

[Report to the Central Council of the Louis Mission Society]

First of all I feel myself obliged to beg pardon because I am a little later than usual in sending my humble petition to the Central Council. A mission journey is the reason for it. After it I had more time and material to give an extended report about the condition of the Order, in whose welfare and expansion the Central Council has always shown an active interest. Through your favor so much good has been done, so that without this our Order in America would perhaps be only one tenth of what it now is. Therefore, I feel myself urged to the most heartfelt gratitude and again encouraged---although conscious of my lengthy correspondence style---to give you a chronological review of the past year.

I begin with the mission [St. Joseph] that carries the name "Ignatius" and was founded in St. Louis in May, 1858. The Reverend Jesuit Fathers asked us to come there, and I traveled to St. Louis at the end of April with our venerable companion Sister Mary Seraphine von Pronath, who became the superior there, and two teaching Sisters and a candidate. Here we took over the German girls school at St. Joseph Parish. Shortly before, through the instrumentality of the now deceased Reverend Father Patschowski, a grand schoolhouse, which also contains the living quarters of the Sisters, was built. Since it rained continuously for several days, the opening of the school was postponed from May 3 to 10, on which the Most Reverend Bishop [James] Duggan, Coadjutor of the Reverend Archbishop of St. Louis, accompanied by the whole German parish and the school children and many priests, formed a procession to our house and then blessed it. On the third floor which was destined for a chapel, the bishop gave a talk, recommended the Catholic education of their children to the parents, and referred them to us as those called to do the work.

His wish was realized. Scarcely were the festivities over when the fathers and mothers brought their darlings to us. The Divine Friend of children brought 200 to us at once. Oh, how the heart of a School Sister rejoices at such a sight! The children greeted us with a shy look, for they had never seen Sisters in such clothes. Soon they warmed up, especially when they received little pictures, which the kind Court Chaplain [Joseph Ferdinand] Mueller had often sent us to give to the children. It was almost evening until we had become acquainted with our little folk. Well satisfied they left the hall, which the Reverend Jesuits themselves had appropriately decorated. An old painting of the Child Jesus, which, like the walls of the hall, had been trimmed with garlands of roses and lilies, was in the middle of the hall. In the lilies I saw the pictures of childlike innocence, while the roses told me, "See like my red, so let your heart burn with love for the children." And in Mary I saw the two virtues united. Oh, might she, the dear Mother, embrace firmly children and Sisters! With this prayer to Mary we left the hall. For a week I was happily busy offering the little ones the first bread of instruction but then, on account of another mission, I had to return to the Motherhouse.

Letters from New Orleans had arrived. The Sisters there needed more personnel; the number of school and orphan children had increased. I had to send at least two more Sisters there. Besides, I owed them a visitation. The weather grew continually warmer; all this meant haste. Two Novices who had proved themselves were, therefore, allowed to take their vows. Equipped for their mission with this bond of love, with which they were fastened to the Crucified in order to work for the kingdom of God with more blessing, they left the Motherhouse. This holy ceremony made the departure for the newly professed more meaningful and happy. They who died to the world had now begun to live for Christ. Surely blessed now from heaven with unusual graces, they could look forward to their daily work.

It was May 28 when, with the two Sisters [Hyacinth Zimmermann and Patricia Hussey], and our Very Reverend Confessor H. Anton Urbanek, left our quiet convent walls in order to begin the hard and dangerous journey to New Orleans for the third time. Since the Mississippi River was at high water, the trip went fast and favorably. Daily, Reverend Father Urbanek gave little conferences so that the time passed doubly fast. What misery we had to see on the banks of the Mississippi. The river had risen 16 to 20 miles out of its basin, causing great devastation. All plantations with their houses stood under water; the poor Negroes had fled to the housetops, where they live, cook and sleep. It was a curious sight to see the housetops with beds, kitchenware, etc., and also chickens and roosters parading around. The cattle were settled under the trees in several little boats. They nourished themselves for a time with the branches torn from the trees, until finally they died. I heartily pitied the poor slaves. However, I was greatly astonished when I saw their contentment and heard that most of them are indifferent because they were put into a state of rest and laziness by this misfortune.

It was touching to see how the Catholics in Napoleon had built a wall from their dwelling to church in order to get there but not for long. It also disappeared in the ever rising flood of the Mississippi. The water kept rising; soon the highest building could not resist the force. The foundations, loosened by the long time in the water, gave way thereby drowning many people. Many, seized by anger and despair, killed others and themselves. Of course, Cairo found itself in the same condition since the city is right on the banks of the Mississippi.

