

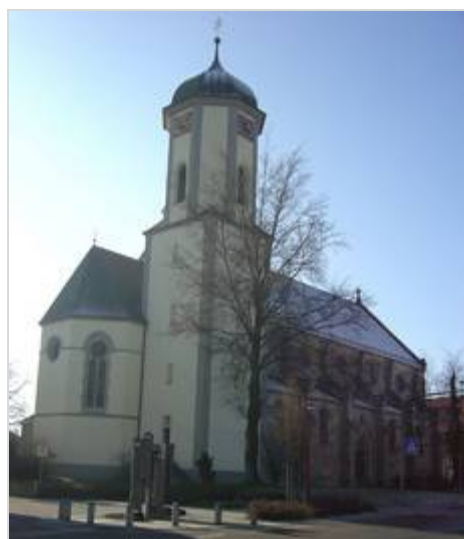


BIOGRAPHY OF SR. REINOLDA MAY OSB

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Sr. Reinolda May was born into a religious family on 21 October 1901 at Pfahlheim near Ellwangen in the diocese of Rottenburg in south-western Germany. The following day she was baptized and given the name Francisca. Her father John Baptist May was a shoemaker and small farmer, and Francisca was the youngest of nine children. Three children had died a few months after birth. Her mother Magdalena (nee Rathgeb) brought two children into the first marriage. After the death of her first husband, Joseph Kling, she married again in 1895. Francisca completed her primary education in her home village. She helped out at home and later attended the domestic school of the Franciscan sisters of Dillingen at Hochaltingen in Bavaria.

The village of Pfahlheim had a very zealous priest at that time and he made every effort to get his parishioners actively involved in one or another of the Catholic sodalities. Young and old, men and women, the married and the unmarried were thus constantly encouraged to practice their faith. Each group had a special Sunday set aside when its members would receive Communion. A whole range of colourful customs enhanced the great liturgical celebrations of the church year. The parish priest promoted church music. He fostered a Eucharistic spirituality through daily Holy Mass and Eucharistic devotions. "When I as a child was preparing for my first Holy Communion", Sr. Reinolda remarked many years afterwards, "Our parish priest implanted a love for Jesus in the Holy



Eucharist.” Fr. Eugen Adis was inspired by the programme of the pontificate of Pope Pius X. (1903 – 1914) “To renew all things in Christ”.



In her youth Sr. Reinolda learned to love Mary, the Mother of God. The girl Francisca joined the parish sodality of Our Lady, which had more than 100 members. The sodality wakened in the hearts of its members a real love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, the sodality fostered and protected this love, guiding its members to live as children of Mary and to serve God through leading a Christian life. They were encouraged to fight together against the enemy of their faith and chastity and to support the work of Jesus and his church. Every evening the Blessed Sacrament was exposed and the rosary was said in the parish church. Many parishioners took part in the annual pilgrimage on foot to the wonderful Marian Shrine Schoenenberg.

A few Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul of Untermarchtal cared for the children and the sick in the community. They were at the service of the sodalities and the parish church. The community appreciated their devoted work.

It is not surprising that such an environment produced a good number of religious vocations. Although there were only about one thousand Catholics in the parish of Pfahlheim at the turn of the 20th Century, more than thirty girls joined twelve different congregations of sisters while Fr. Eugen Adis was the parish priest from 1910 to 1938. One of them was Francisca May.

SR. REINOLDA'S EARLY YEARS AS MISSIONARY BENEDICTINE SISTER

Francisca May showed a keen interest in the missions. Her parish priest advised her to join the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Fr. Andreas Amrhein OSB had founded the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien and the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing. In the very early days of the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters solid foundations of the congregation had been laid. The founder wanted to form his brothers and sisters by the Rule of Benedict and according to the Benedictine tradition for doing God's work, “for God and the salvation of souls” in the toil and sacrifices of the missionary vocation.

Sr. Birgitta Korff was the first Prioress General of the young congregation from 1895 to 1920. After she had been reelected in 1903 she wrote a letter to her sisters in East Africa: “The salvation of souls is not the work of weak human beings. No, it is God's work. But the Lord wants us to share in His work... How much sacrifice, self denial and struggle is demanded by constant faithfulness in little things! If we feel too sluggish, weak and lacking energy for diligent striving, oh, let us go to the Divine Heart of Jesus in the tabernacle to obtain the fervor which imparts strength.” Brothers and sisters, members of the same spiritual family, formed by the same Benedictine Rule, struggled to live their missionary vocation and experienced God's faithfulness.



Francisca's first attempt at Tutzing failed. She was told that she was not healthy enough to go to the missions, so Francisca was forced to return to her family. Her father was not at all sad about this turn of events. He loved his youngest daughter who was charming and full of life. Francisca's thoughts however were firmly fixed on becoming a missionary. People remembered that she was then frequently

seen during the day praying in the parish church. This must have struck the villagers as somewhat unusual. Otherwise they would not have taken any notice. Francisca travelled once more to Tutzing. She tried a second time to answer God's call. On 1st March 1922, she entered the Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters at Tutzing and her religious profession took place at the feast of St. Scholastica on 10th February 1925. She took the name of Sr. Reinolda. The young sister was assigned to dedicate her life to missionary work in Zululand, South Africa.

