

Sister Clara Foeckersperger, SSND

Taken from "Enlarge The Space Of Your tent" by" S. Victoria Wiethaler, SSND

Sister Clara was asked to write about her experiences in Germany while Hitler was in power and this is what she related, "In 1933, coming out of the novitiate in Munich, I was sent to northern Bavaria, not too far from Frankfurt. Hitler had staunch deputies there. I had to teach seventy head-strong girls aged ten to thirteen, and one afternoon in the week about fifty girls aged thirteen to sixteen. We were allowed to begin school with prayer, but had to add 'Heil Hitler.'

"The older girls were urged on by some 'Brown Shirts,' the name given to the followers of Hitler, to contradict me in my teaching whenever it wasn't to their liking. To flare up or punish them was not good, so I tried to convince them they would have to know the fundamentals well if they aimed to become useful members of the party. So far so good, but I got worn out and often came home from school and couldn't eat.

"Our principal was head of the Boys' School as well as of the Girls' School. And Hitler became his god. His aim was to get rid of the sisters. When the report cards were given out, he watched like a hawk. He found out that one girl, who was a good member of the Hitler Youth, had the best mark in singing. The next day he came storming to my classroom door 'Yes, you gave her the high mark to get her away from the Hitler Youth. That's a criminal offense. Just wait, I'll get you into the concentration camp!'....

"In 1938, we were informed that our schools would be closed. Our values were unacceptable. They did not fit the philosophy of the leader. I volunteered for Brazil. When I went to the embassy to apply for a passport the room was crowded with Jews hoping to get permission to leave Germany. I often wonder how many of them escaped Hitler's hate and fury. In December, I received my passport and in January 1939 I was on my way, not to Brazil, but to England...

"We lived through six years of war, and thanks be to God, none of us was injured and none of our school children nor their families were bombed out or injured, or killed....The horrors of war are in our memories, but these sad experiences drew us closer together with our companion sisters and pupils.

"I taught in Woolwich [England] for thirty years. Then I was sent to Lingfield/Surrey to take over a class when a teacher was missing, but I found that too taxing. So, I decided to go to Canada in 1976. I spent five years in the Waterdown motherhouse activity room to help the elderly sisters do needlework. Then I was sent up north to Formosa [Ontario] to visit the elderly and the sick with another companion sister for five years. Now, I live in the motherhouse villa being elderly myself. I enjoy being with the dear companion sisters, going for walks, doing needlework, having fun. I pray for all in need and I'm looking forward to the life to come." ■