On our arrival New Orleans was really near sinking, and this part of the city was nearly devastated; no people were around. The Sisters' house which is built on one of the highest places more remote from the Mississippi, in the suburb of Lafayette, had remained untouched by this affliction. Nevertheless, the worry about the affliction that the near future might bring saddened the joy of seeing each other again. Our arrival was favorable in two ways: it was 5:00 a.m. Nature provided an unusually pleasant summer day, which the church celebrated with happy sound the feast of Corpus Christi. The altar in the little convent chapel looked like a single bouquet of flowers in the sanctuary of the Lord, offering Him fragrance and life. Scarcely a half hour after our arrival, Father Urbanek was at the altar to offer the most holy sacrifice, which he did daily during his stay here. In addition, he gave the Sisters talks to encourage them and to refresh their spirits for the future. As their former spiritual director and educator for the Order, he

understood this well and did not miss his purpose. I scarcely believed my eyes to see the Sisters so well and cheerful as they gathered about me. I had imagined pale and thin faces, but I found them unchanged. Only the roses had faded a little from their cheeks. The good Sisters had undergone great effort with their many school children. How glad they were to receive two new helpers, who the next day already were busy with the young people! At my visit to the school and to the orphanage, which at present counted 186 children, I could see to my consolation many happy changes in the children, notice the good results which the instruction and the influence of the Sisters had had on the children. This was also corroborated by the good Redemptorist Fathers.

When the people heard that two new Sisters had arrived, they believed that I would take two others with me. Therefore one deputation of ladies after another came with the petition to leave all the Sisters. They would certainly take good care of them as a pledge of their attachment to the Sisters. After a week's time, we had finished our business in New Orleans. The mutual leave taking was hard. Reverend Father Urbanek consoled the weeping Sisters with the words: "We are not parted; nothing can part us except sin." Thereupon we parted; and with a half-orphan, who was entering the Order as an aspirant, we embarked on the unusually large and well arranged steamer *Pennsylvania*. I traveled with a Sister of Charity, ⁸ who also had an orphan girl with her and who was also traveling to her Motherhouse. Reverend Father Urbanek found a pleasant traveling companion in the Lazarist Father De la Croix. ⁹ If the Lord had let us see the misery and hardship of so many on our trip south, so now on the return trip I was to experience hardship as I had never expected.

It was on June 13, the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, a Sunday morning between five and six o'clock, about 60 miles from Memphis when the boiler exploded. One single bang and a third of the ship was blown to the sky! Almost 200 people lost their lives, were torn to pieces, burned, scalded, crippled or drowned. Among them—O inexplicable destiny --- the two Reverend Fathers Urbanek and de la Crosse. The Sister of Charity had the consolation of seeing her Reverend Confessor still alive. Longingly, he asked for Holy Communion, which however could not be given him. Reverend Father Urbanek disappeared without a trace, God alone knows how. I searched and found nothing; everything was useless. I cannot describe my sorrow and the fearful worry that came over me. Naturally speaking it is inconceivable that I did not lose my presence of mind, even when holding on to the strong cable between fire and water, in order to save my life.

Even in the wooden boat that came quickly and which I grasped happily, life was not a certainty; the boat came too near the flaming steamer and hovered in great danger of being set on fire by the leaping sparks. Horrible were the lamentations and cries for help of those who were left on the burning ship, who still had hope to be taken by the boats, but the boats had to be pushed away by force in order to avoid being burned themselves. The cries for help were soon stilled; they had become victims of the angry elements. In the boats were 68 passengers, who --- except for the Sister of Charity, the two girls and I --- were agnostics. They called on no God in their distress, but desperately looked to heaven and swore against their Maker, so that I had no more

hope of being saved, but had to await the vengeful hand of God. I was facing the possibility of dying and commended myself to God, when suddenly, by a lucky turning of the ship we saw ourselves saved. Quickly we were at the bank. It was flooded but our boat could be tied to forest trees.

Five little boats gradually brought 20 severely wounded, who with their broiled bodies had to lie on the hard bottom of the ship without bedding and who soon fell into a fever. This mourning, groaning, complaining, and then, too, the great poverty! Everything had gone to pieces! No doctor, no medicine, no other cover than the foliage of the trees! Unfortunate people, to whom we could offer no other comfort than to fan them with a little cloth, and to alleviate their parched lips with a little dirty Mississippi water. Thus they had to languish for seven hours under the burning heat of the sun, a time that seemed to me to be eternity. During this time I tried to get some information about Father Urbanek. Perhaps he, too, was just now battling life against death. Did his pious spirit retain its senses under the force of the pain, then like David in his misfortune only bemoan the fact that he was so far from the house of God? At last at three o'clock in the afternoon a steamer, which had heard of the catastrophe, arrived to pick up us shipwrecked, whereby some relief could be given to the wounded. We passed the scene of our misfortune and saw the smoldering wreck, which now was a toy of the waves of the Mississippi.