The Apostolic Vicariate of Zululand had been mandated to the Missionary Benedictines of St. Ottilien only in 1922.

The Pioneers, Fr. Thomas Spreiter OSB, former Vicar Apostolic of Dar-es Salaam, and his confreres had all previously worked in the East African mission field. It was as a result of the First World War that they had to leave East Africa. They were offered new missionary territory in South Africa. The Missionary Benedictines started their missionary work at Inkamana, near Vryheid in Natal, in August 1922.

Bishop Spreiter wanted the Missionary Benedictine Sisters to work once more for him. They too had to leave East Africa and had come to South Africa. Two Tutzing Sisters were the first to arrive at Inkamana in December 1922. Bishop Spreiter was pleased that the Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing were assisting him once again. He had a very high opinion of them. They were exemplary as religious, unwavering in their commitment to missionary apostolate, highly disciplined and always willing to bear the hardships of a new beginning. A remark in his diary illustrates his esteem of the sisters: "I regard them really as sisters, as precious coworkers."

On Sunday morning, 21 June 1925 Sr. Reinolda received the mission cross. In the early afternoon she left the motherhouse at Tutzing. In Hamburg she embarked together with three sisters for Zululand. In her letter from Antwerp, Belgium, bearing the date of June 26, 1925 she writes to her "dear parents and all loved ones": "Leaving German soil did not impress me at all. It didn't cause the slightest pain. Now all bonds are loosened. Home, Motherhouse, Fatherland! – I was however not insensitive to leaving home and motherhouse. In all the sacrifices I felt unspeakable peace and happiness. Never before could I pray sincerely: 'Jesus, all for you alone' – "Your happy missionary sister, Sr. Reinolda OSB. "

The first Christian missionaries came to Zululand in the middle of the 19th century. The Lutheran Church and the Anglican Church founded mission stations. Zululand was part of the Vicariate Apostolic of Natal which was erected in 1850 and entrusted to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In 1895 Bishop Jolivet of Durban assigned Oblates to go

to Zululand. The Emoyeni Mission was opened. Before Christmas 1895, three Dominican Sisters of Oakford arrived at Emoyeni/Holy Cross. A second Catholic Mission was started at Mbongolwane in 1914. French Franciscan nuns supported the Oblates. The Benedictine missionaries took over Emoyeni and Mbongolwane mission in 1924.

In her early years as a missionary in Zululand Sr. Reinolda worked as seamstress at these mission stations. She made a great effort to learn the difficult Zulu language. Soon she began her mission work in the homes of the Zulus. As much as time permitted, she visited people on foot and on horseback. Sisters on horseback were a common sight in those pioneering days.

THE DEDICATED MIDWIFE

A new Vocation

Bishop Thomas Spreiter at that time was convinced of the great importance of indirect mission work in school and hospital for the spreading of the faith in a difficult mission territory like South Africa. With great vision and courage he worked to obtain permission from Rome that Benedictine Sisters could be trained in midwifery.

After years of persistent effort this permission was obtained from Rome and from Tutzing in 1936. The sisters in Zululand were allowed to assist women in childbirth. Sr. Reinolda became the first sister to take a course in midwifery. She had been asked by her superiors if she wanted to take this training. When she was requested to enroll for the midwifery course she seemed to be a rather unlikely candidate as she was already in her mid thirties, and lacked secondary education. Moreover her knowledge of English was scant and she had spent



all of her missionary years in the sewing room. She soon agreed, trusting in God's help and in view of the personnel needs of the hospital at Nongoma that was under construction. Her decision was entirely borne by her spirit of faith. A young Dominican sister also trained as midwife at that time in Pietermaritzburg.

Because of her knowledge of the language and academic ability, the sister had better chances for successful final exam. Sr. Reinolda also studied hard, but not through many nights in order not to neglect her spiritual life. She relied completely on God in prayer, a spirit of faith and trust in God. In the end she received a better mark in the final exam than this Dominican Sister. In May of 1938, Sr. Reinolda passed her exams and was awarded a diploma as midwife from Grey's hospital in Pietermaritzburg.

Start at Nongoma



The fourth Catholic Mission Station at Nongoma in Zululand was founded by the Benedictines on August 1, 1926. Nongoma is the royal city of Zululand, the home of the Zulu king. The Catholic mission station was dedicated to Christ the King.

When the Benedictine Mission Hospital at Nongoma opened in June 1938, the newly qualified Sr. Reinolda was put in charge of the maternity section.

