

Chapter 36 - Venlo

A House of Providence

During Mother General Augustine Geisel's visit to Europe in 1937 she realised how vitally important it was to have a place of refuge in readiness for the Schlehdorf Community in case of need, for it was obvious that a war in Germany was imminent. With the Prioress of Schlehdorf¹ as travelling companion, Reverend Mother went to Rome and, on the return journey, the two Sisters also visited the tomb of St Dominic at Bologna and entrusted to their Father's loving care all the problems faced by the Congregation in those difficult days. The travellers also went to Switzerland, exploring possibilities, but without success. They now journeyed northwards and at Cologne the Dominican Brethren offered them a farm, 3 Km from Venlo² in the Netherlands. The sisters called at the farm and, as it seemed ideally suited to their purpose, they agreed to buy it.

On Mother General's return to South Africa she wrote that Sister Bertranda Schmid and a few Sisters should set out for Venlo as soon as can be arranged. Before their departure, however, came an urgent letter from Father Prior Siegfried Wagner, O.P. saying His Lordship, Bishop Gulielmus Lemmens of Roermond refused the new community admittance to his diocese as there were already more than enough convents in the district of Limburg. So they Sisters waited with the packed luggage, hoping that the Bishop might relent, but in vain. Finally they unpacked their portmanteaux and boxes.

In the autumn of 1937 Mother Athanasius heard that the Salesian Fathers had a "mission school" near Amersfoort, Holland. Contact was made there and on 29th October, Rev Mother Athanasius and Sister Agnella Dirr set out for the Netherlands to meet the Salesian Rector, Father Kramer. Again the nuns were disappointed at not finding a suitable place. While "invoking the assistance of the entire heavenly court" Mother Athanasius decided to ask an interview with Bishop Lemmens on their homeward journey. The Dominican Fathers felt the Sisters were only wasting time and said so; for their Provincial, Very Rev Father Lawrence Siemer, had tried repeatedly to induce Bishop Lemmens to change his mind but failed. However, as the story of Albertushof³ unfolds it will be seen that the new foundation was indeed under the protection of Divine Providence.

To the Sisters' great surprise the Bishop not only granted them an audience and seemed quite interested in their Congregation and its work, but also agreed to the new foundation on the following conditions:

The Sisters may not beg;

They may not make propaganda for recruits, and

The Mother House in Africa must vouch to support the convent.

These promises having been duly given, His Lordship took the two nuns into his private chapel and gave them his blessing. "... This took place on All Souls' Day", said Mother Athanasius. When the result of the meeting was made known to the Dominican Fathers they were not a little astonished at the new turn of events. Reverend Mother's journal reads: "... After much preparation and packing it was decided that on 10th January, 1939 we⁴ were to leave our dear Sisters and Schlehdorf, that beautiful mountain home we loved so much. We also experienced great difficulty in deciding what we should take along, for it was during the Hitler regime, when each person was allowed to take no more than 10 D.M.⁵ in cash out of

¹ Sister Athanasius Zech

² A town of circ. 28000 inhabitants

³ Named for St Albert the Great, the learned Dominican.

⁴ *Mother Dominica Zucktrigel succeeded Mother Athanasius as Prioress of Schlehdorf and Athanasius was named Superior of the new foundation. Sisters Hippolyta Ferstl, Amora Nibler, Dafrosa Hirschhalmer and Estella Schaeffeler were to accompany her. Sister Joachim Meerkotter, a born Netherlander, came from South Africa to teach the novices English and Dutch. Sister Priscilla Gfroereis was sent from England to Venlo. She was a teacher of sacred and secular music. The privations of the war undermined her health and she died in 1948 at Venlo.*

⁵ *Ten German Marks, at the time equal to about ten shillings sterling.*

Germany, although we were to begin a new house in a strange land of which none of us knew the language. Our summons to Holland also finally came rather unexpectedly from Father Cornelius O. P., the newly-elected Prior of Cologne Friary..."