Soon thereafter we arrived in Helena Island where we halted to again pick up the wounded, who had been thrown here by the explosion. Oil had been poured into their burn wounds and their bodies were covered with flour. Once more a ray of hope glimmered in my heart. I searched among them, looked at them carefully but to no avail. In the meantime three large steamships arrived, one of which went to New Orleans and the two sailed westward. The Sister of Charity returned to New Orleans, taking with her the corpse of her Spiritual Father. My young companion also went with her since, frightened by the accident, she wished to return to her homeland. I permitted her to do so because the fright brought on a homesickness so strong that I feared she would suffer a mental disorder. The Sister of Charity promised to take care of her. 10

So in God's name, battered in body and soul, I had to return home along, which I at first thought impossible but God came to my assistance. I entered the boat that was going homeward and sat down in a corner, giving my tears free reign. It was not until I was surrounded by a crowd of American ladies, who cried with me. Wondering about my dress, they presented me with clothes, so I could change into dry ones. The generosity of these great American ladies! They vied with each other to relieve my condition to some extent. One fanned me, another offered me refreshing water and perfume, the third a dress, which she said was too small for her. Likewise, they offered me a cabin and a bed, for which I, poor beggar, could offer only my wordless thanks. The help and the tender attention of these American ladies pleased me very much; their sympathy went so far that they collected traveling money for me among themselves. A Negro slave girl with a noble heart came to me one evening and pressed \$5.00 into my hand. I said to her, "No, I will not take any money from a slave." She said however: "I

am a slave, but not poor and you should know that slaves also can do good," whereupon she hurried away.

Three days after this catastrophe I arrived at the dear Motherhouse, for which I had such a great longing. Gladly had I carried the pain alone, but now I had to see not only the whole Motherhouse, but also the whole Order in mourning, orphaned by the loss of a spiritual father, who was so hard to replace. The dear Sisters, who had heard the telegraph reports and read the newspapers, and who hovered for several days in fear and uncertainty, praying unceasingly in their misery to God, were greatly surprised on seeing me and filled with the sincerest gratitude for my safety, since they had just about to give up hope for my safety. Tears of gratitude and joy flowed when they saw me entirely unharmed. A thousand thanks to Divine Goodness for wonderfully saving my life, which, however, I would have gladly given like Reverend [Anton] Urbanek, although most unworthy of such a grace!

Our most Reverend Bishop [Henni], whom we have to thank for so much since our coming her, showed sincere interest and fatherly care also in this misfortune. In great measure we owe to him the appointment of our present Spiritual Father, Reverend [Francis Xavier] Krautbauer,¹¹ for whom we had to wait ten months, since he, coming from the diocese of Buffalo, could not leave his parish earlier. On June 13 of last year, between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m. Father Urbanek was taken from us; on April 13 this year at the same hour, Father Krautbauer was given us. So the Lord wounds in order to heal and proves in order to purify. Until this, Reverend [Michael] Heiss, Rector of the Bishop's Seminary, took over the care of a spiritual father for us.

It seemed unbelievable that Reverend Father Urbanek should not come back and yet it was so --- all further searchings were useless. We had to believe it now and could do no more than to pray for the repose of his soul. May he receive in eternity a rich reward for offering himself completely for the Order during eight years. We hope with confidence that he who during life was a sincere friend and benefactor of the Order will in eternity be all the more an intercessor and protector for us in our battle! May his spirit continue to live in us until we, too, are called. Whoever knew good Father Urbanek bemoaned his terrible death. There is no one who would not like to trade with him now. No one dared to think that death overtook him unprepared, so well-known was his 12-year long exemplary priestly journey in America.

Scarcely had our Sisters in New Orleans learned this terrible news, when they had to send us another one, namely that yellow fever had broken out there, a new increase of my troubles. I had every reason to have the greatest fear for the Sisters there. On account of the high water on the marshy earth and the great heat, a pasty air developed which attacked even the animals. Therefore, the doctors gave orders that no meat or milk might be consumed. One dared not leave the house morning or evening. Although the death toll from yellow fever increased daily, 100 -120 daily, our Sisters were spared until September, but then they, too, fell prey to the epidemic. Seven of them lay ill at the same time. They recovered. In October, however, Sister Clara [Scholl] became ill, and so severely that in two days she was a corpse. The Lord had destined the feast of St.