At first, things were difficult: She experienced personal hardships and great poverty, she had to put up with the distrust of the local population, not to mention quarrels with the district surgeon who did all he could to harm the competitor, as he perceived it. In these years Sr. Reinolda's great union with God and her deep faith became evident. She spent many an hour of the night in prayer in order to be able to handle these difficulties. Yet, as time passed, she slowly won the hearts of the Zulus by her kindness and generous readiness to help. In addition, her expertise as midwife soon attracted mothers from afar

Training of midwives

Eventually, Sr. Reinolda began in turn to train midwives. In 1941 the first group took their exams. Hundreds of young Zulu girls, black and white religious sisters of various congregations as well as her own fellow sisters were her pupils. They trained under her vigilant and highly capable supervision.

Her nurses knew discipline and were always punctual at work, attending classes and they all knew what was expected of them. Her lectures were very practical. She talked about sexual life in an unusually relaxed way. She was able to train students who were not talented. In all these years she had a 100% pass rate.

Sr. Reinolda was strict but kind. She did not hesitate to correct firmly but always in a kind way. One could very often find her at her patients' bedsides. In this way she taught her student midwives to do the same. She tried very hard to bring the nurses to understand the quality of nursing care.

Midwifery is a complicated field of nursing as the midwife has to act promptly when complication arises. She successfully taught her nurses what to do. She empowered her nurses for such skills. The midwives would do all what they can without her, but when the labour was a difficult one a beep was heard from the maternity section. Everyone knew that this was an emergency call for Sr. Reinolda. Always ready, she hurried to give council in a difficult situation or to do the work herself. The doctors appreciated her knowledge and skills and were not shy to learn from her long experience.

Nurse and Mother

This true nurse had the heart of a mother. She was the one constant factor in the maternity department. Her office and bedroom was in the maternity section. She was on duty for 24 hours. When a woman had a difficult labour and the baby was crying throughout the night Sr. Reinolda became a babysitter during the whole night. One could see her going up and down the corridor holding babies close to her heart. She would follow closely the progress of a mother and a baby until they were discharged in a healthy condition.

She went out on foot or donkey cart visiting expectant mothers in the rural area. If sister was called upon at night she would get up and go on a donkey cart with a hurricane lamp. She would take the mother to the hospital. Sr. Reinolda showed great love towards the expectant mothers. She attended them in their huts to the best of her ability.

A Benedictine sister who trained at the maternity department and worked there for 20 years remarked: "Sr. Reinolda was attentive and concerned about all the people in the maternity ward. She loved all the patients, babies and mothers and cared for them as only a good and self-forgetting mother can do."

The nurses who had been together with Sr. Reinolda in the maternity department got to know her well. They respected, admired and loved her. They learned from her the Christian way of living. Sr. Reinolda prayed wholeheartedly for her nurses.

THE ZEALOUS MISSIONARY

Woman of charity



It was not only her reputation as midwife that made her so popular in the district but more particularly her keen and sincere interest in the welfare of the people. Sr. Reinolda had her heart in her missionary vocation. She longed to bring the love of Christ to his people in Zululand. She knew that charity is the soul of the missionary apostolate.

Day after day she came to the aid of people she met in and outside the hospital. She visited the sick in the different wards of the hospital and comforted them. Poor and hungry people came to her door. She gave them food and clothed them. With priests and brothers she went out in order to get a chance of visiting sick people in their homes. The poor, unwanted as well as families with many children received her special care. Through all the years, generous benefactors overseas supported her charitable mission.

At the same time Jesus whom she loved so much was on her lips. She brought the Good News to people together with medicine, food and clothing. Praying together with people in their homes was the central part of her missionary endeavor. People could not forget the way she prayed in their midst. She did not stop doing good even if her kindness was occasionally misused.

Co-worker/ Co-missionary

The flame of an unusual missionary zeal flickered in the soul of Sr. Reinolda. Her co-missionaries experienced her as a very solid missionary sister in the truest sense of the word.

As a responsible and efficient midwife she came in contact with many people, women and men from near and far, and she enjoyed their complete confidence. In her friendly manner combined with zeal for souls she had a great moral influence on those who sought her help. If she met with cases that required a priest, she informed him and sent the persons to the priest. Many non-practicing Christians found their way back to the church. In marriage situations where the Catholic man or catechumen lived together with several wives, she managed to convince the man to enter a church marriage with one of them and separate – again without harshness - from the others and thus start a Christian family. During her pastoral visits in the wide-spread Nongoma parish, often together with the priest, Sr. Reinolda taught people the Christian faith in word and deed. At home, in the hospital and outside one would see her mixing with people, talking to them, laughing and at times giving them “Holy Pictures” and asking them about going to church. There was hardly a woman who would leave the maternity ward without a holy picture from her.

Over the many years Sr. Reinolda lived and worked in the maternity department many babies who were in mortal danger received emergency baptism and all the children who survived were not forgotten by Sr. Reinolda. She made every effort to track down these children and admonished the parents to have these children educated in a Catholic school. She invited their families to attend Catholic Church services.

