



*The Calvary at Calabar*

*From their first Mission foundation in Calabar, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus have carried the Cross to many sections, many tribes, in the widespread areas of Nigeria and into Ghana. Now, in their newest foundation, they have brought the Cross to one of the most arid parts in the "Lost Province."*

## Sharon - Izzi

By

Mother M. St. Henry

Seven miles from Abakaliki (see the map on page 16) is a brand new compound carved out of the bush. This is Sharon-Izzi. We called it "Sharon" after one of our oldest Holy Child schools in America. The "Izzi" (pronounced Iz-zee') is part of the official name of this section: Inyimagu, Ndiaboi-shiagu, Izzi, Abakaliki Province, Eastern Nigeria.

On *January 9th* of this year - shall I ever forget it! - Mother M. Romana and I visited our new "home" to see how soon we could

move in. The classroom block, with 3 classrooms, a Principal's office and a small storeroom, was the only building finished... And on *February 3rd* we were supposed to open the first secondary school (high school in the U.S.) for girls in the diocese! Preliminary tests had been given and already 32 boarders were scheduled to arrive on that date.

A Convent where we could live? There was none.

"We have to move in next week," we told the head man.



He stared at us, unbelieving.  
"Mothers cannot do!"

"Mothers *must* do." With a  
piece of chalk we began marking

out a classroom for our "Convent";  
the partitions could be made of  
asbestos squares which later might  
be used to seal a roof.



At present, the community of two Nuns, Mother M. St. Henry (seated),  
and Mother M. Romana, are living in this classroom, divided by asbestos  
sheets. The "community room" is in the foreground, the "refectory"  
in the background.

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**HELP WANTED!**

*Help us to build a small convent for the Nuns at our new  
high school at*

**SHARON, ABAKALIKI**

*A cement convent including a small Chapel will cost  
\$ 12,000 (£ 4,200, or 7 million lire)*

*The smallest donation will be gratefully received and  
acknowledged by :*

**Reverend Mother Vicar.**

**P. O. Box 55,  
Ikot Ekpene, Nigeria.**



On *January 11th* we drove to Enugu, 90 miles away, where we met our Superior, Reverend Mother M. Hubert from Ogoja, who brought a kind letter from Bishop McGettrick welcoming us and enclosing a generous "dash". This money was to be spent on furnishing our "house". We returned to the S.H.C.J. Mission in Afikpo, where we had been living temporarily, with so heavy a load that even Moses, the driver said we could not have added a "straw piece"!

Back at Sharon-Izzi the next day it rained disappointments. The partitions were up but not a single stick of furniture had arrived. The agent for the United Africa Company said no lorry would be available for days to carry our load. Just when things seemed dimmest Father Boylan, our parish priest, came along with an open light truck... By the time I left at 4 p. m. the beds were made and the curtains were up. Some twenty-four hours later Mother M. Romana and I were duly established at Sharon-Izzi.

Unpacking all the cartons that had been sent by the different Holy Child houses was pure joy. With all our Missions vying with one another to help us the physical hardships of these pioneering days are almost *nil*. Our greatest deprivation is in not having a Chapel but by late summer we hope to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved on our compound. As it is now, we go to Mass each morning at the boys' school which is about 10 minutes away.

In the midst of the "settling-in" process I celebrated my Silver Jubilee in Africa - but I feel as if I have gone back 25 years, for Christianity is still in its infancy up here. The adult Catholics are very few in number. They came one Sunday to welcome us with

a "dash" of yams, fruit, eggs and a cock - but they were only a handful of people.

Izzi itself is a veritable desert. Little mud huts with doors about 3½ ft. high and no windows dot the dense tangle of elephant grass. The roofs are round, made of grass, and they meet in a point like a witch's hat. Unlike the tribes in other parts of Eastern Nigeria, the people here prefer to build their huts singly in the bush. There are no compounds with several houses in them, nor villages with the huts close together. But the Izzi Council is going to make a law stating that houses must be built in groups because a single hut can be burnt down or robbed before help can be obtained. We have to be very careful at this season of the year for the smallest spark

Students cleaning filters.





Bishop McGettrick blesses  
the school assisted by Father  
Meehan (left) and Father  
Boylan.



can start an awe-inspiring fire. And water in the Abakaliki area is very scarce. The Government tried to solve the problem by digging deep wells, because all surface water has guinea worm, but most of the wells dry up during this Harmattan season.

The Harmattan was blowing when we arrived – and it still is. Everything is covered with thick layers of dust from the sand-laden air. We usually look like walking dusters. Washing one's clothes makes little difference because the water is dark brown with mud. All drinking water in the compound has to be not only boiled but filtered. We are fortunate in having a permanent (if muddy!) supply of water about 7 minutes' walk away. Actually, there must be a hidden spring in what looks like a deep pond in a basin for it never dries up.

