leave the building. The CPS Sisters and other women could stay. The soldiers searched the whole castle; however, they did not discover the 20 hidden men. A heavy cupboard was moved to the entrance of their cellar to camouflage the door. The community was given 5 minutes to get a blanket and some food. Then they were marched to the village and added to a large group of men raided from other neighbouring villages. The group of some 600 men had to cross the Maas and walk to Velden, 12 km away. The Mariannahillers sang the popular hit, „Houd er de moed maar in” (*Keep your spirits up*) and other local folk songs.

In the meantime, Fr. Leo Poser had succeeded to be released because of a medical certificate in his passport.

All captives were transported on tenders of the tramline Nijmegen/Venlo. Because of lack of a locomotive, a tractor towed the tram to Venlo. There they had to board a train of cattle wagons without seats or straw, heading for Germany. Standing upright, they travelled towards Wuppertal during the cold night.



*Three students (Frans Lenssen, René Dupont, Martin Duikers (ex CMM Fr. Joseph) on the ruins of the castle in Blitterswijk 1945*

The train was attacked twice by British fighter planes which caused great terror and confusion. Seven passengers were killed, and many were wounded. After nobody was left behind in the castle in Blitterswijk, the building was blasted by the withdrawing German soldiers. After the war the remaining ruin was cleared, and the castle never rebuilt.

After arrival in Wuppertal, the detained were taken to a transit camp. The transport leader introduced the men to the camp commander and, surprisingly he highly commended the religious for their heroic action, after the attack, at the risk of their own lives, they had taken care of the wounded and had covered the dead with their own blankets after the train was attacked by British air fighters.

He requested that they were treated well. And indeed, they were looked after reasonably. The Mariannahillers were accommodated in two small rooms that had straw and a small stove. They could celebrate Mass und get what they needed for it from the parish church in Sonnborn. After having been taken to another camp, they could celebrate Mass in a church in town. They also could move more freely and were even allowed to find their own accommodation in town. They contacted the Holy Spirit Sisters from Steyl in the hospital who warmly welcomed them and took care of them very well, giving them accommodation, clothing and food. Compared to the other detained they were privileged.

Despite repeated attempts, the labour officers at Düsseldorf could not force the Dutch into labour. Therefore, they passed them on to the Gestapo (Secret Police), who nonetheless were unable to settle things with the stubborn Dutchmen. The two representatives of the group, Fathers Eduard Luyten and Remigius Peters, were bold and defiant. Fr. Winfried Hastreiter remarks, „There stood a higher power behind the detained, to which the power of darkness had to give way”. In the meantime, more religious, SVD, Trappists and Redemptorists had joined the group. They also took steps to be released. For weeks they were waiting between anxiety and hope. On 20 December, suddenly the message came through: „Tomorrow, the Dutch religious are allowed to return to the Netherlands”. They would be transported by train to the North of the Netherlands,

where they should present themselves to the German occupation authorities. The next day, the SVD Fathers and the Trappists joined them at the railway station of Sonnborn, all together 62 persons. They got seats in reserved carriages. Unfortunately, one confrere, Marcel Noten, was too ill to go along and had to stay back. Fr. Eduard Luyten volunteered to accompany him. He and Fr. Remigius Peters had continuously attempted to be released by the authorities. Near Oldenzaal, the train crossed the Dutch border. The released decided not to check in with the authorities but split up in small groups to make it easier to find accommodation and not be caught in a raid. The confreres from the northwest of the country parted from the others and tried to find a way home. Another group, together with those from the southern provinces, found a place with the Dominicans in Zwolle, and the others went to the northern provinces Groningen or Friesland.

## **DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENTS AT ST. PAUL**

### **St. Paul becomes headquarters**

One day, St. Paul became suddenly a very important place. It was chosen as the headquarters of General Marshal Model, the supreme commander of the West-Army in the Netherlands. It was the beginning of a period of highest activities; cars with high ranking officers rushed back and forth; all around heavily armed sentries were posted, patrolling up and down; a network of communication cables was installed going in all kind of directions. It was said that those top men were not only busy with meetings and administration but also with drinking parties. They seemed to have excellent French wines in stock. Soldiers whispered that one night even Heinrich Himmler, the feared SS-Reichsführer had called in for deliberations but also for a hefty drinking party. A former CMM seminarian was working in one of the offices. Fr. Hermann Arndt was happy to see his former student again. He attended Mass almost daily. Suddenly, after three weeks, the headquarters broke up. While the front was approaching, the soil became too hot under their feet.

### **St. Paul becomes a fortress**

The high four-story building of St. Paul was of course of strategic importance because it offered a wide outlook over the whole area. Therefore, it became a fortified place in face of the approaching front. All around, large underground bunkers were built, some furnished as living quarters. Br. Possenti, the electrician, had to install electric cables. The riverbanks of the Maas were secured with barbed wire, mines fields, machineguns and trenches. About 800 forced labourers arrived from Germany to construct them. When the British soldiers came very close on the far side of the river, these workers were withdrawn, and 250 men of the Polish Labour Service took their place.



### **St. Paul becomes a Red Cross clinic**

On 15 October 1944, a new formation arrived to occupy part of the house. St. Paul became a Red Cross clinic with surgery rooms and seven doctors and medical personnel. An enormous canvas with the Red Cross sign was spread out on the soccer field to serve as a temporary protection against attacks from the air. The wounded victims came from small firstaid posts at the front. In the family house of Fr. Frans Lenssen (15 km away), such an aid post was set up in one room. Soldiers in various conditions arrived there daily from the battlefield, and after having been treated, were transported to St Paul. Thirty-three of the soldiers who died there were buried in the cemetery of the mission house.

### **St. Paul under artillery fire**

On 23 November 1944, the battlefield had moved to the other bank of the River Maas, opposite St. Paul. The British artillery bombarded the German positions near the house daily. The first grenades exploded in the near surroundings of St. Paul. This went on from that day until the arrival of the British troupes. Immediately after the first attack, all inhabitants of S. Paul went underground into the cellars of the main building, the farm and the workshops and other buildings of the 'old St. Paul'. Kitchen, dining rooms, dormitories were quickly set up in the cellars. In those days, the number of refugees from outside was growing daily, so that a chapel was prepared for 300 persons. The Sisters of Nazareth were still there with their 183 girls. The Brothers of the neighbouring St. Joseph's school had come with 40 boys. On 10 December the British opened for the first-time fire with their canons directly on the house. This went on for days.

### **Evacuation**

On 9 January 1945, the long-dreaded order for the evacuation of St. Paul came. At 12.00, the whole building had to be vacated. The claim that according to a well-kept charter, St. Paul was protected

under the Convent of Genève, had resulted in only a few days of postponement, but could not hold up the evacuation.

