



In her book *Notre Dame under the Southern Cross* (Ravan Press, 1984), Sr Patricia Kay's second chapter about St Peter Claver School calls this THE LONGEST TRADITION. Established in 1916, it has grown to be in 2007 an intermediate school with a considerable

reputation. Today its principal, Mrs Florence Radebe is herself a former pupil. She has a staff of 29, and there are over 1 000 learners in school each day.

1907: Soon after the Sisters of Notre Dame

arrived in Kroonstad they requested permission from their Superiors in Europe to open a school for African pupils. When this request was turned down, they were not to be deterred but learnt Sotho and continued to visit the 'location' regularly.

1914: They were visited by Sr Marie des Saints Anges (Mary Elizabeth Towneley) from England, who in many ways was personally responsible for the Southern African Notre Dame Foundations in Empandeni (1899), Kroonstad (1907) and Chikuni (1920). Sr Marie des Sts Anges had been made responsible for the SND communities and ministries in Britain in 1886, and under her there had been phenomenal growth of the Congregation and its educational works. Fr Richard Sykes SJ, Prefect Apostolic and Jesuit Superior of the Zambezi Mission region in Africa for two periods between 1896 and 1919 approached her about sending SNDs to Southern Africa. Marie des Saints Anges was 68 when she arrived in Kroonstad and heard the appeal to open a school for African pupils and felt 'the blessing of God could not be given to any work of Blessed Julie's Institute in which the poor of Christ were not first considered and provided for.'^{1 2}

1916: Four stands were rented by the Sisters in 'B' location and a single mud brick room was built and solemnly opened in April. The school was dedicated to St Peter Claver, who himself had given his life for the poor and oppressed.

Sr Andrina Ledwick one of the pioneer Sisters from Empandeni was appointed to run the school. Her companion, Sr Mary Theresa Dawkins walked up and down the dusty streets ringing a bell on that opening day to let people know of the fact. In

these early days there was no priest to say Mass for the Catholics so Sr Andrina began each day with a short prayer service.

1918: The school was turned into a hospital during the Spanish influenza outbreak.

1924: Monsignor Leo Klerlein was appointed as Prefect Apostolic to the area, and he decided to get the Spiritan – or Holy Ghost Brothers – to build a small Church on to the end of the school building so that Mass could be celebrated each Sunday.

1926: As the Catholic population of the township grew so did the school. Sr Brendan Dalton was appointed principal and the school log book that she began has been kept up to date ever since. For 29 years Sr Brendan, assisted by SNDs and teachers from the area, developed the school that grew to over 1 000 pupils in large classes. The Sisters endeavoured to train the teachers as they taught, in order to offer as well-rounded an education as possible.

Permission was sought to build a small convent next to the school so that the Sisters could live among the people, and supervise a hostel for boarders. This permission was never given.

1933: Sr Alphonse Byrne, a Tipperary woman arrived in Kroonstad and took over administration of the lower primary section of the school. She studied Sotho and for the next 20 years devoted herself to the learners and their teachers in the classes always bursting at their seams.

1953: Sr Mary McLeish, an energetic Scots woman became principal. She very quickly learned to drive to get to and from school daily from the Convent on the Hill where they lived. Sr Patricia Kay relates a story in *Notre Dame under the Southern Cross* of how one Friday afternoon, Sr Mary, in her fledgling Sotho, instructed the small group of boys who delighted in cleaning the Sisters' car after it had accumulated much dust during the week, to make the car SHINE! Later in the afternoon, Fr Janssen, the priest in charge, called Sister Mary to come and see the result of the boys' diligence! The lads, armed with glass and sand, had taken her literally, and had scraped all paint off the bonnet to really make it SHINE!

1950s: After the promulgation of the Bantu Education Act, the government withdrew subsidies, and the financial responsibility of running the school devolved on the Congregation. Teachers accepted a reduction in salaries and parents agreed to an increase in school fees. Sr Alphonse returned to St Peter Claver after a sojourn in St Francis Xavier's, Martindale. Among the achievements of this time was the school's publication of its own reading books for Subs A and B based on the new Sotho orthography.



The Great Trek

1960s: The decade saw much talk about finding new premises. The ever-expanding school, in Marabastad, had outgrown its capacity. Eventually the Town Council of Kroonstad made two stands available in Constantia, a new section of the township, now known as Maokeng.

1971: The buildings erected were made possible with funds sent from the British Province of the SNDs. Annually the British Province sent funding to enable the salaries of the teachers both in this school and in St Martin de Porres School in Orlando West to be more just. The move from Marabastad to Constantia (A Great Trek) took place with the assistance of among others, Mr de Sousa, Mr Dalleu and the late Fr Lewis Balink. An agreement was signed with the diocese whereby the Congregation took full responsibility for the running of the school. When Sr Alphonse retired as principal she was replaced for a short while by Sr Anne Reid, and then by Sr Veronica Chapman. One of Sr Veronica's achievements was the establishment of a well-equipped school library, the first in the township that was open to other learners from the township on Saturday afternoons.

1976: In March Sr Veronica handed over the principalship of the school to the first lay person to have this position, Mr Michael Mosabela, who had joined the school staff in 1964. Mr Mosabela held this position for 20 years, during which a School Governing Body was inaugurated, indicative of a the Congregation's desire to share the overall responsibility for the school with members of the community that it served.



1996: When Mr Mosabela retired he was replaced by Sr Dorothy Castles SND from the USA, who had spent some years working in Catholic Schools in the Bethlehem Diocese of the Free State with the Catholic Institute of Education. Sr Dorothy's years as principal saw the St Peter Claver learners participating in a number of provincial and national educational events, and the introduction of subject festivals and open days, to which the parents were invited. Sr Dorothy returned to the USA in 2002 and died in 2006. Since 2002 the school has been led by Mrs Florence Radebe.

2007: Two Sisters of Notre Dame continue to work in the school alongside a 27-member teaching staff. The centenary year of SNDs in Kroonstad sees continuing developments in the school, with the laying down of sports fields and the sinking of a bore hole.

1920's



1950's



1960's

