

## Beginnings in Ghana.

*The following letters were shared by Sr. Maureen Fitzgerald and they record something of the beginnings in Ghana. Just a few weeks ago I returned from Ghana where I had spent Christmas in Ahotokurum. I marvelled at the stamina of Monica Smyth, who has spent 38 years in Ghana and other sisters who have spent decades in a demanding and debilitating climate. Maureen's letters –some from the late Sr. Barbara Batten- take us back to the beginnings.*



**3<sup>rd</sup> April 1974**

Dear Maureen,

Sister Eucharua suggested I should write to you some time ago, but things have been so uncertain here that I have waited till I had a better idea of what will be happening next year. Even now things are not fixed, but I will explain what we are planning. We have been asked by the Bishop of Benin City, Nigeria, to take over the formation of his new community. There will be 5 novices and some postulants for next year (say Oct '74). He is building the convent and there is a lot of ground attached and the idea is to have a farm which the novices would help to keep up- probably chickens, rabbits, goats, oranges etc and vegetables- maize etc. I thought perhaps you might be willing to come for a year to get it all started and then go on to further training. The year's experience would help you to know what you needed to train in especially. I am hoping that Brigid (Johnston) will come to teach the novices their religious studies and I thought you could direct their manual activities. I hope to have an African sister from Ghana also as a member of the team who would look after their personal needs.

So you see you wouldn't need any qualifications (in the way of certificates). You would come in on the formation team, under the bishop. You would have your keep provided, your fare paid and you would get pocket money.

I don't know the exact names of international centres for further training, but I can find out when I go to Rome in May. In any case the experience would be very useful to you before

training. We are waiting for Ruth's permission before we say yes to the Bishop, but if I knew you were willing to come, it would help us in our planning. If I can get a group of three for Benin, I would reckon to divide my time between Benin and Cape Coast, but I don't think these sisters could manage a farm at the moment, they are too few. What they need is someone to help them start a rural development project, teaching the village folk hygiene and initiative in cooperative development. Maybe you would be interested in this side later on? The first thing is for you to see for yourself what is needed. There are some good centres like this in other place that you could visit.

Waiting to hear how you feel about this – my love to everyone-

Barbara.

**(Barbara Batten,  
Convent of the Infant Jesus,  
PO Box 378  
Cape Coast,  
Ghana West Africa.)**

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**Figlie Di Maria E Di Giuseppe**

**Roma 21<sup>st</sup> May '74.  
180, Via di Villa Lauchli,  
00191 Roma.**

Dear Maureen,

I arrived back in Rome yesterday and Mary called in to see us in the evening, so I told her I would write you a note and she will take it tonight. The post from Rome is quite unreliable.

I do hope you will be able to come to West Africa this coming year. It would be a great help to me. My plan at the moment is that you come out with me in late October or early November. Maybe you could find some short course in between now and then, on anything to do with life in the tropics as it will all be useful.

Our first job when we get to Nigeria will be to organise the move into the new convent, it is nearly ready now but it will have to be furnished and I don't know whether any of that will be done before we arrive. There will be at least 5 very sensible hard-working postulants to help.

Then you will get going on organising the farm. There will be a man for the heavy work and the postulants. Maybe the first thing would be to get chickens and rabbits going, as that will help with the eggs and meat. Things they can grow there include pineapples, oranges, lemons and grapefruit, cassava, maize, yams (something like potatoes), tomatoes, cabbage,

lettuce. I'm speaking about West Africa in general. I don't know what that particular region can produce.

I think a very good idea would be if you come with me to Cape Coast, Ghana on our way. The plane stops in Ghana anyway, so it won't cost any more – and I'm hoping the bishop will pay your fare. In Cape Coast, where I have been this year, the Holy Child Sisters have a good farm attached to their school. One sister is in charge of it and you could find out a lot from her. She has chickens and rabbits, besides growing quite a lot of things.

I don't know whether goats would be practical because they are so destructive. It would mean fencing around all the vegetables. There are no cows, on account of tsetse fly, and everyone drinks tinned milk which is a pity.

As to the visa, it will be the bishop's responsibility to get you in. He is coming to Rome in June so I will get that settled with him as let you know what to do as soon as it is settled. You will also have to get a visitor's visa for Ghana, but there will be no difficulty about that. In fact, if it came to it, it would be possible to go to Nigeria on a visitor's visa. You can stay for 3 months so that would be a possibility if the permanent visa proved difficult. With 3 months in Ghana as well, that would enable you a 9 month visit, which wouldn't be bad, if you were going back to study the following year. But we will try for the permanent visa anyway.

I'm hoping Teresa Clements will come in January and Brigid J also in January. They will see to the instruction of the novices, while I would hope you would organise their manual work. They are sensible and hard-working and I think will very soon be able to organise themselves but they need someone to be generally in charge. I'll write again when I've seen the bishop and hope to see you in Ireland – maybe in September. If there is anything else you want to know you could write to me at Forest Hill, England. I'll be there by the end of June. My love to everyone. United in prayer.

Sr Barbara.

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**24 Mayow Road,  
Forest Hill,  
London SE 23.**

29<sup>th</sup> August 1974

Dear Maureen,

I'm so sorry not to have written before but I have been unwell since the California meetings and am only just facing up to letter-writing again. Also we still haven't had a definite reply

from Nigeria – I expect Eucharis explained to you that the bishop there seems to be turning us down, so we are concentrating on Ghana instead.

There is lots to do in Ghana and in many ways it is a pleasanter country to work in, the people are extremely friendly. The disadvantage is that we are in a situation that was not started by us and we have to fit in, whereas in Nigeria we would have had the opportunity of starting from scratch.