On 15 January, in cold weather with frost and snow, the caravan of 600 refugees including those from Arcen who had joined in, started walking and crossed the border near Walbeck. It was misty so that they had not to worry about attacks from the air. From Walbeck they continued walking 7 more kilometres to Straelen. There, at the railway station, a long train with 50 carriages was waiting. In the meantime, 600 more refugees had arrived from Venlo, so that the number increased to 1200 people. At midnight the train left Straelen for Groningen near the Nord Sea. Since the allied forces had already reached Nijmegen, the train had to make a detour through German territory. On 16 January, it crossed the Dutch border near Winterswijk. In Vorden there was a break after 12 hours traveling. The villagers prepared food for the refugees, potatoes, and milk for the children. Then the train drove to Zwolle, where they met three CMM confreres from Blitterswijk who had come there some weeks earlier and had found refuge in the Dominican monastery. Frater Chrysanthus van den Idsert was present at the railway station where he was working with the Red Cross. At the station, fighter planes appeared suddenly but they did not an attack.

On 17 January, the train finally arrived in Groningen, a town of 120.000 inhabitants at that time, about 30 km from the Nord Sea. The four religious groups stayed in the city for the first days: the Mariannahillers, the Sisters of Nazareth with 183 children, the Brothers of the Seven Sorrows with 40 boys, and a group of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Most of the Mariannahillers were accommodated in Kloosterburen, a village on the coast.

### **Battle of Groningen**

While most parts of the southern provinces were already liberated in autumn 1944, the occupation in the provinces north of the great rivers was prolonged until May 1945. People in the great cities suffered famine. The city of Groningen would still become the scene of a fierce battle in the final phase of the war. From 14 April on, artillery

could be heard. Canadian troops forced the German army back into town. In the following days, the infantry fought a way into the city and a man-to-man battle started. They had to fight street by street and house by house. Many houses were burning, people were fleeing, shooting and explosions were heard everywhere. Fr. Winfried Hastreiter, who lived in a guesthouse in the centre of the city, was an eyewitness of the battle. At 4.00 a.m., a man of the fire brigade rushed into the house announcing that the street was free; the first Canadian troops appeared and not for long the remaining German soldiers surrendered. For the inhabitants and the refugees, the war was over. The end of the war passed almost unnoticed for the Mariannahillers in Kloosterburen. Only a few days later they realized that the battle in Groningen had ended. They only had seen some smoke of the burning city over the horizon.

In the meantime, Br. Hilarius Kummeling had died on 14 April 1945 after a long period of suffering from TB. Six days after the liberation of Groningen, all Mariannahillers gathered for his funeral.

### **Returning home**

On 15 May 1945, a long-time house friend of St. Paul appeared unexpectedly in Groningen and announced in few words: „I have come with a truck from St. Paul to bring all Mariannahillers back home”. Jan van Dijk from Arcen had been a close friend of Mariannahill since the foundation of St. Paul. He was one of the first students when the Fathers started a school at St. Paul in 1918. When this school was moved to Germany in 1920, he had not gone along. However, he remained a close friend and a great supporter in many ways. When St. Paul was evacuated, he stayed in Walbeck and kept an eye on the property. When he found out that three boxes with chalices and monstrances from St. Paul, the parish and the Sisters convent in Arcen, which were stolen as war booty, he was determined to get them back. He succeeded to get a document from the Swedish consul in Kleve, who also looked after the Dutch affairs during the occupation. He went to Kevelaer to pass this letter to the Gestapo officer who was summoned by the Swedish consul to return the sto-

len religious articles in accordance with Genève Convention. The Gestapo man, respecting the international law, gave in to the demand of the Swedish consul and reluctantly returned the stolen goods. With the permission of the commander of the British occupation and the mayor of Arcen, Jan van Dijk got the disposal of a truck with driver from the Red Cross to bring back the inhabitants of St. Paul from Groningen. On the way via Zwolle, where they picked up three conferees, and from there to Deventer, Zutphen, Arnhem and they made a stopover in Nijmegen. Along the way, they saw the devastation of the war everywhere. The next day they arrived at St. Paul and stood in shock at the sight of the destruction. When somebody remarked dryly, „It could have been worse. We are back home at last”, the gloomy mood was lifted. The next day they took stock of the damage and counted 88 direct hits on the buildings, which were also completely looted; furniture, equipment, tools, machines, stoves, foodstuff like 250 sacks of grain and flower, cattle, horses, chickens, everything had gone.

### **Live goes on**

The community members of the destroyed castle in Blitterswijk came home soon afterwards. The 4 priests and 20 scholastics had been dispersed into all directions.

The new school year started with 41 students in September 1945. Two postulants and three aspirants were admitted by the superior general, Fr. Reginald Weinmann, who had stayed at the generalate in Hatfield/Peveral in England during the war and visited St. Paul in September 1945. He erected St. Paul as headquarters of the new Dutch Province and appointed Fr. Remigius Peters as provincial superior.

The world war had begun for the Netherlands with the invasion of German troops on 10 May 1940 and ended with their capitulation at Wageningen on 5 May 1945. Life went on.

# MATAMORPHOSIS OF A MISSION HOUSE

*Jan Visser,*  
*former bank director and member of the Franz Pfanner Foundation*

## **Integrated recreation**

Around 1950 I met a man very regularly in later years. He was impulsive and socially driven, had tenacity and perseverance, who gradually, when he was still head of Social Affairs of an East Brabant municipality, came up with the concept of creating, as he called it, integrated recreational opportunities for the healthy and for the sick and disabled. His name: Arie Verberk.

In the 60s he was looking for a suitable accommodation where that vision could be realized. They seemed to be there with quite a few empty monasteries at the time. Earlier he had convinced me and asked me to participate administratively after finding something most suitable. And so, it happened that I occasionally got a phone call from him in the spirit of: „John, I think I found it; come straight there and bring a big amount money with you!“ He then had his eye on an old monastery building and while talking about it, such a call turned out to be richly premature.

Then in 1968, he got in touch with Mariannahill in the Netherlands, where Fr. Frans Tausch was provincial at the time, someone with brainpower and relativism. It clicked and many intensive and exploratory talks between both parties followed. A doer and a thinker had found each other. Both were on the same line.

## **Foundation „Het Veldkamp“**

After signing a letter of intent, a small, „handy“ board was formed, of which Tausch became chairman and in March 1969 was named the Foundation „Het Veldkamp“, by which a recreation company was to be realized and founded. A strict separation was observed between mission and recreation; the interests of Mariannahill Nether-

lands should not be harmed and certainly not financially. The Foundation gave a new purpose to part of the grounds of St. Paul. That part could only be used for integrated recreation.

Part of the positive balances are intended to finance its own mission areas. That was given plenty of attention. The union with the missionaries intensified because the home front had new impulses and new possibilities.