Theresa, her baptismal patron, for her death day. The good Sister was the first candidate we had received in America, born in Bavaria at Stadtamhof. She had rendered the Order many and varied services. Her going forth was doubly hard because she had to depart this life very unexpectedly, without the Last Sacraments. The symptoms of the fever were so strong that she was unconscious right from the beginning. May her remembrance among her school children, who loved her and wept for her so much, be a blessed one! It was hard for me to replace her. R.I.P.

The Sisters who took care of the orphans remained untouched by the yellow fever. However, they had to work day and night, since daily their orphan family increased. Only in November the fever ceased, the water level went down. However, it left a sediment which fertilized the land and bred millions of insects.

Although the Order had been severely tried by the death of Reverend Father Urbanek, yet the kind Providence of God was not to be underestimated, for in the same year 33 fine young ladies entered the novitiate, receiving the holy habit on the same day and more than 33 entered the candidature. All good children, but all poor, whom however, we do not refuse on that account, for the Order needs so many subjects. We can scarcely send one fourth of the number of Sisters that are required. Our Motherhouse is too small for the many inhabitants, the candidates have only one room for living, studying, working. May the High Central Council see from this that we again are in need of support, for which we humbly ask, since besides these needs we still owe much on the Motherhouse and other missions.

Although my report is already long, I cannot help, Central Council, adding something about the new foundations. The feast of the Three Holy Kings brought us two more missions --- one at Elm Grove (Erlenhain), [Wisconsin] where King Ludwig's Orphanage, situated nine miles from the Motherhouse, carries the name of "The Visitation." There was a village school which had a large increase of school children in the spring, but for the most part, they are Protestants. It is touching how these children have such great love for religion, how much they love the Mother of God, bringing a small bouquet or wreath to honor her, especially now in the month of May. We live in a happy hope of bringing these children gradually into the Catholic faith, then through them, their parents, since they are so influenced by their children that they attend Holy Mass and pray the rosary. We also send our sickly Sisters there where they can regain their health in the fresh country air. We also have there our own cemetery in the midst of which we have erected a large crucifix.

Our mission, [St. Mary], La Crosse, [Wisconsin], which on account of the opening day is called "The Holy Three Kings" lies on the eastern bank of the Mississippi in the northern Wisconsin, on a wide fruitful plain behind which high mountains rise, which give the new city a very pretty, interesting view. It has a healthy climate, for while the river offers coolness, the mountains hem in the draft of the wind. On this plain the Indians formerly performed a game which they called lacrosse and which consisted in rolling a large ball up and down on a large tree trunk lying on the ground, without permitting the ball to roll off. Such a tree had to be brought a great distance from the

mountains, since none grew on the prairie. La Crosse is scarcely nine years old and on account of its happy situation was quickly inhabited. In one summer 600 houses were built there. This brought work, money, bread to the people, so that La Crosse ¹² at present counts 6,000 inhabitants. Yet what a sight it presents in winter! On account of its flat contour, in its icy condition it looks as though it were sinking. In summer one never gets muddy because the whole plain is a sandbank.

Our Sisters moved into a frame house that was connected with the church, and therefore suitable for religious. They have 200 children whom they instruct in three languages. It was a pleasure to see how these children let themselves be enticed to church and school by means of little pictures. On the feast of Pentecost many will receive Holy Communion, the first for them and the first for La Crosse.

Now there are Sisters also in Richmond, Virginia. This is a city near the birthplace of the famous [George] Washington. On the feast of St. Benedict the train brought me to Richmond. My glance took in many churches, large buildings, English gardens, all in beautiful spring array, as I walked through the city to reach the German St. Mary Church. But what a sad feeling overtook me when I learned from the Reverend P. Polk, S.J. that the city of 40,000 inhabitants had only two Catholic churches and could not count 4,000 Catholics. On the other hand, many rich Americans who had over 20,000 slaves lived here. Idolatry and slavery! What a state of affairs! What a condition! And yet, a son of the great St. Ignatius has succeeded in gathering around him a believing army of 1,500 souls, for whose young people he invited us. On May 10 of this year we arrived there. The mission is named "House of Holy Innocents." The Reverend Bishop John McGill, a well-bred American, formerly a lawyer and statesman, showed great interest in our Order and blessed our entrance into the city.