One beautiful aspect of her missionary zeal was her fostering of priestly vocations. Wherever she saw talents in a boy, she made every effort to enable him to go on to higher education. Even if she experienced many a disappointment, she did not get discouraged. Young men who were preparing for priesthood could rely on her support and prayer. More than one reached his goal.

“Mashiane”

Sr. Reinolda was a well known nun among the sick, nurses, doctors, poor, orphans, Christians, non-Christians and the community at large especially the pregnant women and those who had delivered their babies at the Benedictine Hospital. The community nicknamed her “Mashiane” on account of her thick eyebrows. This name was well accepted by sisters, priests, brothers and by everybody who worked at the Benedictine Hospital. According to Zulu tradition, when a bride is accepted by in-laws especially on the wedding day, she is given a name as a sign that she is one of the family members



and the clan. Sr. Reinolda was given a name by the community as a sign of acceptance by the community.

Mashiane was known and loved everywhere in the Nongoma region, and her word counted. Even the Zulu king, who was born in her department, came occasionally to her small office for advice. She was most welcome in the royal family.

The Benedictine Sister

Sr. Reinolda loved her religious community. She gladly joined them in the celebration of the Divine Office and the Holy Eucharist. She firmly believed that she was called by God to be a woman of prayer in the community. "The Work of God" should always retain its primary position for the Benedictine community.

"Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God." (Rule of Benedict)

In urgent cases the service of mothers and babies was to be preferred to all else, and to be performed without delay. Sr. Reinolda believed that service of others is service of God. Whenever possible Sr. Reinolda took part in the common meals and enjoyed the company of her sisters at recreation time. All the sisters were eager listeners when Sr. Reinolda related to them about her work and experience as a missionary. Then it would happen that nobody else had a chance to speak during recreation time. Whenever another thousand births were recorded, the community would celebrate this event with an apple cake

"The brothers should serve one another." (Rule of Benedict) Sr. Reinolda was always helpful in the community. She did not forget to make the old and sick sisters happy.

Never on home leave

In August 1971 Fr. Rudolf Kling visited his aunt Sr. Reinolda at Nongoma. After 46 years Sr. Reinolda was able to see at least one of her close relatives, a priest. Her relatives of course would very much have liked to welcome their beloved Sr. Reinolda at home. At this visit Sr. Reinolda made a recording. Her relatives and friends could at least hear her voice and listen to her. She said: "Don't think that I have no interest in you. When my dear father and other close relatives died and Rudolf was ordained priest, I felt with you. I was with you. Through all the years we have been short of personnel at the hospital. I have been needed here.

When I left home 46 years ago I made a sacrifice. I have still the same spirit of sacrifice. I am here at home. I am happy. I belong to the Zulus and I am mother of many children, living and dead. Not long ago the twenty one thousandth baby has arrived in our maternity ward. My motto is: "to live in love".

MISSIONARY OF MARY

Encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary

Sr. Reinolda May OSB describes her encounters with the Blessed Virgin Mary at the Benedictine Hospital Nongoma (1955 to 1970) as follows:

First encounter (22 – 08 – 1955)

At the Hospital Chapel



Shortly after receiving Holy Communion Mary stood before me, very close by. (Everything was seen in spirit.) I was drawn into another atmosphere. Mary showed herself in a wonderful light, more beautiful than the sun. She was robed all in white flowing veil from top to toe. Upon her breast rested a big host, surrounded by a brilliant corona, radiating life. She was a 'living monstrance'. Mary stood upon the globe, hands and feet invisible.

It felt like entering a cloud, drawn by Mary, away from the earth. I had my eyes closed, but I saw so much light that I was very much dazzled, for several days, by the beauty and the light that I had seen.

Mary said:

"Call me Tabernacle of the Most High. You too are such a tabernacle, believe it! I wish to be called upon this title for the glory of my Son. I wish that more such tabernacles be prepared.

I wish that the altars be surrounded by praying people more frequently. Don't be afraid, make it known."

Q: "To whom?"

A: "Don't be afraid, tell your priest."

Second & Third encounters (20-10-1955 and 22 – 10- 1955)

It happened immediately after Holy Mass. It was the same figure, the same place. The same requests were repeated, but the following was added:

"Make these words known to everybody. Don't be afraid, you are God's tool." "Then Christ came out of this big host and was in union with me."

Fourth encounter (15- 03- 1956)

After Holy Mass, Mary stood before me (serious). She said:

"My child, I know about your anxiety"

(She bent down and drew me to herself.)

"You asked for a sign?"

"Not for me, for the others so that they may believe, they do not believe me."

"I wish that a shrine be erected for me in the place where seven springs come together. There I let my graces flow in abundance. Many people shall turn to God."

When I asked, "where is the place" (without words) she made a movement of the hand. The left hand pointed majestically upwards in a certain direction. This made me very happy and I felt great assurance.