### **Approach of a recreation project**

First of all, there was a need for an inventory of what they wanted to achieve; in addition, there was a need for „entries“, to the local, regional and national authorities. A panel of experts proved to be of excellent service. This advisory group has been figured for a while under the leadership of former minister Dr. Veldkamp. Intensive contacts were built up with many institutions, foundations and associations, such as Rijkswaterstaat, Grondmij, planners, landscape architects, miners but especially with authorities that working for the sick and disabled. Mariannahill had worked extensively with Asthma Fund, Zonnebloem, Red Cross etc. years earlier with holiday and summer camps in Arcen. Scientists from various backgrounds were also called in: what is possible and desirable for the disabled, the sick, old and of days? Special provisions would be needed for these. The Second Spatial Planning Memorandum 1966 offered the possibility of realizing the plans. The estate „Klein Vink“ was described as one of the regions, which could primarily be developed for weekend and holiday recreation with the emphasis on stimulating the establishment of new facilities, as it was officially called. It could hardly be better! Verberk quit his job and was appointed director of the Foundation to get the business off the ground. The project had to be balanced and harmonious, offer privacy and tranquility, have a nice recreational climate with related facilities. And it had to provide space and shelter for 3000 people.

In 1969, a campsite with 550 pitches with all the necessary facilities, including for the disabled, was started. After that and after the grounds had been renewed to a landscape with large water parties, the

construction of a large bungalow park was started. In three phases, 220 group-by-group and bungalows were built, including a number of them, specially adapted for wheelchair users and other disabled people. All this included a restaurant, a supermarket, indoor sports facilities, a meeting center, everything in adapted, existing buildings, and a separate indoor competition pool.

The very original first Mariannahill monastery now serves as a reception, office and a work place. Outside, sports facilities and a riding school a rise. Dredging of a 40 ha was still under way. large pond for water sports enthusiasts and fishermen.

### **Convalescence center**

In the first years, a lot of thought and research was done on the realization of a so-called convalescence center, i.e. buildings and accommodations for severely physically disabled people. All this within the framework of the AWBZ. State Secretary dr. Kruizinga made a strong case for this at the time. However, realization turned out to be politically and financially too ambitious. In the meantime, it had been investigated whether the main large building of St. Paul (eye-catcher for the wider area) could be adapted for this purpose. It turned out to be both too expensive (especially in maintenance) and unsuitable.

In the meantime, in the monastic buildings that had become far too large and uneconomical for the small group of religious, a new, small monastery had been built, in the spirit of the bungalows, offering ample space for the Mariannahillers, including those from overseas.

It will be clear that all these developments required adjustment in administrative and legal terms. The intention was: demarcation and separation of the different parts; risk reduction; fiscally attractive. The respective boards were not only kept small; it was used back and forth, so that everything remained agile and clear. The late notary Hein Smeets from Oss was for many years' advisor and notary of Klein Vink. In the meantime, the name 'Het Veldkamp' Foundation had been renamed – appropriately- and rightly – into the Franz Pfanner Foundation in 1969.

## **Thermal bath**

A few years ago, Verberk had the idea, once suggested by someone, to check whether there would be hot springs under Klein Vink. Literature research by experts showed that this chance was very real. An exploratory drilling confirmed this, so that the decision was made to build a modern thermal bath, after Verberk and others had carried out a lot of research, study and information at thermal baths and elsewhere. This modern building with outdoor facilities and equipped with advanced equipment could be opened in early 1989. The important part in the realization that the late former mayor of Arcen & Velden, Mrs. van Soest-Jansbeeken, has certainly to be remembered here.

From a depth of approximately 900 meters, water with a temperature of 42 C. inflated. Analyses at some (also foreign) universities showed that it is very suitable for therapeutic purposes and mainly for rheumatism. The thermal bath became instantly known, to which the favorable location near the densely populated Ruhr area and the German for love for 'Kühren' contributed. Remarkably, the North-Limburg Health Insurance Fund now enables 350 rheumatism patients to cure there every week.

Mud baths and beauty treatments are also available. A centre for naturopathy is being considered.

„Klein Vink” has about 70 full-time employees. And already for several years it had a kidney dialysis center, where 12 patents could be treated at the same time.

## **Family Replacement Home. (G.V.T.)**

Because the Mariannahillers traditionally cared for a number of slightly mentally handicapped people, it was logical to achieve something on this front as well. After years of tug-of-war, a special building has professionally been running a Family Replacement Home. It turned out that the objectives of missionaries and laymen can go well and in a modern way.

This story could give the impression that things went smoothly. But that is not how life and practice are.



## **Incomprehension resolved**

That the Mariannahillers at home and overseas did not surrender to the new developments was inescapable and understandable. As the project grew and things became clearer, they gradually came to realize that there were no more financial worries, not now and not in the future for the missionaries, who were given a home basis. A lot of attention has been paid to this issue.

The objective was gradually accepted not only, but several Mariannahillers, cooperating in the project, experienced a new purpose, certainty and security. The move to the new comfortable house contributed to this. It was put into service in 1974. Afterwards, a beautiful new chapel with presbytery was added. It originally was meant for pastoral care for people in the recreation resort who would ask for it, as a natural pastoral task for the Mariannahill missionaries.

## **Reaction from the Generalate in Rome**

It goes without saying that relations with the Generalate in Rome have been particularly uncomfortable. Rome, being already strained by the cessation of a house of formation, did not understand this „worldly“ approach. But a lot of conversations there and in Klein Vink with extensive reports led to the gradual gaining of insight and understanding. The facts also clearly showed it. The suspicion disappeared, and people started to show understanding, even encouragement.

Respected and perceived as correct, the Mariannahill-Netherlands principle was especially valued for avoiding financial risks with the entire project. The concern of environmentalists, who were very active, especially in the early days, may have been a very understandable: the great fear that ‘Klein Vink’ would become an amusement park has proved unfounded. Peace and harmony in recreation are important and are pursued. Finally, Mariannahill-Neder1and had about 65 members, including missionaries, in the nineteen-seventies. At present (2022), a small group is accommodated in the comfortable new Missiehuis St. Paul III.

# IN THE MAELSTROM OF A TURBULENT TIDE

## A snapshot of 1971

The revolutionary changes in church and society evidently had an impact on the life of the St. Paul community. At a meeting at that time (1971), a kind of inventory was made of the situation of St. Paul and its residents. It was also an evaluating on the extraordinary General Chapter that had taken place in Rome in 1970. How to proceed into the future?

At the time of this chapter, St. Paul counted 24 residents, whose average age was 48 years. The situation of the accommodation in the big building was particularly unfavourable. The fact that the earning opportunities outdoors diminished, forced the community to seek other possibilities. St. Paul was still aware of the obligations to sustain the Missionaries and secure their old-age benefits.