But still, the Ghanaian sisters are very pleasant to work with and as they have not tried keeping chickens etc. before, you will have a free hand to get started. Lack of funds will be the problem, but we'll have to start in a small way. One of the sisters already has a small farm going – cassava, pineapples, tomatoes, sweetcorn. There is a man who works on it a bit. You can work with her and gradually develop things. The Holy Child Sisters nearby have a very efficient chicken and rabbit farm, so you can learn from them. I'm so glad about the course you are doing now. Learn all you can. Once we have got these sisters in Cape Coast on their feet, there is lots to be done in the less developed parts of Ghana further north. But this will be a convenient way for you to get to know the country and the people. There are many different languages in Ghana. You will be able to pick up the local one to some extent with the help of the sisters. About the visa there is nothing to do until we get the letter form the Archbishop, which you have to take to the Ghanaian Embassy with you and fill in the forms. Ask the missionaries you meet on the course whether there is a Ghanaian Embassy or Consulate in Dublin and whether they apply through Dublin. I did it in London. The missionaries will know what is best. Let me know what you find out. I'll write again when I know more.

Love,

Barbara.

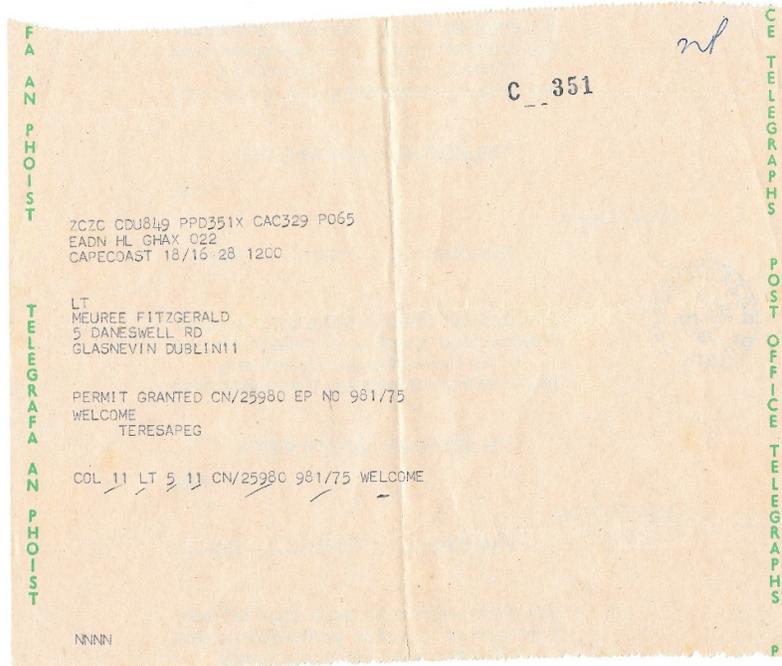
**Sadly Barbara died unexpectedly on September 20<sup>th</sup> 1974, less than a month after writing the above letter.**

**Cape Coast.  
26<sup>th</sup> April '75**

Dear Maureen,

As you can see I started this on Saturday and then put it aside saying I'll get going on Monday morning. Just now 11am the phone rang saying they have granted you Permit CN 25980 EP No/981/75 so you're welcome as soon as you can make it – Teresa leaves on 16<sup>th</sup>

May so 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> would be ideal for us. If not, Maureen- you've probably got fixed up already- the Archbishop's Mercedes is here waiting to pick you up at any time of the day or night. We have great rejoicing today – pity you aren't here to join us- will have another when you come DV.



Love to all. Dying to see you. You'll need a rest after all the waiting.

God Bless,  
Peg, Teresa and June  
+ Infant Jesus Sisters.

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PO Box 378

**Cape Coast**  
**23.04.'78**

**To: Srs Eucharía, Maureen and Margaret,**  
**Peace in Christ,**  
**Sion Road,**  
**Kilkenny.**

My Dears,

How do I say Thank You for your first big 'yes' to Ghana, to the Church here as you begin your new work as a new team! Maureen over to you to say Medasi Pi as the Ghanaians do! How we were annoyed when we read that you were stolen from Ghana for the Irish Team and as they say here- 'God's time is the best' so you can imagine my surprise and delight when Paula's long Annunciation Telegram arrived.... So now we can say TG others are coming- others have said YES and so we thank you for your mission in sending Joan, Monica and Phil- all lovely Gospel surprises also Maria and Corinne. It was pouring when I went to the PO on Friday so everybody had gathered on the verandah for shelter and they must have thought I was quite crazy when I opened the telegram and just stood- wondering if I read correctly. I'm just dying to get Paula's letter with all the details and of course that can take up to a month. I know the Bishop- Jo- Bridie and the sisters at Akim Swedru will be thrilled and it's nice that a new group can build up together and do so much with and for the people in that area. I'm going to Ofoase on Sat and hopefully Jo and Bridie will take over the Clinic and outstations etc. on May 1<sup>st</sup> TG. Have had growing pains- hopefully they are nearly over.

Just got the IMU newsletter yesterday. Thanks a lot, Eucharía. Saw there is a course for Tropical Medicine June 26<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> and wondered if it is possible for Monica and Phil and maybe Joan to attend. If Joan is doing shopping etc.. it would help and also give god contacts.

Praying with you dearest Eucharía, Margaret and Maureen that the Holy Spirit may come to enlighten you and that you may continue to attend to the needs of the Church and the 3<sup>rd</sup> World!

Much love and Shalom,  
Peg.