



IN MEMORY OF OUR

SISTER M. BERNITA WALTER OSB

born on June 20, 1920 in Jülich/Rheinland,
died on December 18, 2005 in Haus St. Benedikt, Tutzing

"Sustained by God's Faithfulness"

Sr. Bernita chose this title for the History of our Congregation which she wrote, and this title also fits very well to her own life. She had entrusted herself entirely into the faithful hands of God.

Josefine Walter was born on June 20, 1920, the only child of her parents, Mr. Paul Walter, municipal secretary, and his wife Therese, nee Jauer, in Jülich / Rheinland, Germany. Although her father was a Protestant, he took the promise he had made at his wedding – to give a Catholic education to his child(ren) – very seriously. Josi grew up as a joyful child and retained her fine Rhineland humor till her old age; this helped her in many difficult situations. After graduation from secondary school, she studied medicine following the wish of her parents, although her personal inclination was more in the line of literary studies. Her desire, to give herself to God in religious life, grew ever more. For many years, her father refused to agree to this way of life. Finally, he did permit her to enter with the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Tutzing but on condition that she would not be sent to the foreign missions. Although in our Congregation, the readiness to serve in the foreign missions is pre-supposed, in this case, the superiors agreed to his condition. In October 1947, Josi entered in Tutzing. At her clothing, she received St. Ursula of Cologne as her patron, but was named Bernita because there was already one Sister Ursula in the Congregation. After her first profession on October 19, 1949, she became the secretary of the novice mistress. At the same time, she worked as a physician in the surgical section of the hospital of Tutzing. She celebrated her final profession in Tutzing on October 21, 1952.

Already in the novitiate, her literary and musical talents became evident and she composed little dramas and stories to brighten the celebration of feasts in the convent. From 1950 to 1967, she worked in the editorial staff of the "Missions-Echo", the missionary periodical of Tutzing, first as assistant and then as principal editor. From 1953 to 1967 she was the mistress of the candidates, at times also of the postulants, in Tutzing.

On June 1, 1967, Sr. Bernita went to Grottaferrata, Rome, to participate as delegate in the General Chapter, where she was elected general councilor. In 1970, the Generalate transferred to the new Generalate house in Via dei Bevilacqua, Rome. Although she was never assigned to the foreign missions, yet in 1959, as general councilor, she had the joy of accompanying Mother Maria Lucas on her visitation trip to Tanzania and thus, could live for half a year in Africa.

Already during her time as general councilor, she had started to organize the Congregation Archives in Rome, and in 1982 she was officially assigned to be the Congregation Archivist. Thus she remained in Rome. In 1976, she received from the General Chapter the mandate to write the history of our Congregation. With her usual

thoroughness and conscientiousness, she put herself to this task. In the course of her researches, she traveled to South- and Southwest Africa, and once more to Tanzania, in order to study there the roots of our Congregation's missionary activity. In 1985, just on time for the opening of the Congregation's Centenary Celebration, the first volume of the history, "Sustained by God's Faithfulness", "Foundation and First Developments of the Congregation", was published. The second volume followed in 1992, with the sub-title: "Preparing the Way for the Church in East-Africa."

While in Rome, she was soon fluent in speaking Italian. And when our Generalate was approached by the "Osservatore Romano" to make a sister available as translator and editor in the German section of the OR, Sr. Bernita proved to be the right person for this, too. Hence, and for many years, she went twice a week to the Vatican for this task, and often carried work home to continue with the translations until deep into the nights. Her diligence and her literary skills were highly appreciated, and her friendship with some of her co-workers remained even after her transfer to Tutzing. Her pastoral zeal, too, was admirable. In spite of her manifold tasks, she went every Sunday morning to the "Villa Armonia", the mental hospital in our vicinity, to arrange there everything for Holy Mass for the patients, which was celebrated by a priest from the parish.

In spite of her wide knowledge and literary gifts, Sr. Bernita remained a very pious and modest person who was satisfied with the simplest and least of things. The practice of monastic poverty was very dear to her heart. During our evening recreations, she used to mend again and again her worn underwear and stockings, until it was really no longer possible to repair them. Nothing superfluous was to be found in her room. Every scrap of paper was examined for its usefulness. Yet at the same time, she was generous and open towards the others. Silently she bore her handicap of being hard of hearing and did not complain when she did not hear or understand what was told or announced. When a sister apologized for not having repeated to her in a loud voice what had been said, she replied: "Never mind, I am happy that I can be with you." She was grateful for the slightest act of kindness given to her. Also in Haus St. Benedikt, it seems that "Grazie" was the most frequent word she used. Her amiable disposition was admirable. All her life, she remained a joyful, open person. At our carnival celebrations, she invented the most original funny costumes and joined in every kind of nonsense.

A cerebral hemorrhage on December 27, 1999, brought a big turn in her life. She could be operated on in a special clinic for head injuries in Rome and we were given good hope for her recovery. As there were more possibilities for her rehabilitation in Germany, she was brought to Tutzing in February 2000, where she remained for more than one year. In August 2001 she could return to Rome, but her precarious state of health did not allow anymore for strenuous activities. On June 1, 2004 she was transferred to Haus St. Benedikt in Tutzing, where she could no more really adjust. Once in a while she was confused, did not find her way, and slept very much. On December 17, 2005, she still attended Holy Mass, but had no appetite, only took some fluid and went early to bed. Yet there was no apparent indication that her end was near. The doctor too, who visited her still on December 18 in the afternoon, did not think that she would die very soon. Before Vespers, a sister looked after her; she was quietly resting on her bed. The community started the first Vespers of the Fourth Sunday of Advent. During the responsory, just before the Antiphon "O Adonai", Sr. Bernita surrendered her soul into the hands of her Maker with the words: THANKS BE TO GOD! May she now await with us all the Return of the Lord and intercede for us with Him.

"Grazie", dear Sister Bernita!

Tutzing, December 20, 2005
Prioress General and the Community of Sisters at Haus St. Benedikt