The fact that so little young people were among the group with unbalanced obligations led to the conclusion that various enterprises like cattle and agriculture had no profitable future. In the following years, workshops and agriculture, the garden, the chicken farm and pig farming had to disappear. This aspect of the declining enterprises that people were even more dependent than before on job creation. However, it was not so much the problem of financial factors and employment. The main question of the group was how to face the future of St. Paul. It began already in the discussions about the future of Venray and later about the future of St. Paul. In addition, discussions with the generalate were ongoing, which resulted in an open collaboration. In addition to the discussions on this point, which were mainly intended to familiarize each other with the new situation that was coming to the community of St. Paul, attempts were made to arrive at a renewed religious design of the group through discussion groups. In the post-conciliar years, with a confusing supply of groups and individuals within the Dutch church, it was almost impossible to arrive at a fixed design. In this area, it had to be established that there have

been numerous attempts that have led to certain insights here and there, but not to the expected tangible result, but created more division among the believers.

There was apparently a lack of sufficient interest and enthusiasm for a renewed lifestyle of a religious community, which finally gave rise to an attitude of resignation and to get stuck at a low level without making many demands. This resulted in the following years in a secularized status quo that can no longer be questioned. Already in the 60s, the common morning prayer was abolished and not restored in the following decades.

The consequences of the cultural revolution that broke out in the mid-60s – a kind of second Enlightenment – unleashed great unrest, especially in the student world. The major seminarians in Würzburg studied there at the theological faculty of the state university. Communist cells and the extra-parliamentary opposition (APO) infiltrated the world of the students. These conditions also confused the life in the Mariannhiller Pius Seminary. Rules no longer applied. The usual religious exercises were no longer attended. Once a week the Eucharist was celebrated around a table in the recreation room, with guitar-accompanied hymns. However, initially the meetings of the small remaining community of sensitively training brought some concrete impetus to a new experience of community. One found a new way of mutual understanding for each other, and lively exchanges of thoughts took place about certain questions: Why are we here, what do we want, how can we go further to realize that? Such intensive group discussions also took place in the university's student houses, sometimes with personal dramatic consequences. Nevertheless, a significant number of seminarians gave up their studies and left the congregation. The euphoric expectation that the priestly celibacy obligation would soon be exempted also played a role that should not be underestimated.

Missionaries on leave from Papua New Guinea, had to face the effects of social and ecclesiastical upheavals in Europe, and returned to their mission in great disorientation with effect that several left the mission and congregation after a short time. There

was no point of return to the passed time in the church while the contours of a new future were still vague and confused. Initial illusions of an overall renewal often turned into disillusionment. The trend of individualism, secularization and relativism had started and was no longer possible to be stopped, but it persevered and would last unchained or adapted for decades in the future.

*F.L.*

# **ST. PAUL'S PIONEERS IN PAPA NEW GUINEA**

## **1960**

St. Paul was the starting point from where in 1960 the first missionary team was sent to Papua New Guinea for the missionary mission in the newly established diocese of Lae.

### **Beginning**

The history of Mariannahill in Papua New Guinea began with the mandate of Pope John' XIII of June 18, 1959, transferring the newly established Vicariate of Lae (comprising the present province of Morobe) to the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill (CMM). The Superior General transferred the execution of this assignment to the Dutch province. The first four CMM priests who arrived in Lae from the Netherlands in March 1960 were the Fathers Gerard Hafmans as superior, Bert Kempkes, Henry van Lieshout and Anthony Mulderink. The population of the Vicariate Lae in 1959 was 187,000, of which 1,750 were Catholics. Fifty years later, the number of inhabitants of the current Morobe province (at that time still district) had increased to 616,263 of which about 34,000 Catholics. Lae is a seaport city on the Huon bay.

### **Exploration of the area**

After six months of introduction to missionary life on missionary stations of the missionaries of the Divine Word (SVD) in the Vicariate of Madang from which Lae was separated, the four Mariannahillers returned to Lae. They began exploring their new mission area in the Morobe district. In addition to Lae, there were two other centres with small Catholic groups. They began their explorations with two teams accompanied by local porters and spent weeks touring through mountain areas and coastal regions, through rivers and jungle, looking for possible places for the setting up of a mission station. But it soon became clear to them that the Lutheran Mission was firmly established everywhere down to

the smallest hamlet. So, it was a welcome extension of their mission area when in 1962 the Siassi Islands, a group of islands between the mainland and New Britain, were separated from the Vicariate of Rabaul and handed over to the Vicariate of Lae. On these islands there was already a Catholic community founded by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) of Western New Britain.

### **Arrival of new CMM missionaries and Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (CPS)**

The second group of four Dutch Mariannahillers, Jan Admiraal, Wim Sasse, Leo Trommelen and René Kuypers, arrived a year later in 1961. Furthermore, in 1962 two priests, Sido van der Werf and Joost Hafmans, were appointed for Lae; they first went to Australia to obtain a teacher's diploma at the Teachers Training College of the Marist Brothers in Sydney. (Theo Cornelissen, Wiel Buskens, Joost Hafmans.) Then they went to Lae in January 1964. In the following years, eight more Brothers were transferred from St. Paul to Lae. (Hubert Hofmans, Jan Oldenburg, Cor Philippe, Benedict Janssen, Jan Antonisse, Jan Bolte and Jan Kleijn.) In June 1962, the first Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood arrived: Sr. Godelief Leyten and Sr. Marie-José Boersen, followed by Sr. Bosco Dercks in October and Sr. Clemence Klever in 1964; Sr. Magdalene Arends joined the CPS team in 1967.

### **New missionary priority: education**

If 95% of the indigenous population of the vicariate belonged to the Lutheran church, then missionary work among non-Christian tribes was not eligible. Interfering in the good work of the Lutheran mission was not an option. This situation led the young missionaries to their view that they should first pay all attention to the Catholics who were already present in the new mission area, even if only in a small number. To further develop this group, education by schools was a primary task. After this priority was clearly in mind all activities were focused on the project of building the

St. Joseph station located at 8-Mile on the main road to the Highlands inland. This first project consisted in the construction of a technical school on the model of the Dutch craft school. Thus, 1964 became a year of construction activities on the new station, about 15 km outside the city of Lae. In this one year, 14 buildings were built on the station, of which the church was the last. Meanwhile, St. Joseph's Technical Training Centre was provisionally recognized by the Department of Education. Br. Leo Trommelen further developed the school with the help of the Brothers Hubert Hofmans, Jan Antonisse, Jan Kleijn, Jan Bolte, Piet van Deursen and the lay missionaries Jan Verheyen, Heinz Schmidt, Joseph Geissler and Jerry Pueffer. Other schools were built in the city. On the Siassi Islands there was already a primary school on Por near Mandok. A new primary school was built in Aupwel. The help of Dutch lay missionaries was also called in, with Hanneke and Frits v/d Werf, Janus Fleerackers and later Petra Nabben. A vocational school for girls was also founded in Aupwel by Sister Paul v.d. Heikant CPS and two German lay missionaries, but due to the remote situation of the island of Umboi and lack of pupils, the school was already closed in the seventies. In the Watut area, St. Paul's school was founded in Wheel in 1963, 30 km from Bulolo, but it did not last long. The St. Peter's School in Bulolo was opened in 1970 and developed successfully. Fr. Sido van der Werf founded the Mariannahill primary school in Wau in the eighties.