The local chiefs have made strict rules in order to keep the pond clear but they can do nothing about a herd of bush cows that goes there to drink during the night and stirs up the mud. The herd

seems to wander about at will. My first encounter with it was soon after our arrival when I woke up one night at the sound of heavy breathing followed by a clatter. I flashed on our torch – and startled a cow peering in at the window. There were cows all over our back compound; thanking God that something was being done to keep down the elephant grass (which grows in spite of the drought and which we cannot afford to have cut) I left those bush bovines to enjoy themselves and went back to sleep.

On *January 21st* Reverend Mother Vicar arrived to help us with the opening of the school. In five days' time she had made among other things, towels, and 32 bed spreads for the children's dormitories. And on *February 3rd* the 32 students arrived bag and baggage. We began with one class and the children are exceptionally nice. Most of them come from the various Holy Child Primary Schools in the diocese so they settled in very quickly. On Saturday they were given their text books and



The children love to study  
on the sand pile.





Sunday afternoon walk in the bush . . M. M. Romana and the children call on a neighbour in the hopes of ultimately winning him to Christ.

on Monday we had assembly, morning prayers and lessons as if they were merely beginning a new term, after the holidays. Thanks to Chicago and to Preston we have quite a good selection of books for a new school. All those who have helped us in any way are remembered daily by the children and Nuns in their prayers.

When the Bishop came to bless Sharon-Izzi on *March 12* the children wore their blue-and-biscuit-coloured uniforms for the first time.

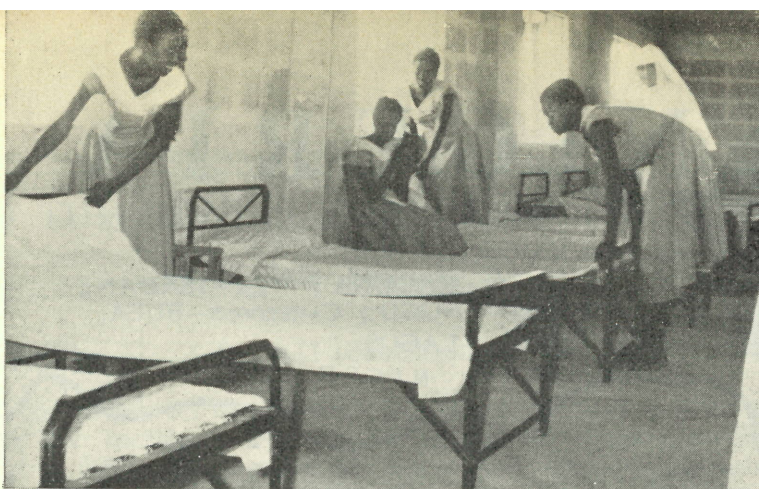
That day of the Blessing was one of those spectacularly beautiful days. The Ogoja and Afikpo communities arrived early in the morning. We had also invited the Fathers, the Medical Missionaries from the different stations in the vicinity, and our Holy Child Handmaids who have been such a tremendous help from the beginning. The congregation from the Mission came up here for their Sunday Mass and the Bishop gave them a little talk. He begged them to send their girls to school (only one of our students is from this parish), and he appealed to the women in particular to stand up for their rights – the right to have their girls

educated, telling them how backward this area is in comparison to other places. And he appealed for Christian marriages, one wife and one husband praying and working together to educate the children.

The children did not go home for Easter because we had started the term late, and Holy Week Services were held for the first time. Father Boylan had hoped to have the Services in his new church (just at the end of our compound road), but he has not yet got enough money to cement the floor so they were held in the boys' school. There was no Paschal candle for the Easter Vigil Mass so we put a candle in an empty "Vim" (cleanser) tin and poured melted wax around it. The result was a very satisfactory, if short, Paschal candle. Long candles are of no use, anyway, because they droop in the heat . . .

Something of a Sunday-afternoon-custom is being formed which we hope will bear fruit next year. Mother M. Romana takes the children for a walk down the road and into the bush calling at each little house on the way. (That is one way of getting acquainted with the





The cheery dormitory with its colourful curtains and bedspreads . . . Here the art of proper bed-making is practised under M. M. St. Henry's watchful eye. The uniforms of the students are blue trimmed with biscuit colour.

neighbours and it is surprising how many we have!) . Around every clump of trees there seems to be a hut snuggled into the tall grass. On the first visit the family, especially the children, usually disappear into the house either through shyness or fright at seeing 33 people approaching. Then in a few moments they come out again timidly and proffer an egg or a yam. What we are trying to do is to make friends with the people in preparation for Catechetical work next year. The only Christians around us seem to be the little pupils in the Mission schools.

A visiting American priest, after getting acquainted with the environs

of Sharon-Izzi, shook his head thoughtfully. "Here you are teaching Latin, French, Geometry, English Literature, etc. etc., in addition to Religion, right next door to the most primitive life imaginable. It's amazing!"

"No, Father," we hastened to assure him "It's *Africa*! Modern education is simply pushing back the old frontiers." And what is far more important, the Cross, the great symbol of Life, is being planted where only death and darkness reigned before. And from every grateful Missionary heart rises the prayer to God, "Thank You for this chance to serve You!"

The library showing the one bookcase . . . Benefactors from Chicago and Preston have sent most of the books. More would be welcome.

THE PYLON