"At Munich station had gathered Right Rev Monsignori J Neuhaeusler and A Lang with many friends and relatives to bid us farewell and, en route to the Netherlands, the parents of our Sister Infantia Neunzig greeted us at Cologne. On our arrival at Venlo station we were welcomed by Father Prior and Brother Augustinus who took us to Albertus-Hof. In the chapel the TE DEUM was sung and, during the Benediction Service, Father Prior invoked God's special blessing on this undertaking begun for His glory and the good of souls. This was 11th January, 1939. The brethren did their best to make us feel at home; and from the first day there was no lack of work..." At that time conditions in Germany were already so strained that the crossing of the frontier could only be accomplished with difficulty and this was often aggravated by the animosity of the officials. The Sisters had now reached their destination with 10 D.M. each and their hand luggage only, which contained just the most necessary clothing.

While the rest of their baggage was delayed at the border they had to make do with what they had. When the luggage finally arrived the Sisters had to pay their very last penny for its redemption. It certainly required trust in Providence for the little band to face the future, now quite penniless.

The buildings of the farm were arranged in a quadrangle. The living quarters had been erected in 1911, to which a barn was added the following year. The stable and other outhouses were begun in 1919 and completed in 1922. The farm comprised about 20 hectares and the livestock consisted of 12 cows, 19 pigs, 2 horses, a beehive, numerous hens and 3 dogs. The farm lands were composed of fields, meadows, a fairly large orchard, a vegetable garden and a little forest in which was situated a small cemetery of the former Friary. There were still two men working the property, one of them, Mr Louis van den Beuken, who helped the Sisters so faithfully.

In March 1939 six postulants⁶ arrived from Schlehdorf. They had at first been intended for the novitiate at Hinckley, since their emigration to South Africa was no longer possible. But, as things turned out, they remained at Albertus-Hof. This group of lively youngsters put new hope into the little community. On a Saturday in May the Sisters received their first and unexpected visit from "Vader Bisschop", as the saintly Bishop Lemmens was affectionately known in his diocese. The Prelate found the nuns busily engaged in their various duties. Full of interest about their welfare His Lordship greeted them individually and said a few kind words to each.

Early in 1940 came the canonical approbation for the establishment of a temporary novitiate in Albertus-Hof. Since from the beginning the community had the privilege of daily Mass and the Reserved Sacrament, and all other obligations of our Rule could be observed at the new foundation, there was no impediment to the novices receiving the required training. The Bishop himself presided at the first ceremony of Reception on 13th January 1940 and, of his own accord, now gave the community leave to recruit postulants. Thus the Venlo foundation became a collecting house for vocations and, as a result of it, forty Dutch names can today be counted in the register of our Congregation.

"From April 1940, when the Germans took possession of the Netherlands by force, until the armistice in 1945, God's loving Providence watched over this little Convent in a most wonderful manner", wrote Mother Athanasius. When the time of terror began in the spring of 1940 this convent stood in the direct line of fighting on the Dutch-German border and, although bombs fell on all sides of it, the house was never hit.

As soon as the novices were professed in 1941 they had to begin their studies at the college at Blerick and Sisters Auxiliata and Gulielma commenced their training as nurses at the Venlo Hospital, administered by the Sisters of Charity.

⁶ *Sisters Siegfrieda Preis, Basildis Heinzelmann, Gabriela Walch, Hubertina Weishaupt, Auxiliata Gerster and Gulielma Lederle. The emigration of these from Germany was assisted by the valued friend of the Congregation, Msgr J Neuhaeusler. The six postulants had hardly arrived at Albertus-Hof when Sister Willibrorda van den Hombergh offered herself as the first Dutch postulant to our Congregation and was allowed to join the party.*

The chronicle continues: "There is, at present, much anxiety; many soldiers of the 'Wehrmacht' are at the aerodrome and one hears of convents being confiscated and the religious driven away at an hour's notice: Bethania, Auxiliatrix and the Ursulines. Even at Roermond the seminary has been seized. Rev Father Superior of St Paul's at Arcen telephoned to ask whether we are still here. He says the 'S.S.' were there ordering all to leave. He advised us to make provisional arrangements for lodgings for our Sisters with private people in case we may also have to go. This we did, but I renew my trust in God's protection and we will *not* go away..." As one reads the Convent Record the language breathes with the stress experienced and it is clear that the faith manifested by Mother Athanasius in these dire circumstances is only possible in a person who lives very close to God.

On 14th March the Local Commander, Schneider, arrived there at supper time. Mother Superior writes: "... and he promised us help. I think he is a Catholic thought he does not admit it... We celebrated Easter with great solemnity – 'Tenebrae' during Holy Week. Father Stanislaus, brother to our Sister Amora, officiated..."