### **The Vicariate of Lae becomes a diocese in**

1965, Fr. Henry van Lieshout was appointed apostolic vicar of Lae.

When the hierarchy in PNG was established in 1966, Lae was elevated to a diocese. Henry van Lieshout became the first bishop of Lae. The ordination took place on March 5, 1967 in Lae. P. Gerard Hafmans was appointed vicar general.

An important pastoral area was developed in Taraka north of the city. The Catholic Church owned a large and unexplored land there.

The initial intention was that it would be mined to start a plantation, partly done by Br. René Kuypers. But soon it was not recognized because it had to be abandoned because of certain insects which infected the palm trees. The area was sold to the city the intended urban extension with a residential area. However, the diocese retained a small area for a new parish with church, presbytery and a school, called West Taraka.

In 1964, the Technical University of Lae was founded, which also attracted many Catholic students. The Catholic student parish was founded with Fr. Guy Cloutier as a student chaplain. When a great flood of the Bumbu River destroyed numerous houses of a large settlement at the river mouth, a whole new area was developed in Taraka where the displaced people initially lived in tents. From this came the name Tent City, which was later retained as the official name of that part of the city of Lae. The diocese was allocated on a spacious plot where the first parish priest, Fr. Chris Blouin who in the following years developed the new parish of St. Patrick, with a church, school and parish hall.

Under the leadership of Fr. Hubert Hofmans, a group of former students of the St. Jozef Technical School founded their own company under the name J.O.B (St. Joseph's Old Boys). They had their own workshop in the Kamkumun area for woodworkers who carried out many construction projects and, in addition to furniture and constructions, also manufactured wood carvings. Although they formed an independent firm, Fr. Hubert remained the important promoter of this company. Due to the loss of Hubert, who was murdered on November 23, 2001, the J.O.B. company had to face difficult times but with the help of Br. Werner Hupperich was able to continue to exist. When Br. Werner suddenly dropped out because of a serious stroke in 2009, things went downhill until the company finally dissolved in 2014. The St. Joseph's Technical School, which for years had successfully trained many young men as good craftsmen, dropped in quality in



later years and went through a long crisis due to weak management. In 2014, the school flourished again and with the help of a generous state subsidy, it was able to reorganize and expand and was promoted as a Technical College.

### **Mariannahill Mission after independence of Papua New Guinea (1975)**

Even before Papua New Guinea's secession from Australia as an independent state in 1975, Catholics' awareness grew that they needed to develop more participation in the life of their church. The awareness-raising program entitled 'We are the Church', which was launched in 1971 and implemented in all dioceses over the course of three years, encouraged the faithful, in collaboration with the bishops and clergy, to take responsibility for the life and work of their church into their own hands. This period of pastoral reorientation had a positive effect on the development of the local church. Bishop Henry van Lieshout founded the diocesan Catholic Radio Broadcasting Company with which people in the region outside the city could also be reached.

The ordination of the first diocesan priest of the Diocese of Lae Edward Suakau in 1988 was an encouraging milestone in the history of the still young diocese. Five years later, in 1993, two more priests were ordained, Geoffrey Lee and Gerard Vains, followed by Augustin Aigilo in 1994 and Philemon in 2013.

At the same time, more primary and technical schools were established and a vocational school for girls, all run by local teachers. The various departments of the diocesan headquarters were also in the hands of local employees. The 'Centre of Mercy' clinic in the new St. Therese in the Kamkumun area was also founded by Bishop Henry van Lieshout. This clinic soon proved to meet a great need and is visited daily by many people. The clinic was and is an important instrument for combating HIV/AIDS. Next to this clinic was already the association building of the Catholic women's organization built. This movement was already some years earlier started by the CPS sisters and developed under the leadership of Sister Godelief Leyten to a strong movement which

strengthened a positive life in the church community. The association building bears her name. The parish priest of St. Mary's Cathedral, Fr. Arnold Schmitt established proper facilities for the care of the growing number of street children.

### **A multinational missionary enterprise**

The original group of CMM consisted of Dutch members. This team became international with the arrival of Fr. Philip Heier from the USA in 1969. Later, other Mariannahillers from Canada, Germany, Spain, Africa, Panama and Poland followed. Most stayed for a limited period. There were also sisters from different congregations and nationalities: The Little Sisters of Jesus, Franciscan Mission Sisters of Mary, Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and the local congregations of the Daughters of the Immaculate Conception and Brothers of the Sacred Heart. They were all active in the field of education, pastoral, social and health care.

A new team of CPS sisters from Korea, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Kenya arrived in 2009 and joined the aging original group of Dutch sisters of which only Sr. Clemence Klever remained. They were welcome for various pastoral and social tasks.

Not to be forgotten are the contributions to missionary work by dozens of lay missionaries, (about 36), young people from Australia and Europe who, with their different skills, have contributed substantially to the development of the Diocese of Lae in recent years.

### **Mariannahill in Port Moresby**

In 2002, the Mariannahillers began sending their priestly candidates to the Catholic Theological Institute in Bomana/Port Moresby for formation. A house of formation, Mariannahill College, was built on the campus of the institute where already a dozen houses of other congregations and dioceses were established. The first rector was Fr. Chris Blouin. Fr. Frans Lenssen was appointed as a lecturer of Holy Scripture. A good number of candidates spent several years of study in the house, but most of them

dropped out of college and left the seminary. Br. Daniel Apas was the first to be ordained a deacon and Fr. Ludwig Teika the first priest (December 2011). From the beginning of the establishment of the diocese of Lae, Bishop Henry van Lieshout has been in a leading position for 40 years. He was ordained a bishop in 1967 and was in office until his retirement in 2007. He was succeeded by Bishop Christian Blouin CMM. Bishop Henry did not enjoy his retirement for long. He had continued to live in Lae and died suddenly on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2009, just a few days before the beginning of the anniversary year 2010 in memory of 50 years Mariannahill Mission in Lae.