"Don't be afraid, make it known, it is my work. I shall see you again."

Fifth encounter (05-06-1956)

Feast of the Sacred Heart – during Benediction.

She came out of the monstrance and approached me as a living monstrance.

Sixth encounter (15 – 03 – 1957)

"I come to strengthen you. I make use of your nothingness. Be totally humble."

Pausing – she drew me to herself and said:

"I want to save the world through the host, my fruit. I am completely one with the host as I was one with Jesus under the cross."

"Fearful things are in store for you unless you convert."

Q: "We?"

A: "Yes, if the religious do not convert and if the world does not convert."

"Mother, just give me a sign!"

"You be all love and readiness. All people who hear and believe these, my words, are going to receive a sign from me. Make all these words known!"

Seventh encounter (24 – 05 – 1957)

The following words were clearly heard: "Don't lose heart."

Eighth encounter (17 – 04 – 1958)

Like a command!

"Go to your place. Hurry up, the hour is advanced. I must keep back the streams of grace with force because you do not make any effort to help me. I am asking for help from you my chosen ones."

Q: "What are we supposed to be?"

A: "Be hosts! Prepare hosts for me, hosts who put themselves completely at my disposal. Only a flaming sea of hosts can drive back the hate of the godless world and restrain the angry hand of the Father. Don't get tired. I find consolation in revealing myself to you. I shall never abandon you."

Q: "Where is the place of the springs?"

A: "On your property on the mountain."

With a movement of the hand she indicated a second time the very same direction!

“Don’t be afraid; make haste to make it known.”

Ninth encounter (23 – 03 – 1970)

It was the second night after a horrible appearance of the devil. I was woken from my sleep. All around me was light. Mary, the Tabernacle of the Most High stood beside me. She took me into her arms and consoled me. She said:
“I know about your anxiety, I stand by you, I shall not abandon you.”
Before she disappeared she said:
“Look to the other side.”

There stood Michael in armour and a lance in his hands. On his right stood a cherubim robed in white, his arms folded. After about two minutes they disappeared and so did the brilliant light. This was a great consolation for me.

Tenth encounter (02 – 05 – 1971)

At the Ngome Chapel

Shortly before I left, I went again to the chapel with a small group of women. A catechumen had complained that she is in trouble because she wants to believe. One of her neighbours called her names and they were quarrelling. I prayed aloud with the woman and asked Mary to help this woman and to convert this troublemaker.



Suddenly I noticed that the picture was very much alive. She stepped forward and her face was immensely beautiful.

In my excitement I shouted: “Look at Mary!” I am convinced that the women too saw Mary. I personally was so moved that I walked away silently. The same troublesome man asked the priest for pardon and since then there is peace.

Sr. Reinolda was deeply convinced of her encounters with Our Lady. She talked to her priest about them. Fr. Ignatius Jutz OSB was the superior of the Nongoma Mission and Secretary General of the Benedictine Hospitals in the Diocese of Eshowe. Fr. Norbert Roehm OSB was assistant priest.

BISHOP AURELIAN BILGERI OSB, ESHOWE AND SR. REINOLDA MAY OSB

Sr. Reinolda conscientiously informed her bishop about her encounters.

I carefully considered your personal concern, but I cannot give you any other answer than the one I have already given you. If the matter is genuine, the Blessed Mother will see to its success. Preserve in your heart your great love and your secret, and then you

will derive great spiritual profit from it. Since you revealed this matter to your spiritual director and to me, you have done your part and can lay all else into the hands of Mary.

Letter of Bishop A. Bilgeri to Sr. Reinolda + 14 -11-1956

Pardon me please, if I am not silent but speak about my secret again. How can the mouth and pen be silent if the heart is full to overflowing? Everything is as clear and alive before me as on the first day. This experience and impact on my spiritual life cannot be wiped away any more. Should I want to forget it, I would have to give up praying. At each Holy Mass, communion, and dozens of time at work, I am captured and my soul wants to shout and make the wish of Mary known to the whole world. The fact that I am supposed to be silent while my task is not yet done causes me very often pain and my tears flow secretly. I pray every day that you might understand the meaning of the message and not say it is nothing new. If you could only see Mary just once! She is the living tabernacle. She wants to give Jesus in the Host to the blind world. She only asks for souls who will receive the host, not only for some moments but take it along into the daily life, without separation, just like a living tabernacle.

Letter of Sr. Reinolda to Bishop Aurelian +Nongoma 18-01-1957

The mother general (of the Tutzing Sisters) said: "Deal with the Rev. Bishop. Do not push that something gets done". This is easy to say by one who does not know any thing of the matter.

I want to beg you, Rev. Bishop, to immerse yourself into the matter in front of the tabernacle, please. May Mary, the Tabernacle of the Most High, show you a way in which you can repeat to the world the words she has spoken.