"High Mass on Corpus Christi. Many priests, brothers, altar boys and flower girls took part in the procession in our forest where we had four beautiful altars..."

So the community life could go on at Albertus-Hof. The poor Sisters of the sequestered convents were at the mercy of some charitable persons who gave them shelter in their homes. Some of these dispersed religious often asked help from Albertus-Hof, which was gladly given. For example, the Ursulines did their weekly laundry at our convent and many others received some of the farm produce. At this time the community also received sufficient financial aid from Rev Dr Berner of the Mission Society at Aachen to enable them to pay for a new kitchen stove. Nevertheless, the nuns had to live very frugally because all income, agricultural produce or an increase in the stables were strictly controlled; besides the number of persons looking to our Sisters for sustenance was steadily growing.

In an attempt to economise still more the Sisters changed to black Habits. They also offered to launder the church linen of parishes in the vicinity that had been deprived of Sisters' communities. Since all available outbuildings were occupied by the military, the washing was usually done at night.

These quotations from the convent chronicles give an idea of the situation at Albertus-Hof: "12th December, 1941: Several Fathers bade us goodbye. They must go to the front – poor priests!

"Christmas Eve: Father Aegidius officiated. At 10 p.m. we recited Matins with the usual procession of the Holy Infant at the TE DEUM. One even forgets it is war time, all were so busy preparing for Christmas. The Sisters were very good and never tired of looking again and again for something small that might give pleasure to the poor families who have taken refuge in our house. The chapel was packed with people attending Mass and all joined in the singing..."

"December 31st: A day of thanksgiving for all the graces received during this year from our Father in Heaven. In the evening Vader Bisschop paid us a brief visit. It was a happy ending to our short community retreat..."

"February 2nd: Oh, may our dear Lady's prayers obtain peace for the world!

"March 17th: By the 19th instant the poor Sisters at Blerick must vacate their convent. Our student Sisters help them clear away as much of their possessions as possible. We also sent our servant with cart and horse to aid them. Terrible!

"April: Holy Week: We received so many beautiful flowers from Dr van Rooy, Family Winters, Peters, Gerards, etc., for the Altar of Repose..."

"Feast of our Holy Mother St Catharine: Sisters Elizabeth Buis and Antonia Verhalle were received into the Order. They were the picture of happiness in spite of bombers flying over our house..."

On 7th November the annals relate that Sisters Joachim and Estella went to Enkhuizen because Greta Urseim was very ill and had received the Sacraments of the dying. The chronicle continues: "... She must be an extraordinarily good girl and has a great desire to be a Dominican and to be professed. She had visited Albertus-Hof but her poor health prevented her from entering religion. The Parish Priest and the

Bishop know of her ardent wish and consented that she should receive these privileges. On the 21st November, 1942, On Our Lady's Presentation, Sister Margaretha Ursem made her religious profession at the age of seventeen. She was so happy she began to sing and said she was ready to go 'home' now. And actually on the following day, Sunday, Our Lord took His little bride to Himself."

During the opening months of 1943, the Sisters again received generous donations from Prof. Feron at Roermond, the Family Winters and other benefactors at Venlo and even from relatives in Germany, sent out by hand – so that they could again make ends meet in the community and were able to give some relief to others in need. The Superior had persuaded the Local Commander to turn Albertus-Hof into an emergency dressing station and the Red Cross flag was hoisted over the roof. This proved to be their saving. All through the year the billeting of soldiers in the houses of civilians was enforced relentlessly and the poor people, sick or well, young or old, were simply told to find shelter elsewhere. Many of these persons sought refuge with our Sisters and whatever corner of the house could possibly be spared was given up to these homeless people.

Owing to the imminent danger of the frequent air raids the convent cellar was now turned into a temporary chapel and the Blessed Sacrament reserved there. Food stuffs became scarcer by the day and whatever the military could lay hands on was confiscated. The Sisters had no cart or horse left, but sometimes they were fortunate to borrow a horse for the work in the fields. One day Mother Athanasius even asked a passing Gipsy for the loan of his horse and actually got it.

On 22nd February 1944 the Allies made their first attempt to bomb the aerodrome which was very close to our convent. Many people were killed in the town, among them the convent's good friend, Dr van Rooy.

