

*“Enlarge the Space of Your Tent”*

by S. Victoria Wiethaler, SSND, 2003

The beginning of our missions in South America was in direct connection with the Nazi power structure against teaching orders. Bishop Berning of Osnabrueck asked for sisters for a German parish in the state of Santa Catarina in South Brazil. He was urged to do this by Father Linnartz, who had worked in Brazil for years. The Generalate of the order granted the request and entrusted the mission to the Silesian province. Five sisters left Hamburg on September 20, 1935, and landed on October 13. Many difficulties accompanied the beginnings. The competent archbishop told the pioneers, “I have not called you, you can return back home.” He had given the right to come to the Ursulines and by an oversight was not informed {had not informed the School Sisters of Notre Dame} of the change. Yet the German settlers were overjoyed and for some time the sisters could teach in the German language. (God has blessed the province and some sisters are now serving in the Amazon region.)

Even at the early signs that the dismissal of the sisters from the schools {in Germany} was being planned, some sisters announced their willingness to leave their homeland, ready to go to any place to which they would be sent. Wishing to follow the example of Mother Theresa, Mother Almeda did not take any action and waited to get requests for sisters. Through an extraordinary act of Divine Providence our sisters were invited to Matao in the State of Sao Paulo in Brazil. Because of a misunderstanding during a telephone conversation, the bishop approved the coming of our sisters. The first eight Bavarian sisters left April 27, 1937, for Matao. Work in hospitals and care of poor children were their first ministries. In their greatest financial need, Mother Fidelis Krieter, commissary general of North America, gave them sisterly support, especially during the years of WWII. (Sao Paulo became a province in 1950. The sisters still continue their fruitful labor in Brazil.)

April 26, 1937, Mother Almeda received a letter from a priest in Argentina asking for sisters. He had received permission from his bishop for this request. Mother Almeda saw in it God’s guiding hand and responded gratefully. Seven sisters boarded a ship on January 1, 1938, and were on their way to Buenos Aires. The bishop of Mercedes became their good friend, but within their first two years two of the sisters died, a great loss to the little group, In the same year ten more sisters arrived from Munich and strengthened the community. The sisters worked in a hospital, in a large colony for healthy children of parents with leprosy, and in a home for blind girls. After 14 years of patient waiting and passing of Argentinean exams the sisters were allowed to start teaching. Training of the parents as co-workers in

the religious education of their children was a primary aim. (The province of Argentina was established in 1950).