Letter of Sr. Reinolda to Bishop Aurelian +Nongoma 09-01-1959

At the end of December I received a long letter from Father Archabbot Suso (Archabbey of St. Ottilien). He pointed out emphatically that I must not undertake anything without your consent. I can assure you that I have done nothing against your will and have kept nothing secret. Father Archabbot promised to have a picture painted according to my description. I do not want to have anything to do with it personally because my name must not appear. I will gladly go my way of the cross in silence if only the wish of the "Tabernacle of the Most High" is being fulfilled. Mary must and will bring success to her work.

Letter of Sr. Reinolda to Bishop Aurelian + Nongoma 15-01-1961

Bishop A. Bilgeri treated the "Ngome affair" very cautiously.

A Shrine is built at Ngome.

After the Benedictine Missionaries had opened a mission station at Nongoma in 1926, they began to establish a string of outstations in the district. In 1944, they bought a farm at Ngome which was intended as a source of income for the mission station at Nongoma. The missionaries called the new church property simply the “Ngome Farm”. A small school was erected on the farm. The new building was blessed and opened in November 1953. It became known as the Mayime School. On Sundays the classroom was used as a chapel by the small local Catholic community.

When in December 1957 Sr. Reinolda was visiting a sick person in the Ngome area for the first time she felt the certainty within her heart that this was the place where the shrine the Blessed Virgin had requested should be built. After consulting with Fr. Ignatius, the parish priest, seven springs were found below the Mayime School. Sr. Reinolda firmly believed that Our Lady, twice pointing at the direction of Ngome, wanted “a shrine on church property where seven springs come together.”



Sr. Reinolda began to feel the need for a picture of “Our Lady, Tabernacle of the Most High.” With the consent of Bishop Aurelian Bilgeri and the support of Archabbot Suso Brechter OSB of St. Ottilien, a Munich artist painted the picture according to the instruction given to him by Sr. Reinolda. The painting was taken to Ngome in May 1963 and kept in the niche of the classroom where an altar had been built for church services.

Urged by Fr. Ignatius, Bishop Aurelian Bilgeri allowed Br. Jacob Riedmann OSB to build a small chapel on the Ngome farm near the area where seven springs were situated.

Fr. Ignatius, not the bishop, blessed the chapel on Pentecost Sunday 1966. The picture of Our Lady, Tabernacle of the Most High, found its place above the altar of the chapel.

About a dozen of Benedictine Sisters, local people and “pilgrims” from outside attended this historic Pentecost celebration at Ngome.



Right Reverend Bishop,

I want to thank you personally for giving permission for the little chapel in Ngome. I often feel it hard that you don't believe me and that you also prevent the people from going to Ngome. Well the matter has been published, and also my name was mentioned which I had personally not wished. However, today I say to myself: It came that way and so it had to be.

Mary said: “Reveal it to the whole world”. And that was already on 21 and 22 October 1955. She also said “All people who hear these words and believe them shall receive a sign from me”. Well, because the Bishop does not believe in it, he cannot receive a sign. The matter is of such a spiritual nature that it does not require spectacular miracles.

Now I come back to the happening on 8th December 1954. Do you recall what I already presented to you? The two figures seen: a monk with raised hands from which incense was rising and a woman (Veil), showing something veiled. At first I thought it was a shield but was soon enlightened during Holy Communion, that it was not a shield but a veiled monstrance.

For years I have had the desire to present this to you and ask you most earnestly to think about it whether the “shrine” doesn’t mean “a church with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament”. From where could greater blessing come for our nation than through hands raised in praise of God?

Your grateful, Sr. Reinolda OSB

Letter of Sr. Reinolda to Bishop Aurelian +Nongoma 22 – 01-1967

Right Reverend Bishop,

I am just coming from Ngome together with our sisters from South-West. May “Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High” bring you many blessings and new strength for your jubilee. I thank you with all my heart for what you have done for us. May you receive light that you will become more open to the call of Mary.

Your grateful, Sr. Reinolda OSB

Letter of Sr. Reinolda to Bishop Aurelian +Nongoma 16-09-1972

Bishop A. Bilgeri celebrated his 25th anniversary of episcopal consecration in September 1972. God called him to eternity in 1973.

Sr. Reinolda obeyed her bishop. She loved him and prayed for him.

The Prioress-General and “Ngome Affair”

On the occasion of our General Chapter (Congregation of the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzling) 1967 in Grottaferrata near Rome for which I was a delegate from the priory of Sorocaba (Southern Brazil), I heard for the first time about the Marian visions of our Sr. Reinolda May.

The Prioress-General at that time, M. Maria Lucas Rauch OSB, spoke briefly and objectively to the chapter delegates about these happenings in order to inform the sisters present, in case they should come to hear about this any time. She also mentioned the title “Tabernacle of the Most High” under which the Blessed Mother appeared to Sr. Reinolda. Mother Maria Lucas did not voice any personal opinion about these events. She gave very factual information, but emphasized that Sr. Reinolda was a true missionary who stands with both feet on the earth, does very effective mission work, is midwife and very capable head of the maternity department in Nongoma. These latter remarks about the person of Sr. Reinolda left a lasting impression with me whereas the Marian apparitions did not touch me.