One day Sisters Basildis and Theresia came with the news that the Convent of St Antonius, Tegelen, where they were boarding, was confiscated too... In August 1944 the fortunes of war had taken such a turn that it was obvious that the Allies would force their way into Germany. Venlo, the gateway into Germany, was a much contested site. Several persons of the underground resistance movement also sought cover at Albertus-Hof where the Sisters gave them as much help as they could. "During the frequent air raids the noise of the aeroplanes and bursting bombs was deafening. No one dared go out of doors. Our whole house shook, windows and doors opened and closed – it was frightful! Father T de Valk, O.P. frequently pronounced the general absolution while we were huddled together in the cellar in constant danger of death, praying one Rosary after another. The destruction wrought is unimaginable and the terror and mental anguish often seemed unendurable... One can only trust in the Lord. 'The eternal God is thy dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms', I often repeat to myself", wrote Athanasius.

"The Sisters sometimes had to leave the convent precincts, even while planes flew overhead, in order to find something to feed the many hungry mouths at Albertus-Hof. The harvest of the year, too, had to be gathered in under grave danger, for bombers now did not cease passing over Venlo day and night, discharging their deadly load.

"On 18th October 1944 the beautiful Dominican Church of Trans-Cedron was hit. A lay-brother was killed in his room and three nuns who had been billeted there also died under the ruins. The following week three of our Sisters went to help clear away the debris of the last bombardment when bombers again surprised them. The nuns were frantically running for shelter when the violent air pressure literally hurled them down the stairs to the cellar where they were crammed together with others praying in terror, while bombs continued to fall around their shelter. It happened that one community of fifteen nuns were all killed when a bomb fell through the house exploding in their cellar."

In September all the available men in Venlo, even elderly monks, were rounded up by the Nazi for forced labour. A Sister secretly warned the Superior of Albertus-Hof that soldiers were there looking for the chaplain. With remarkable presence of mind Mother Athanasius turned a large wash tub over the priest who was just there talking with her. Quickly she placed a bowl of stockings and soap suds on top of the barrel and stood there washing these articles when the soldiers burst through the door, demanding to know where is the priest. Though her knees must have trembled she answered calmly: "If I tell you he is not here you will not believe me, so you must search for him yourselves." The leader of the band

threatened her as he hurried into the house to continue his quest. They finally left, angry at not finding him.

On another day the Superior hastily put a Sister's veil on an elderly monk's head, pushing him unceremoniously into the chapel where the Sisters were in choir. The soldiers looked in and, not noticing the priest amongst the rows of praying nuns, went away.

They had no bread left and there were 70 people in all at Albertus-Hof. The barn was full of corn but not threshed, for the power station had long since been destroyed and their own machine was an electric one. A Sister went on bicycle through ruins and dangers to ask a loan of a petrol engine from a farmer in the vicinity so that they could bake something in preparation for Christmas.

Mother's journal continues: "... Sisters Auxiliata and Gulielma came home today for their free day. They have not been here for a long time. They say their hospital was also subjected to much shelling. They now live in the cellars and the hospital beds are as close to one another as possible; so many patients are brought in daily having been wounded by shrapnel. The Sisters sleep in the passages of the cellars... very many windows are broken and they have no electricity and often not even water.

Sister Basildis related how they had to cross a very narrow temporary bridge over the Maas on their bicycles to reach the teachers' college each day. More than once, in heavy fog, they were surprised by the bus in the middle of the bridge. There was no room for the cyclists to pass the bus on that narrow span. All the sisters could do was to dismount and stand on the very edge of the bridge until the vehicle had passed. Had one of them lost her balance and fallen into the river she would surely have drowned as each one was weighed down by heavy books in the satchel on her back.

Someone told the Sisters that the convent of Marienthal, which had also been confiscated, was occupied by Nazi soldiers and partly by civilians. "Apparently the soldiers use the beautiful refectory of the convent as an abattoir to slaughter cows...! The stories one hears about the war get worse by the day..." Mother wrote.

Another entry: "Bombardments again; so far the most terrible! A whole street was in flames. In the evening a storm spread the fire rapidly... Homeless people came all day for shelter with the few things they could save. Many were weeping... The misery becomes more insupportable by the day. How to deed them all? But our dear Lord can and *will* increase our store... The house shakes so one expects it to fall to pieces any moment. Terrific noise; cannon roar; bombs and shells over and around us. Every corner of the house is packed with people..." Shrapnel once entered a room of our convent, but providentially no one was there at the time. The window was broken and a statue damaged... Another striking proof of Gon's protection of the community.

