

Early Years

Johanna was born in Lichtenvoorde, Holland to devout parents, Johannes and Fredrika Eekelder. Her birthplace was a rural town whose people the "Lichtenvoordse" were known as the keienslōppers (brick trailers). Each year there was a floral parade which could account for Johanna's love of flowers and gardening.

God's Call

Johanna entered the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary Amsterdam at the age of 24. She was a tall, rugged woman used to hard work.

Missionary Life

Her first mission sending was to N.D. de L'Michel in Bruselles where she served as a 'commissioner', joining others of her sisters traveling all over Belgium selling the handwork made in the Missions, thus obtaining the funds necessary to support the missionary work of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Through her religious life she served in the humble but essential community services; in the laundry, ironing room and the kitchen. These services she carried out with great devotion and love in communities in

Brussels, Gooreind, Malines and in London.

She was sent in mission to Holy Family Community, N. Providence, RI, USA in 1952. She accompanied M. Sacred Heart, one of her country women, who later became the superior of Holy Family Community.

Once again, she served her sisters in the laundry and ironing room where she instructed novices to work with the same diligence and devotion as hers. Novices learned by her witness to be faithful, hard working FMMS.

Her novices also witnessed the joyful aspect of her personality as they observed her at recreation cavorting like a gazelle, laughing and joking with her sisters. They also observed her faithfulness in prayer. One former novice recalls Johanna always being the first in the chapel every morning.

In the 60's, Johanna was designated as the director of the extensive grounds of Fruit Hill. This was her special joy. She planned and designed the shrine to O.L. of Fatima and to St. Jude. Tulip bulbs from Holland were planted in precise designs. Moss gathered from the forest made an attractive background to the various flower arrangements. On her hands and knees she groomed this shrine until the day she could no longer bend nor kneel to do this. She enjoyed so much planting,

and caring for the flowers both outside and inside that she felt somewhat guilty until she read this account from one of the readings of Mary of the Passion. "Like the Seraphic Father Francis, Mother Mary of the Passion loved nature. The sole relaxation she permitted herself was the cultivation of plants for the adornment of the altar in the garden of St. Helen's at Rome. She passed many a delightful hour in caring for the flowers with which she loved to surround our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Johanna remarked," I was so astonished to read about Mother Foundress working in the garden."

Another great devotion and love was that of the Nativity. Each Christmas she set up an exquisite nativity scene in her room which stretched across three bureaus. She invited her sisters to visit this Nativity display.

During efforts to upgrade the Infirmary to a Licensed Nursing Facility, Johanna served as a nursing assistant.

She was a woman of wisdom and utter discretion in offering counsel and prayer to those who approached her. When she no longer was able to do physical work, she devoted all of her time and effort into fulfilling her vocation of prayer and suffering for the Church and for the salvation of the world. She readied herself for her final journey detaching herself from all but God alone.