



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



SISTER MARIE MICHELLE SENKHANE
Bertha Maria

entered Eternal Life on January 10, 2019
at the age of 88 years
and 62 years of religious life

+ 2841

*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul is longing for you My God, I thirst for you the living God. When can I go and worship in your presence?
(Ps 42. 1-2)*

These words from the scripture match very well with Sr. Marie Michelle Senkhane's pattern of life. Born on July 24, 1931, from M'e 'Mahalio Flory and Mr. Emmanuel Senkhane, she was the second child in a family of five. She lived in Thaba-Tseka where the third mission of the Sisters of Charity was founded.

She attended a Thaba-Tseka protestant primary school of the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LECSA). In 1947, in an attempt to comprehend her protestant faith, she went to Paray Roman Catholic Primary school, administered by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa. There, her heart was touched by Sr. Maria-Anna Mokhothu and Sr. Marie des Anges which she described as her best teachers who also elevated her desire for God and for religious life. In 1948, she switched to learning crafts and sewing, taught by Sr. Leonidas. During the years 1949-1952, she worked as a ward attendant in Paray Hospital. Her thirst for God kept increasing every time she would be with the sisters.

In 1952, her long hidden desire for conversion to Catholicism was revealed. Unfortunately, in those days, there was great animosity between the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations. Being from a staunch protestant family, she had to keep the secret from her mother. In May 1953, she secretly left for Pontmain, driven by a growing enthusiasm for God, where she declared her desire to join the Congregation. However, before she could join, she had to be baptized in the Catholic Church. In October, she was given the name of Marie Michelle by Sr. St-Gilberte, Provincial Superior, and received Holy Eucharist, administered by Fr. Thomas, O.M.I. A month later, she received the sacrament of Confirmation from Bishop Emmanuel Mabathoana, O.M.I., and Sr. Maria Augustina became her godparent.

Upon entering the formation house in 1955, Sr. Marie Michelle received another name, Bertha Maria, in honor of Dr. Berthe Harddiger, a pioneer in the Swiss Doctors Mission to Lesotho, who was also a supporting pillar for the missionaries in the health sectors.

In 1957, she continued in her pursuit of God's work by taking her temporary vows and her perpetual vows in 1961. She was a woman of strong willpower, in her spiritual development and in her studies.

When it comes to her obedience, she was very receptive and open-minded. She worked in hospitals on different occasions. At different times she served as a ward attendant; Paray Hospital being her first experience from 1959 to 1962. She also worked in 'Mamohau Hospital, even long after it was no longer administered by the Sisters of Charity of Ottawa.

Before she qualified as a teacher, she served in Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Convent, our second foundation mission in St. Paul region, as a seam mistress and housekeeper. As her first job in the early 70s, she periodically supplied the sisters with products from the garden.

Her devotion to God resonates in her professional initiatives. During the years 1976-1978, she enrolled for a primary teacher's certificate with the National Teachers Training College, where she succeeded at obtaining the first level with a first class pass. In order to receive a teachers' certificate and be able to continue to the second level, she had enrolled with Lesotho Examination Council for a Junior certificate, which is the equivalent to the current grade 10 in our secondary schools. She covered this three year course in two years (1979-1980) while working full time. Doesn't this show a clear sign of hunger for knowledge, an eagerness to learn?

Sr. Bertha Maria was very busy in the 80's. After receiving her junior certificate, she qualified for the second level of the Professional teacher's certificate offered by the same college. She covered these courses within a three year period (1980-1982) while working. During her stay in Roma, the first mission by the Oblate Missionaries, she started a new apostolate and journeyed with the Immaculata Militia – the Legion of Mary. By this time, she was teaching, minding the garden and pursuing her part time studies on educational leadership in 1988-1990.

In 1993, she was ready for University. Indeed, Sister Marie Michelle had a burning desire to learn, not only of God directly, but also of skills required in her profession as a teacher.

In 2002, she established the first pre-school run by the Sisters in St. Paul Mission.

She taught in our primary school, a very renowned one among the top leaders in this country, under the SCO administration. After seven years she moved on to work to the neighbouring Catholic primary

school, located on the same ground as our Guardian Angel Primary school. She helped educate many children throughout her career. She even accompanied the youth in the Legion of Mary and in the Christian Life Group based on Ignatian Spirituality, and joined a teachers' association where she served in the committee.

Sr. Bertha Maria enjoyed attending the school sporting events and would ensure a prayer was said before any game, even those outside the school perimeters. Her presence was always of great significance. Her thirst for God kept her throughout her entire life. Prayer was an answer for every challenge she met.

Sr. Bertha Maria was physically healthy for most of her active ministry. Upon retiring from teaching, she went back to her home in Paray where she accepted a six year mandate as Superior of the house at the 'Mamohau Convent mission in the mountains. In 2010, at the end of her mandate, she retired to Paballong Ea Molimo, where the infirmary for our retired, elderly and sick sisters is located.

All who knew Sr. Bertha Maria witnessed her religious life, her spirit of obedience, enthusiasm, piety and selflessness in her many volunteering actions, wherever there was a need. She would go up to the altar beside the statue of our Mother Mary for her private devotions, and would sit on the floor by the tabernacle during her visitation of the Eucharist. How she loved our Mother Mary and the Eucharist! The Eucharist celebration was her joy!

As she got closer to her death, she often asked for forgiveness from her caretakers.

The many testimonies given at her burial give emphasis to her spiritual dependence on the Divine Providence and the Holy Spirit.

Praised be the name of God for the gift of Sr. Bertha Maria in our Congregation. The holy viaticum she was privileged to have received.

May she rest in eternal peace and joy!