*On his jubilee of 40 years bishop of the diocese of Lae, the governor-general honoured him with the second ranking highest reward of „Grand Companion of the Order of the Bird of Paradise”*

For the past 60 years, Papua New Guinea has an alarming speed undergone with major changes. The population has increased in number from 2.5 million to over 7 million in that period. The old tribal structures with their strong traditions, which had provided the inhabitants with support and stability in their own environment, began to crumble. A problem for the Catholic community in the Diocese of Lae was that most Catholics live in urban areas and only a small number in the diaspora spread across the province. Many of the resident Catholics in Lae, Bulolo and Wau originally came from other remote districts and foreign tribes. Small churches were built in some places, such as in Mubo, Mutzing

and Erap (MarkhamValley) and in the districts of Menyamya and the Siassi Islands. While the town of Lae grew from 16. 000 inhabitants in 1966 to 216,263 today the number of Catholics has also risen from 1,750 to about 34,000 throughout the diocese; most of them live in Lae. In any case, these numbers show that the Catholic Church has also produced rich fruit in this part of the world over the past sixty years. That the mission house St. Paul by sending of the first team of missionary pioneer workers, shows that it has remained faithful to the original commission of the founders of this mission house more than a century ago.

*F.L.*

# PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE EXIT

## Looking back and forward

Looking back to the past of St. Paul, where since 1911 numerous missionaries have been trained until the second half of the last century, we asked ourselves, what are we going to do with our history here in Arcen? Meanwhile the former first St. Paul completed in 1914 has disappeared more than 40 years ago. After several fruit bearing decades and an initially new revival after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War the decline of religious vocations since the years 1960 was the beginning of the end of ecclesiastic formation institutes. The building of St. Paul became too big and too expensive for maintenance. A reconstruction of the house with ceilings of 6 meters high was not feasible. For a while the house was used for some activities, like boarding youth groups and Red Cross patients for holidays. Therefore, the community moved out and were accommodated into a new and smaller building in 1974. Then finally it was decided to demolish the large building because adjusting it for other purposes was not feasible. That happened in 1987 and gradually a bungalow park for holiday makers was set up on the former agriculture farm land with ponds, a swimming pool and later also a thermal bath. Of the original complex only, the farm building is retained which at present houses a supermarket and a restaurant named 'Kloosterhoeve'. The original chapel built in 1912 has been converted into a centre for cultural activities under the name of the original founder of Mariannahill 'Franz Pfanner House'. The whole complex with its recreational facilities was sold. Only the new house of the religious community with its chapel, and the cemetery in the beautiful park will remain as a remembrance of the Mariannahillers who lived here.

We realize very well that what is going to happen with our cultural heritage will be determined by people after us. When St. Paul will come to its end of its existence as a Mariannahill Mission House, we want that our heritage will be passed on to a partner who can keep our history in memory. This is how we met the Limburg Land-

scape Foundation. Our property is situated in the nature reserve called 'Maasduinen' comprising the 'Hamert Estate' and the 'Arcen Estate'. Limburg Landscape takes care of many cultural heritage projects in the province Limburg, so, this Foundation is the right partner to preserve over heritage. At present we are a shrinking community and we don't expect new Dutch members. It is agreed that Limburg Landscape will take over when the last Dutch Mariannahiller resident has left the house and then the sale will be definitive. We believe that the site we leave behind will be in good hands and that our story of Mariannahill in the Netherlands will continue to serve as a source of inspiration for those who seek rest and reflection associated with this special place."

### **Agreement between St. Paul and the Limburg Landscape Foundation. Declaration of Intent agreed on 16 March 2018**

The Missionaries of Mariannahill have decided to leave the Mission House St. Paul at Arcen in due course to the care of the Limburg Landscape Foundation. In return, the Dutch members of this religious community are assured that their cemetery and chapel will be maintained after they have left. The takeover of the monastery complex by the Limburg Landscape will finally come into effect after the last Dutch member has died or has permanently moved out of the premises for other reasons. The Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill in North Limburg is also known as the „Missionaries of Saint Paul or Klein Vink". The number of members living there has greatly decreased and this is the reason for them to think about the future of their current residence.

The complex of St. Paul with its land is from the point of view as a natural a natural landscape a valuable link between 'De Hamert estate' and the areas Dorperheide and the 'Arcen estate'. The Limburg Landscape Foundation has a lot of experience with the management of both forest and buildings heritage in this region. For this reason, the Missionaries sought contact with the Limburg Landscape to ensure the sustainable management of their heritage. To that end on 16 March 2018 an agreement was signed between the two parties. It is

foreseen that in the future the Limburg Landscape Foundation will take care of the maintenance of both the forest as well the buildings heritage.



*Members of the community of St. Paul, Fr. Wenceslaus Kwindigwi (Rome), advisor Will Verberk with the director of the Foundation Limburg Landschap Wilfred Alblas on the steps of the castle of Arcen*

The Missionaries of Mariannahill derive their name from the Trappist monastery which the Austrian Abbot Franz Pfanner founded near Durban in South Africa in 1882. The strictly contemplative monastic community soon started active missionary work in the Province of Natal. The tensions resulting from the incompatibility of these activities with the contemplative way of life of the Trappists led to the separation of this monastery from the Trappist order in 1909 on the authority of Pope Pius X. The monastery became an independent active mission congregation under the name 'Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill'. Soon this new mission institute started

to recruit new members in Europe. To this end the estate of Klein Vink near Arcen was acquired in 1911 and in 1914 a large building was erected as a house of formation for future missionaries. This was the origin of 'Missiehuis St. Paul', where over the years a substantial number of missionaries have been trained and sent for evangelisation work mainly in Africa. Because of the decline of religious vocations since the 60s in the past century the big building became useless and was demolished in 1978 giving space to the present parking place for the current recreation park Klein Vink. Only the former farm building and the chapel which were built in 1912 are reminders of the past of old St. Paul. The old chapel is used nowadays as a space for cultural activities and is named after the founder of Mariannahill, 'Franz Pfanner House'.

*Securing the heritage.* Because of the transformation of the St. Paul property into a leisure park and the necessary demolition of the large mission house (1978), there was a need for a new monastery for the remaining missionaries. A new residence in typical low style arose in the quiet woods next to the busy recreation park in 1974. Precisely this combination of forest, park, cemetery and monastery, makes it a heritage complex. At present a small group of elderly missionaries still lives there. The sale of the St. Paul property to the Limburg Landscape Foundation will come into effect finally as the last Dutch missionary dies or for other reasons moves out. Considering the age of the missionaries this gives the Limburg Landscape the time to save for the purchase price. The coming years will also be used to appropriate possible redevelopment plans.

### **Arrangements.**

To maintain and manage nature and cultural (religious) heritage is an important objective of the Limburg Landscape Foundation. With this purchase the Foundation takes on various obligations. So, guarantees the Limburgs Landscape that the history of the missionaries remains visible.