Inkamana, 5th March 1991

Sr. Maria Froning OSB

The Ngome Shrine in the diocese

The mission personell heard about the alleged “apparitions.” The “Ngome Affair” was discussed privately. Not many missionaries of the diocese went to Ngome.

Sr. Athanasia Simon OSB, Sr. Reinolda’s former superior, wrote on 6 October 2006: “She (Sr. Reinolda) never mentioned the visions. Maybe she felt that I did not easily believe in such extra-ordinary graces.”

Sr. Reinolda talked to certain people about her “encounters” with the Blessed Virgin. The nurses who were together with sister in the maternity ward were invited to pray to Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High and to go on a pilgrimage to Ngome. It was believed that the usual 100% pass of the maternity students was due to the help of Our Lady.

In a letter to Fr. Ignatius Jutz OSB (30-08-1964), Sr. Reinolda describes the first miraculous cure which happened through the help of Mary, Tabernacle of the Most High: Good Friday 1956, “Perhaps you recall this skeleton of a person which you yourself baptized on Good Friday. I still remember your words when you said: “In this case one no longer needs to ask if she will die before giving baptism. “This case was a caesarian. She came much too late and was already septic. The wound did not heal. She was operated a second time and on Good Friday a non-catholic nurse came to me and said: ‘Sister I can no longer nurse Monica. We have just removed the clamps and it is again gaping open. Can’t you do anything else for Monica?’ I went to the doctor. His answer: ‘It is abdominal tuberculosis and this infection on top of it. She is lost’. Now I thought again of my “Tabernacle of the Most High”. At that time we did not yet have water from Ngome. I went to her with the sketched picture of the Mother of God. I spoke about the “Tabernacle of the Most High”. Monica spoke her own prayer to the picture as if to a living being. After a short time Monica said: I shall not die. This lady will heal me. Next day the same nurse came again and said: Come with me and see what has happened. I went along and what did we see: the wound had healed. All the nurses cried. A few weeks later Dr. Koehler said to me: Tell me when did this woman die? My answer: She is alive. Dr. Koehler: So, one should not give up on anybody as long as the heart has not stopped beating. My response: “She is healed by a miracle.”

In the short diary of Sr. Reinolda the following entry is found: “I have very frequently experienced Mary’s protection. I was not idle, and Mary lavishly distributed graces. Ever since my encounters with Mary I have, to this day, the urge to prepare tabernacles. Thus I began to work with fallen-away Catholics. Where years ago I failed, Mary’s help was victorious. A great number of marriages were blessed and many have returned to the church after 20-25 years. Mary is active.”

Bishop Mansuet Dela Biyase, Eshowe and Ngome

The Ngome Affair gained more and more publicity after Bishop Bilgeri’s death. The Ngome issue was relatively freely discussed by priests and religious in the diocese. Priests, religious and lay people began to travel to Ngome to pray at the chapel of Our Lady. Some of them fetched water from the springs in the forest below the chapel because they believed it had some curative power.

At a Priests' council meeting on 7 March, 1976, it was decided to establish a commission which was to investigate the Ngome Affair. The commission, consisting of Fr. Michael Mayer OSB and Fr. Richard Multerer OSB, published their findings on 10 May, 1976:

The members of this commission have tried to gather as much as information as possible about Sister Reinolda, the visionary herself. We questioned especially Sisters who had worked together with her at Nongoma and have known her for many years. Almost each and everyone who was asked about Sr. Reinolda agree that there is very little that could be said against her. Many stressed her exemplary life as a religious and



especially her great missionary zeal. For many years she had been working as a midwife and she is known to many people as a skillful and capable nurse. Others mentioned her patience and obedience with regard to her visions. In speaking with her, one gets the impression that she is normal, down to earth woman and by no means given to fantasizing or some sort of hysteria. What was held against her is that she gets carried away at times to interpret commonplace happenings in a pious or supernatural

way where others see nothing extraordinary at all. What must be mentioned is that Sr. Reinolda had not been especially or excessively devoted to our Lady before 22-08-1955. She was, however, known for having a special devotion to the Eucharistic presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament – implanted into her soul by her parish priest when she was still young. On the whole, it can be said that there are many features in Sister's character which make her a person who can be trusted and believed.

As far as her physical condition, her state of health is concerned, we have asked the expert opinion of Dr. Hoare (at Mbongolwane now) who had known Sr. Reinolda for many years. A somewhat mysterious heart complaint has come to our knowledge.

When the members of the Priests' Council met again on 12 May, 1976, they discussed the findings of the commission, but were not prepared to endorse the suggestions. They felt that a more comprehensive investigation into the Ngome Affair was necessary before any recommendations could be issued.