One morning Mother Athanasius was called from Holy Mass. "Soldiers were running through the house and did not even say what they wanted. To my astonishment four armed men were upstairs in the room where the sick Sisters were prostrate with influenza. On asking what this meant they said the Lieutenant sent them to bring the persons in that room to him, for light was showing from their window in the night. I told them the Sisters are too ill but I would go in stead..." Rev Mother had only got up from the 'flu herself and was extremely weak. The men seemed satisfied with her suggestion and they set out. She said, "The weather was bad and my greatest trouble was to extricate my boots from the mud, for I stuck at almost every step as I marched between the four armed soldiers. So we reached the shelter. I greeted the officer and told him I am hostage because the Sisters are too ill to come. He shouted whether we do not know how dangerous it is to have light showing during the black-out. Of course I explained that it had really happened accidentally and apologised for the mistake. Eventually I was allowed to leave. The soldiers offered to accompany me again, but I left them with my thanks. At home the Sisters were all praying, terrified that they might never see me again..."

"Christmas again," continue the annals. "But the whole evening shells flew over our house. It seems the English don't even know it is the Feast of the Prince of Peace... A horse was killed very near us. It was brought into our wash-kitchen and butchered and the meat given to the many hungry people.

“31st December: ... It was a very long year and yet there were not more than 365 days in it. Dear Lord, what is awaiting us in the new year? But I place my trust in You alone...” she wrote. “Air raids increased with the gradual approach of the Allies. The general misery grew daily reaching its height when the general evacuation of Venlo and district was enforced in January 1945. The weather was bitterly cold and snow lay on the ground. It was merciless the way the poor people were thrown out of their homes and sent off into still greater misery and uncertainty. Their road lay through part of Germany to North Holland. Many perished from cold and hunger and when those who survived that calamity returned some months later they found nothing but abject poverty, their belongings which had to remain behind having been looted and gone.

“Our evacuees were also driven away while consternation reigned among the women and children. Having waited a whole winter’s night at Kaldenkirchen for a train which was supposed to take them to the North, but which never came, they returned to us next day, more dead than alive. My dear Lord, surely You are powerful enough to put the whole Hitler hand to shame...!” she wrote, with just indignation.

“Now we had 60 people to feed at Albertus-Hof. We gave whatever help we could but there were occasions when we could only look on with bleeding hearts, for there was just nothing left to offer... Some weeks later, when it was quite certain that the Germans would have to retreat, all livestock that could be found was either driven away or slaughtered on the spot and the meat given to the needy.

“On 1st March 1945 the day of Venlo’s liberation dawned at last... The country was now free, but abject poverty reigned supreme. Out of cellars and corners of shelter the people came... with pale faces and sunken eyes. Shyly they came, but hurrying, anxiously hoping to find something left of their one-time cosy homes! Would the roof still be on or would the walls still be there? Even that would be a blessing...”

Scarcely had the German soldiers left Venlo than the Allies took possession of it and of Albertus-Hof, also billeting their men there. The newcomers were, however, very generous and really tried to give relief to the population. From now onwards people gradually returned from their evacuation and tried to settle down as best they could. Those who had found relief and shelter at Albertus-Hof showed their gratitude in all sorts of ways and the convent, to this day, has in them very many loyal and helpful friends.

In the afternoon of that 1st March 1945, the day of Venlo’s liberation, Sisters Siegfrieda and Antonia set out on an errand from Albertus-Hof. Antonia had not heard from her brother for eight months although the Verhalle family lived only a few miles from the convent; and naturally she was anxious about her people.

It was a beautiful Spring day and there were now no shells to fear, though bomb craters still gaped menacingly from the road. The two nuns had to circumvent barriers of barbed wire before they reached the river. They had expected at least a temporary bridge over the Maas but there was none. Some American soldiers offered to take them across the water on a raft. Having reached the other side the Sisters had not gone far when they accidentally stepped on a land mine. The soldiers heard the explosion and hurried to the rescue. Both Sisters were wounded. First aid was quickly applied and they were taken by ambulance to the nearest hospital, 2 hours away, at Weert, which district had been liberated some time before. (With no bridge over the Maas, the ambulance could not reach Venlo that day.) That same evening the surgeon relieved Sister Antonia of metal splinters in her leg and he had to amputate Sister Siegfrieda’s right fore-finger. At home the community was anxiously awaiting the Sisters’ return but there was no way of getting a message to the convent, telephones, etc. having been disrupted by the war; so they stayed in suspense for five days. On the sixth day a military ambulance could take the two patients to Venlo where the community was grateful to receive them back alive. Again proof of god’s care of the community.