To this end, the cemetery will be maintained as well as the atmospheric chapel as a place for rest and reflection. An appropriate re-



purposing of the parish house and the monastery is to be explored to guarantee at least the cost of the maintenance of the complex for the long future.

*Identity.* The grounds of the monastery are situated on a strategic spot in the natural park 'Maasduinen'. This area has its own story about sand dunes, a landscape formed by the Maas and uncultivated ground. The Missionaries of Mariannahill have their own special story to be added. That determines the identity of this place. By the disappearance of their previous big monastery and the sale of most of their old lands to a nearby recreation park the history of the missionaries is already faded to a large extent. By transferring the property to the Limburg Landscape, the story of Mariannahill Mission House can live on at the current site of St Paul for ages.

*F.L.*

# DATA OF THE ORIGIN AND EXIT OF ST. PAUL

## Signing of purchase St. Paul and sale contract

The former abbot of Mariannahill, Gerard Wolpert who became under the title of provost the first superior general of the new mission congregation, had sent Fr. Notker Vorspel in 1910 to the Netherlands to buy land for a new monastery for formation of new members. Fr. Notker bought the country estate Klein Vink near Arcen for sixty thousand guilders.

## Mariannahill in the Netherlands

### Signing of purchase and sale contracts

1910 The beginning – 2018 On the way to the exit



*Fr. Notker Vorspel 1910*



*Superior and notary 2018*

The official Declaration of Intent was signed by the superior and the councillors of St. Paul, Fr. Frans Lenssen, Fr. Theo Verstappen and Br. Harrie Schaminée at the office of Moonen Notarissen in Venlo-Blerick on 29 January 2018.

## **The future of the Franz Pfanner House**

The Franz Pfanner House (FPH) Foundation, so named after Abbot Frans Pfanner, the founder of the Mission Congregation Mariannahill, was founded in 2000 on the initiative of the Mission House St. Paul, the then owner of the recreation park Klein Vink and has been a user of the former chapel of the monastery, which was originally built in 1911. The historic building has been operated by the FPH since 2000 as a cultural centre with richly varied cultural programs. The management of the Klein Vink holiday park which at present is de owner of the chapel has cancelled the use of the chapel by FPH by 2022. This a part of the process of Exit St. Paul.



*The historic chapel of the first building after the arrival of the first missionaries arrived from South Africa in 1911*

## **The cemetery of St. Paul – a historical heritage**

The Mission House St. Paul on the Klein Vink estate has been inhabited by the Missionaries of Mariannahill since its foundation in 1911. The cemetery was established in 1913 on the occasion of the first deceased of this missionary community. This cemetery will be preserved in the fu-

ture by the Foundation het Limburgs Landscape as a religious heritage keep alive the memory of the former house of formation of missionaries. Looking back to the work of these deceased, we think of the word of Jesus: „When you have done all that you have been commanded to do, say: We are but servants, we have only done our duty” (Lc 10:17).

At the celebration of the renovated graveyard, apart from the guests, the superior-general of Mariannahill, Fr. Thulani Mbuyisa and his vicar Fr. Michael Mass were also present. The renovation of the cemetery was carried out by the Limburg Landscape Foundation which guarantees the ongoing maintenance in the future.

The bust of the monk-missionary abbot Franz Pfanner in front of the entrance of the cemetery is a highly valued gift from the Mission Sisters of Precious Blood, who are closely related to the Mariannahillers by their common spiritual Father-Abbot Franz Pfanner. Not only was he the builder of initiator of the Mariannahill Monastery but he is also the founder of the Congregation of the Mission Sisters of the Precious Blood.



*The cemetery, a monument as religious heritage of St. Paul*

## Word from the superior general of Mariannahill

„On the inauguration of the renovated cemetery at St. Paul, I would like to express my gratitude to our confreres in the Netherlands for their valuable contribution to the missionary mandate of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mariannahill. Many young men received their initial formation right here and became members of our Congregation, one of them is Blessed Fr. Engelmar Unzeitig who joined the community of St. Paul in 1934 and died as a martyr of charity in Dachau. We are most grateful to all those confreres who laboured to form these young men to future missionaries. To all of them who have gone before us to be with the Lord, may they find their reward with Christ the Good Shepherd whom they served faithfully. Finally, I would like to thank the present community of St. Paul for their continued presence and missionary zeal even in their advanced age and for this initiative and thus ensuring that the name of Mariannahill lives on in the Netherlands long after we are gone.”

*Fr. Thulani Victor Mbuyisa CMM  
Superior General*



*Present community of St. Paul (2022)*

## EXIT – A REFLECTION

Exit, exodus, is a pregnant word in many ways. The Book Exodus tells the story of the passage of Israel from Egypt through the Red Sea on transit to the Promised Land. Exodus expresses also an existential aspect of human life meaning: we are all people of exodus, exit, on transit. Life moves on without return. Everything keeps moving forward, the world, nature, people. Everyone and everything move to a destination, known or unknown. But after all we all are moving to the same point. Our exit becomes a transition, passing to the unimaginable while leaving behind what is not ours anymore at the end and comes into good hands without us. This is the present situation of our diminishing community of St. Paul with its property. At long last we will pull out, but what we leave behind goes over to the care of a reliable and experienced institution, the Limburg Landscape Foundation. That makes our way to the exodus easier.

St. Paul was founded as a house of formation in 1911 by order of the last abbot of the Trappist Monastery Mariannahill in South Africa after he had become the first superior general of the Mission Congregation of Mariannahill. From the beginning up to the 60ies of the last century a big number of young missionaries have been sent from this place to the work of evangelization in four continents.

St. Paul continues, though in a different packing. What we are going to leave behind is the name Mariannahill, or rather pass it on as our heritage to future generations in the region of North-Limburg. We are therefore very grateful to the Limburg Landscape Foundation, which is prepared to facilitate this transition into the future. Especially it is reassuring that the Foundation takes time to start concrete steps of taking over. The St. Paul community can undisturbed stay until the last member's personal exodus.

Since the revolutionary changes in society and the church the 60ties of the past century, the religious institutions have been facing irreversible consequences. Many religious houses with ageing members are in the stage of giving up their place in the Netherlands.

This difficult process creates many problems. We, St Paul, can consider ourselves as fortunate by having achieved proper provisions facilitating our passage to the final exit of our community up to the last member of the present group. Without the Limburg Landscape Foundation as our partner we never would have paved a proper way to our exit in a short time and without major difficulties.

The author of the Old Testament book Ecclesiastes wrote more than 2300 years ago: „There is a time for planting and a time for harvest.

There is a time for building and a time for breaking up.“ (Chapter 3). While we are moving to the end of our road, we are preparing a worthy exodus and integrate our beautiful spot into the surrounding natural park „de Maasduinen“.