The feast of the Annunciation brought us a mission, the like of which we had never yet taken over in America. It is an institute [St. Joseph] for physically and morally neglected children. The Reverend Father Joseph Helmprecht, C.S.S.R. [The most well-liked of the loved rectors of Most Holy Redeemer Parish in New York, "a priest whose memory will never be forgotten by the people," (Disold, C.S.S.R) in New York (from Bavaria) recognized this need and he succeeded --- surely through the intercession of St. Joseph, in whose honor this institution was founded --- in collecting \$22,000.00. He bought a country house with a rather large garden in Yorkville, six miles from the city of New York on the Hudson River. ¹³ It has healthy and at the same time beautiful surroundings. In the poor, protectory children's homes the good Father personally searched for German children who for the most part, due to idleness and begging, had been picked up by the police and brought to such houses. Their parents are either dead or among the cast-outs of humanity. Therefore, children without faith, without the Christian education, with many afflictions in body and soul were given over to us here --- lovable only in holy faith. Their salvation will be as difficult as it will be pleasing to our Lord. I admit that this institution is the most pleasing to me of all those we have in America because I cherish the hope to bring many a wandering little sheep back to the Good Shepherd.

Since the morning of the above mentioned feast day [Annunciation, March 25] was very inclement and it rained hard, we doubted strongly that the festivities with the opening of the important institution could go on. However, the sky brightened and after dinner the coaches of the New York City Railroad were crammed with members of the parish of the Most Holy Redeemer, to whom the Institute belongs. There were several hundred people present and many Protestants had also come, so that the New York police found it necessary to be present on account of the ever-increasing number of people. All was hushed as the Reverend Clergy blessed the house and finally when the children and their future nurses appeared on the balcony.

Reverend Father Helmprecht, glowing with zeal for the Institute, spoke words that gripped the hearts of the listeners and won them for the work. Since it depends on alms this was most important. Unforgettable for me are the words he directed to the Sisters, they were similar to these, "I herewith give over to the Order of the Poor School Sisters or Notre Dame this Institute. It is entrusted to you, you honored daughters of your Holy Founder, St. Peter Fourier. You have by the word of obedience left your Motherhouse, the house of your profession, and have gone to strangers. Truly can the words of our Holy Redeemer which He spoke to His apostles be applied to you: "See I send you like sheep among wolves; be wise as snakes and simple as doves! You are sent among wolves for I will indeed entrust to you children who seem to be like wolves, unable to be disciplined, children who imbibed corruption with their mother's milk, who learned to know sin already as three year olds! ...Therefore, be wise, conceal yourselves behind the rule of you Order by faithfully following the same. Be simple and polite like doves, for love knows no anger, she has no gall. Only thus will you succeed in making sheep out of wolves. Let me experience seeing those stubborn children change into gentle lambs and sheep. Conscientiously fulfill this task upon which your eternal happiness depends! I will one day demand a reckoning before God on account of these children whom I am entrusting to you!"

The Institute opened with 16 children, now it already numbers 40, occasionally also foundlings whom their mothers had thrown away. Most of the older children had forgotten their mother tongue and had never learned how to pray. Many of them were known only by their assumed names; others did not know whether they had been baptized. Three of them had only one eye through neglect; I was surprised to see the children already after one week so trusting toward the Sisters. One child asked, "Sister, are you Catholic? I cannot believe that you are so good, I heard that Catholics are bad people." A trick of unbelievers to antagonize the children against the Church, against Catholics, thereby according to the plan of such people they hope the children, when they choose their religion at the age of 18 or 20, will not think of choosing the Catholic religion.

Two sisters who had been separated for five years, each in a different institution, came together in our house, without recognizing each other for several days. How touching was the scene when they found and recognized each other!

Finally, hurrying to close, there remains only to repeat in the name of the entire Order the most sincere thanks to the High Central Council. Daily in prayer to God we bring all our benefactors, especially yourselves, humbly begging once more for the continuation of your alms, which surely will not be spent on unworthy causes.

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

Most obedient poor
School Sister
Mary Caroline Friess

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8. Sister Mary Ellen ---see document # 20. For other descriptions of this event, see document # 20 and # 21.
 9. A Vincentian priest, Rev. John Mary Delcros, C.M.
 10. Attempts to identify this girl through SSND or Daughter of Charity sources have been unsuccessful.
 11. Later the second Bishop of Green Bay [Wisconsin] from Mappach near Bruck in the Oberpfalz (not from Bruck).
 12. La Crosse is a bishopric since 1868. The first shepherd was the learned Bavarian priest, Michael Heiss, later the second Archbishop of Milwaukee.
 13. The foundation was closer to the East River than to the Hudson.