After the war Mother Athanasius and her Sisters decided to inaugurate an annual Triduum of prayers and religious services for the invalids of Venlo and its vicinity. The parishioners of Venlo aided this project generously. A large marquee was pitched at Albertus-Hof and arranged as a temporary chapel, where more than 200 patients could be brought on their stretchers and wheelchairs to attend Mass, sermons and Benediction Service. The occasion became an annual highlight in the monotonous lives of many “shut-

ins”, when they could get out from between four walls into beautiful surroundings and be the guests of Albertus-Hof for three consecutive days in the summers. Here the invalids were served morning and afternoon tea and lunch each day. After 5 o’clock, when the day’s last service was over, the Patients went home for the night with joyful anticipation of more outings to follow. The sick not only delighted in attending the religious services, but also, annually, renewed acquaintance with one another and their other friends. The patients and their relatives greatly valued this work of charity performed by the Sisters.

As the post-war restoration of the Netherlands advanced it became necessary for the community at Albertus-Hof to look for some suitable work with which to earn their livelihood. The Triduum was only an annual event, but regular occupation for the community was essential. At first an attempt was made to manage a Home for the Aged, MEEUWBEEMD, in 1960, erected by the laity of Venlo. However, this proved to be a vast project for which our congregation lacked the necessary staff; so it had to be given up.

The Sisters now thought of opening a day-nursery, “Kleuter Dagverblijf”, for children between the ages of two to five years. This would relieve working mothers during the day of the responsibility of the children; and the little ones, particularly those dwelling in flats, would have ample space to play in the open at Albertus-Hof, or in the roomy nursery. As our convent is, however, situated out of town, a small motor bus would now be needed to fetch the children from Venlo, Blerick and Teegelen every morning and to take them home again at five o’clock in the afternoon.

The Netherlanders had not forgotten all the kindness they had received from Albertus-Hof during the years of strife, so they generously set about collecting the necessary sum to purchase a mini-bus which they presented to the sisters. The Triduum for the sick was now reluctantly abandoned when the crèche was opened on 6th June 1962. Meanwhile the old Albertus-Hof was getting too small for the community and the school, therefore a new convent was planned and erected near the forest in 1967.

On a visit to Belgium the Sisters saw a nursery school for mentally handicapped children in Ghent. This gave them the idea of starting a similar scheme at Venlo in 1965, for children between the ages of two to seven years. Sisters Eugenio Bos and Margo Verspeek were the first to enter for study courses that would fit them for the care of mentally retarded children. When they had acquired their Diplomas new pavilions were erected for “Kindervreugd” and on 17th May 1969 His Excellency Mr H J van der Poel, the Secretary of State, officially opened the new building. This project was now subsidised by the State and the Municipality. This type of work was still in the initial stages in the Netherlands and our Sisters were considered pioneers in that branch of social work. Naturally such children require special care and understanding so that a team of workers was needed to assist the nuns: a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a social worker and a pedagogue; for these children are considered educable to a certain extent. Everything is being done to aid them to develop to their full potential. The parents are also assisted with expert advice in their difficult task of rearing their children and developing the ability of each.

By 1969 the Albertus-Hof community consisted almost exclusively of Netherlanders, so this convent ceased to belong to the conventual District of Hinckley and became a separate unit directly subject to the Prioress General in South Africa.

As the project “Kindervreugd” expanded the Sisters realised that they would have to give up the “Kleuter Dagverblijf” in order to devote all their attention to their mentally handicapped charges. The Government of the Netherlands had also now given Albertus-Hof permission to keep these latter children up to the age of fifteen years. The local clergy as well as the diocesan authorities appreciate the work our Sisters do in supplying this urgent need of modern society. The waiting list shows that the work is growing and, fortunately, there is, at present, sufficient help of trained lay people available although religious vocations in the Netherlands are now at a very low ebb.