

Chapter 40 – Glen Grey Mission Hospital

An Enterprise for God

It is said that every undertaking for good needs a person with vision and another with action. This is found in the story of Glen Grey¹ Mission Hospital belonging to the Diocese of Queenstown.

Monsignor JB Rosenthal SAC, as he was then, dreamed of a hospital in the Reserve where his apostolic work brought him in contact with the African people. He planned and interviewed state officials for permission to build a hospital.

At first it was suggested that he build at a place named Edenvale, but this was ruled out as the roads proved too hazardous for transport. When Dr Maria Kunz arrived from Switzerland in 1936 she practised in Queenstown Location and out in the district at McKay's Nek. Here the doctor thought the hospital should be, under the shadow of a mountain named "Three Crowns". On this spot, in a primitive hut which served as her surgery, and with only the most elementary equipment, Dr Kunz was once obliged to perform the amputation of a gangrenous leg. Yet the man survived it all. Although this site was next to the main road, scarcity of water caused the place to be abandoned.

After prolonged negotiations Bishop Rosenthal purchased six morgen² of land of what used to be a Mr du Plessis' farm. The Lady-Frere³ - Queenstown road passed through the farm and there was, moreover, a large pond supplied from a continually flowing mountain stream which solved their water problem. On 1st March 1948 Father Peter Hoffend SAC and the Brothers moved into the old homestead to begin building operations. But first they established a chapel in a rondavel⁴ which served as the first little church. Then the outhouses were changed into living quarters for the Pallottine Brothers,⁵ and after that the electric power station and workshops were built. In October 1938 Brother Stieler, the engineer and electrician, switched on the first electric lights of Glen Grey. The foundation of the new hospital was begun in 1938 but the completion of the building was delayed by complexities resulting from World War II, so that the hospital was not opened until July 1941.⁶

Monsignor Rosenthal had been promised Sisters from King William's Town to staff his hospital, so Mother General Augustine sent four nurses as pioneers: Sister Mathia Hengge, as the first Matron, and Sisters Mancini Sauterleute, Baptist Nagler and Gertrudis Feth. Sister Wigberta Pfanzelt soon followed to take charge of the busy hospital kitchen and Sister Aquila Bader came to supervise the laundry and the domestic staff.

At first it was doubtful whether the Africans would come to be nursed in the hospital but the registers soon showed that all 80 beds were occupied. After a thorough inspection on behalf of the South African Medical Council, Miss BG Alexander R.R.C. recommended that Glen Grey be registered as a first class training school for general nurses in October 1941. Doctors Kunz and Elize Foullois lived at the hospital and acted as both house and district doctors during the war years.

As the patients increased the Brothers added to the buildings. In March 1948 a bigger laundry was taken into use, complete with electric washing machines, mangles, presses, irons – all labour-saving devices. The rondavel church had become too small so a fine church with a tower was built and dedicated on 8th

¹ *An African Reserve about 30 miles from Queenstown in the region of Tembuland. This reserve was first introduced by Cecil Rhodes in 1894 as an experiment in Native self-government. The Glen Grey Act authorised the setting up of the Native Councils which led to the Transkei Bunga, the Native name for the United Transkeian Territories General Council.*

² *A morgen is a measure of land derived from the Rhenish system introduced by the first Dutch settlers. It equals about 2.12 acres.*

³ *A village founded in 1879 and named after the wife of Governor Sir Bartle Frere.*

⁴ *Characteristic form of African hut, circular in shape with a thatched roof.*

⁵ *Rev Brothers Luecke, Ludwig, Paul, Franz, Joseph, Gabriel, Stieler and Keller*

⁶ *It was placed under the patronage of St John the Baptist.*

December 1950. New quarters for the night nurses were made available in the following year and at the same time a mortuary and autopsy room were completed. To prevent the many out-patients from crowding the verandahs and disturbing the sick, an Out-Patients' Department was put up a little way from the hospital.

During all this time the African Nurses were housed in a wing of the Isolation section of the Hospital. This was not only inconvenient for the patients, as the nurses were noisy when off duty, but it also exposed the staff to the risk of infection. On 10th February 1956 a modern Home to accommodate a hundred nurses was blessed by Bishop Rosenthal⁷ and officially opened by Dr Parker of East London. The event marked another step in the progress of the hospital which was begun as a very modest venture twenty years previously.

The Dominican Sisters' interest in their students' training later obtained for Glen Grey the honour of being the first Mission Hospital to receive the Kenneth B Cloag gold Medal awarded by the South African Nursing Council to one of its pupils who gained the first place in the Final Examination for General Nurses. Another Glen Grey nurse won the Nursing Council's gold medal for the Preliminary Examination.

When the nurses' friend, Rev Brother Luecke, had suffered a stroke and could no longer work, the girls would take him to an armchair before the altar. Here the venerable Brother would sit telling his beads for them while the examinations were in progress. The nurses were also very fond of the saintly Father Winter, himself a tuberculotic, who was for years the faithful helper of the priests who in turn held the post of Hospital Secretary.

Dr Kunz was awarded two Papal decorations⁸ during the forty years she served this mission. When there were five medical practitioners at the hospital she resigned from the office of Medical Superintendent and the duty then passed to Dr M Solleder. The doctors at Glen Grey, like those at Umlamli, visited the more distant villages in a mobile clinic. "Ugqhira⁹ No¹⁰-Kunzi", as her patients call her, is still faithful to the people of the district.

The Hospital which grew far beyond the fondest dreams of its founders, was later also recognised as a training school for midwives. For some time too, it was the only Mother craft School for Africans in the country until this course was incorporated in the General Syllabus for Nurses.

The vast number of patients treated and helped in the various branches of this 500-bed hospital amply justifies the vision of Bishop Rosenthal and the tireless efforts of Doctor of Doctor Kunz in planning this enterprise in that rural area. Glen Grey District has always belonged to the Transkei. Here, as at Umlamli, African Sisters and nurses had been prepared to assume greater responsibility for when the Transkei was to attain its independence in 1976, and the majority of White Sisters would move out. The white Doctors, however, have remained on the staff until there should be enough Black Doctors to assume these posts. Although "Glen Grey" is now owned by the State, mission work still continues through the African Nuns and White Missionaries on the staff.

⁷ *His Lordship was succeeded by Bishop JB Rosner S.A.C. in 1972.*

⁸ *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice Medal and the Lateran Cross, first class.*

⁹ *Xhosa word, meaning Doctor.*

¹⁰ *Xhosa feminine prefix.*