That everything we were aiming at could be accomplished in a short time, is in the first place due to the mediation St. Paul's advisor and best friend of the house, Mr. Will Verberk, who as an excellent facilitator has guided us through the process of negotiating with Limburg Landscape Foundation. As a former and the last director of the Mariannahill owned Franz Pfanner Foundation, he has been deeply involved in the metamorphosis of the originally vast agricultural land of St. Paul into an attractive recreation park for holidaymakers. This Klein Vink resort with a well frequented thermal bath was sold to a large holiday parks enterprise in 2004.

In memory of the origin of this cultural and religious heritage, the nameless entry avenue to the property is officially named „Mariannahilldreef“.

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## ST. PAUL – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- 1880 Franz Pfanner travels with 30 Trappists to South Africa
- 1885 Mariannahill becomes an abbey with Franz Pfanner as abbot and 130 Monks
- 1892 Abbot Franz suspended in conflict between missionary action and contemplative OSCO order
- 1909 Mariannahill becomes an independent congregation
- 1911 1 January – Estate Klein Vink' in Arcen purchased  
1 May – Mission House St. Paul solemnly opened  
1911-1920 – Fr. Isembart Leyendecker 1<sup>st</sup> Superior  
1 May-Farm completed  
June 1- move-in the first wing of St. Paul
- 1914 Second wing St. Paul ready World War I stop construction
- 1920-1923 Fr. Herman Arndt 2<sup>nd</sup> Superior
- 1923-1926 Fr. Ephrem Roth 3<sup>rd</sup> Superior
- 1926-1931 Fr. Bernhard Barbian 4<sup>th</sup> Superior
- 1931-1936 Fr. Joseph Rainer 5<sup>th</sup> Superior
- 1935 Beginning Dutch Mission seminary St. Paul
- 1936 Sober celebration 25 year exist St. Paul
- 1936-1938 Fr. Bernhard Barbian 6<sup>th</sup> superior
- 1938-1942 Fr. Liborius Reuss 7<sup>th</sup> Superior
- 1941 St. Paul confiscated by German Army Brothers/students via Lomm, Lottum and Broekhuizen to Blitterswijck where accommodated in castle Brothers of St. Paul housed in the enterprise buildings
- 1942-1945 Fr. Othman Baumeister 8<sup>th</sup> Superior
- 1944 Residents of St. Paul, Arcen inhabitants and children from Venlo in the basement of St. Paul Inhabitants of castle Blitterswijck evacuated via Germany to Groningen



- 1945 Sept.10 – Superior General Fr. Reginald Weinmann comes from England and erects the Dutch (English) province
- 1945-1954 Fr. Remigius Peeters 9<sup>th</sup> Superior 3 periods  
New extension of St. Paul completed after World War II
- 1954-1956 Fr. Leopold Al 10<sup>th</sup> superior First English Mariannahillers to South Africa
- 1954-1957 Fr. Remigius Peeters 1<sup>st</sup> Provincial
- 1957-1960 Fr. Vianney Boeren 11<sup>th</sup> Superior Purchase of novitiate house Mariannahill in Eijsden Fr. Nicodemus Kops and Theo Zeegers to S-Africa Purchase or future scholasticate St. John in Eijsden
- 1957-1964 Fr. Suitbertus from de Werf 2<sup>nd</sup> Provincial of 2 periods
- 1958 Eight Dutch Mariannahillers to Zimbabwe. The NL Province sends the first missionaries to the new mission in Papua New Guinea erected by Pope John XVI Purchase villa ‘Eldorado’ in Mook for the Formation of students of St. Paul
- 1960 Fr. Martin Duijkers 12<sup>th</sup> Superior Four Dutch Mariannahillers to Papua New Guinea
- 1961 Celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Paul
- 1962 Construction ‘Mission Seminary Mariannahill in Venray
- 1964—1967 Fr. Gerard Hovens 13<sup>th</sup> Superior Fr. Martin Duijkers 3<sup>rd</sup> Provincial
- 1966 In PNG, Fr. Harry from Lieshout consecrated bishop or Lae consecrated
- 1967 Brothers for formation to Venray The novitiate house and St. Jan in Eijsden sold Eldorado in Mook from Provicialate (1963)
- 1967-1070 Fr. Frans Tausch 4<sup>th</sup> Provincial Fr. Gerard Willemse 14<sup>th</sup> Superior All formation stopped Mission seminary in Venray sold
- 1969 Foundation ‘Het Veldkamp’, later named ‘Stichting Franz Pfanner Huis’ Construction 220 bungalows and social recreation park ‘Klein Vink’ with Five Stars

Camping Conversion farm in: Restaurant ‘The Klooster- hoeve’, supermarket/indoor playground for valid- and disabled children Conversion of workshops (the ‘first St. Paul’) into reception and offices for recreation and service Many brothers found suitable work here and others left for mission areas. The teaching Fathers often found work in parishes in the area or across the German border.

- 1970-1982 Fr. Gerard Willemse 5<sup>th</sup> provincial  
 1974 Opening of present (3<sup>rd</sup>) St. Paul  
 1978 Demolition of the 2th (large) Mission House St. Paul
- 1982-1985 Fr. Vianney Farmers 6<sup>th</sup> Provincial  
 1985 Fr. Gerard Willemse 7<sup>th</sup> provincial Br. Jos Linders 15<sup>th</sup> superior  
 1986 St. Paul 75 Years  
 1986 ‘Thermal Bath Arcen’ opened and officially recognized located at the recreation park Klein Vink
- 1994 Fr. Gerard Willemse re-elected provincial. Br. Jos Linders superior
- 1996 Br. Jos Linders dies Br. Harry Schaminee 16<sup>th</sup> Superior
- 2000-2003 Fr. Henk Janssen 8th provincial  
 2001 Former 1<sup>st</sup> chapel restored by Stichting Franz Pfanner Huis and opened for cultural events
- 2003 Fr. Henk Janssen dies Fr. Gerard Willemse 9<sup>th</sup> provincial Br. Harry Schaminee superior
- 2005 Recreation park ‘Klein Vink sold to ‘Roompot Recreation parcs’
- 2009 CMM/NL province becomes a region
- 2011 Sept. 23 – Reunion on 100 years  
 Website: [www.vriendenmariannahill.nl](http://www.vriendenmariannahill.nl) installed by Gerard Egelmeers
- 2012-2015 Fr. Willemse Regional superior; Province becomes a region;
- 2015 5 June Fr. Gerard Willemse dies

1 Jan. Fr. Thomas (Wiel) Peeters 17<sup>th</sup> Superior St. Paul

2016

5 Feb. Fr. Thomas Peeters dies

2016

21 Feb. Fr. Frans Lenssen 18<sup>th</sup> superior St. Paul



**Your Name, God,  
reaches to the end of the world  
(Ps 48,9)**