Bishop M.D. Biyase treated the Ngome Affair with reservation for a number of years.

Sr. Reinolda's last years

In 1976 the Benedictine Hospital Nongoma became government hospital. The Benedictine Missionary Sisters left the hospital on 1 June 1976. The convent was transferred to a place called St. Alban. When Sr. Reinolda retired from hospital work in 1976 at the age of 74, the statistics showed that since the opening of the hospital 28 000 children were born in her department.

Sr. Reinolda was granted four more years in Nongoma. Now she was completely free for missionary work. She walked every day from sisters' convent in St. Alban to the five

minutes distant hospital. The nurses called her attention to the seriously ill patients and the dying, and Sr. Reinolda baptized many children and prepared adults for baptism and death. Not all the nurses at the government hospital liked to see the intruder. Sr. Reinolda still did not have time for holidays.



In June 1980, the first signs of Sr. Reinolda's last illness appeared: intestinal cancer. During her years at Nongoma sister had been sick again and again. Sr. Reinolda spent a few weeks of recuperation and observation in Inkamana and from August on she stayed in the infirmary of the priory house. As long as she could still be up, she suffered much at the thought that she could no longer be in Nongoma and do missionary work. She often said "I want to go home", but she could not grasp that she was ill and needed care. From the beginning of January she experienced greater difficulties and could only take liquid nourishment. Her weight decreased considerably and she became increasingly weaker so that she had to be mostly in bed. One month before her death, as the bells were ringing for the

Sunday high mass, her old energy returned once again. She got dressed and dragged herself to church, unnoticed by anybody. There was great excitement when her bed was found empty. Two sisters had to help her to get home again. Then her strength decreased noticeably, but she immediately recognized everybody at their visit. Sr. Maria Froning spent time with her in the infirmary. What deeply touched Sr. Maria in her frequent visits was the fact that Sr. Reinolda never made the last remark about her encounters with the Mother of God.

Fr. Prior once celebrated Holy Mass in her room and Fathers, Brothers and Sisters came again and again to pray with her. Two days before her death, her Sisters sang the 'Suscipe', prayed and said individual good-byes. On her last day she lay there very quietly and at 10:45 am on April 1, she passed over into eternity.

The funeral on 6 April in Inkamana cemetery gave evidence how highly esteemed and beloved Sr. Reinolda had been. Father Prior Gernot and 22 priests concelebrated the funeral high mass. From Nongoma a bus arrived with 85 people, among them about 40 nurses in uniform. The Zulu King had sent a representative because, according to Zulu law he may not participate in funerals.

In her funeral sermon nothing was said about Sr. Reinoldas encounters with the Blessed Virgin. Only in one sentence Ngome was mentioned. It reads as follows: "At Sr. Reinolda's request a little chapel in honour of Our Lady, Tabernacle of the Most High, was erected at Ngome."

At the end of Sr. Reinolda's obituary, Sr. Prioress and the Sisters of Inkamana Priory wrote as follows:

"Sr. Reinolda will remain in our memories as an exceptionally efficient midwife, a great missionary, and a religious woman who drew her strength from her deep love of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, the Mother of God. May she be an intercessor for the people whom she had loved so much. May she rest in peace."

PRAYER TO THE TABERNACLE OF THE MOST HIGH

Tabernacle of the Most High, in humility I beseech you, let me recognize the mystery of being a tabernacle. You were and you are the true Tabernacle not only of the child growing in your womb, but you are the Christ-Bearer, living monstrance, totally one with your Son in the Host, as you were one with him under the cross. Responding to your petition: "Form more human souls into tabernacles". You alone can do it. Show your motherly power! Let flow the streams of grace! Prepare souls who will understand it and be totally enraptured by the firebrand of love from the Host in the sacrament of the holy Eucharist. Save our world through the Host.

Mary, my beloved Mother, help me and those entrusted to me to reveal your mystery

Sr. Reinolda May – retreat 10 -06-1956

*Fr. Michael Mayer OSB
Inkamana 2007*





erste Begegnung mit Maria
22. 8 - 55.

Wurz nach Entfang der hl. Communio
stand Maria in unmittelbarer Nähe
vor mir.

(Was im Geiste gesehen) Wurde in einer anderen
Atmosphäre hineingezogen.

Maria zeigte sich im wunderbarsten Licht,
schien als die Sonne. Sie war ganz im
weiß gelendet. Wallendet schied vom
Felsen bis zur Sohle. Auf der Brust trug
eine große Kiste, umgeben von einem
Strahlenkranz, Leben ausstrahlend. Sie
war eine lebendige Wassertang.

Maria stand erhöht auf der Erde
Hände und Füße nicht gesehen.

Es war mir als ob ich in einer Wolke
zu erst ergriffen, angezogen von Maria
weg von der Erde. Ich hatte die Augen
geschloffen, aber ich sah rotes Licht,
das ich mehrere Tage lang gelendet war
von der Schönheit und dem Licht der

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