



Maryknoll Sisters

Making God's love visible

Congregational Leadership Team

P.O. Box 311, Maryknoll, NY 10545-0311

Tel: 914-941-7575, E-Mail: CLT@mksisters.org

January 11, 2012

Dear Sisters, Relatives and Friends,

On January 1, 2012, as her Maryknoll Sisters were welcoming in the New Year, Sr. Anita Marie MacWilliam died peacefully in Maryknoll Residential Care III. Anita was 81 years of age and had celebrated 60 years as a Maryknoll Sister.

Marie Anita MacWilliam was born on December 3, 1930 in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Her parents, Anita (Brissette) and Matthew H. MacWilliam have predeceased her. Anita had four siblings, two sisters, Isabel Mackay and Patricia MacWilliam and two brothers John and Michael MacWilliam, all reside in Canada. After graduating from Notre Dame Secondary School in Montreal in 1948, Anita took a secretarial course and worked as a secretary/bookkeeper for a company in the city.

On September 6, 1951, Marie Anita entered the Maryknoll Sisters' Novitiate in Maryknoll, NY from St. Brendan's Parish in Montreal. She received the religious name of Anita Marie at her Reception on March 7, 1952. Her First Profession of Vows on March 7, 1954 was at Maryknoll, NY where she also made her Final Vows on March 7, 1960. After receiving a Bachelor in Education degree at Maryknoll Teachers College Sister Anita earned a Master of Arts degree in Linguistics from Columbia University, New York City.

In 1961, Sr. Anita was assigned to Tanzania. Except for two years on Congregational Service at the Center, Tanzania remained her only mission region until 2003. Her first ministry was in Mwanza, a town on the southern tip of Lake Victoria. Here, besides studying Swahili, she taught French at Rosary College, a new secondary school administered by the Maryknoll Sisters. She also taught Sociology at the nearby Social Training Institute.

Sr. Anita began a new ministry in 1964, the one for which she is best known and greatly appreciated—the Maryknoll Language School. The Maryknoll Society saw the great need for a language school. Up to this time, Maryknollers had studied the language with local tutors. Swahili was now the national language but many missionaries were in rural areas where people spoke the local dialects. The Maryknoll Society requested Sr. Anita, who was a linguist, to undertake this new work. Sister developed the curriculum, trained the Tanzania teachers, produced, and revised the textbooks. Until she left the Language School in 1978 for Congregational Service, Anita continued to develop the School and prepare the students for mission. For Anita, learning the language was not enough; she knew that inculturation was equally important. She invited speakers to help the students learn various aspects of the culture. She organized field trips as well as times for relaxation and fun. The Maryknoll Language School became well known and welcomed missionaries from all religious affiliations as well as expatriates.

After giving two years of Congregational Service in the Treasury, Sr. Anita returned to Tanzania in 1980. She went to Dar es Salaam, the political capital and a port on the Indian Ocean and spent ten years at the University



Sister Anita MacWilliam
1930 - 2012

of Dar es Salaam at the Institute for Kiswahili Research. As a Senior Research Fellow, she was Head of the Terminology and Translation Section. Her specialty was Lexicography and she co-authored a much needed and updated English-Swahili Dictionary. Anita also worked on a French-Swahili Dictionary for the French Embassy. During these years, she was a founding member of two organizations: The Women's Research and Documentation Project and the Translation Association of Tanzania where she served as Treasurer and on the Executive Committee. During the 1980s, Anita wrote many articles on linguistics and on other subjects of great interest to her: women, multiculturalism and social justice. As a linguist, she served as translator and interpreter for seminars and meetings. Besides being fluent in French, English and Swahili, Anita also studied local dialects, as well as Spanish, German, and Finnish. She also spoke of learning Arabic!

An active member of the Maryknoll Sisters' Tanzania Region, Anita served on the Tanzania Regional Governing Board in 1975, as an IAC Delegate in 1976 and as the Tanzania Regional Treasurer from 1985 to 1987. She had an inquiring mind, kept up on current affairs and often wrote letters to politicians expressing her ideas and views – from the lowest representative up to the occupant of the White House! Anita loved life and she loved to dance! No Tanzania meeting or celebration took place without her graceful and joyful dancing.

Reaching out to people, Anita had many friends of all nationalities especially her University co-workers. When she left the University, she lived with Sr. Eleanor McNally, a Holy Union Associate Sister and they became good friends. Eleanor came to visit Anita the day before she died and was with her the next day when she quietly went home to God.

Sister Anita volunteered her services as a translator to the Women's Research and Department Project in Dar es Salaam until increasing health problems necessitated her return to Maryknoll where she joined the Eden Community in 2003. There she took the Development Department for her prayer ministry. Continuing to live life to the fullest, she always took part in any activity she could and she did not stop dancing when her energy lessened. At special liturgical celebrations, as the Sisters held their breath, Anita removed the Oxygen tube, rose from her wheel chair and danced in the center aisle. It was a prayer and her way of praising God.

A generous person Anita was always looking for ways to help others. When her niece told her that she let her hair grow to donate it to children with cancer, Anita started the practice and encouraged other Sisters to do likewise. She encouraged awareness of the national holidays of the non-American Sisters by special prayers and displays of information. She saw that knowledge of English would be beneficial to many on the Maryknoll Residential Care staff and organized and prepared English classes for them. Knowing that it would help others, she donated her body to science.

To all of the nursing staff who lovingly cared for Sister Anita through these past years we express our gratitude. We are very pleased today to welcome Anita's sister, Isobel with her husband Pierre Mackay, as well as her sister Pat MacWilliam and her sister-in-law Pat MacWilliam. Her brother John and his wife were not able to be with us today. With us also is Sister Eleanor McNally, Holy Union Sister, who was in mission in Tanzania with Anita.

We welcome and thank our Maryknoll brother, Fr. Thomas McDonnell who will preside at this Memorial Liturgy for our Sister Anita.

Peace and blessings,

Sr. Catherine Erisman

Sr. Catherine Erisman, M.M.
Community Member

Condolences may be sent to: Isobel Mackay
2218 Souvenir Street
Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3H 1S1