

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SR. MARY MARK'S MEMOIR *BEACON IN THE DARK*

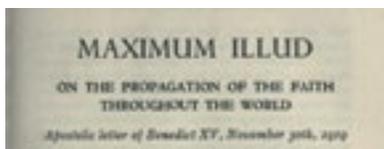
Kathleen M. Washy

“Here was the fulfillment of my life’s dream,” wrote Sister Mary Mark Mullen in 1946 as she reflected on her arrival as a missionary in China in 1933. “After all the months of weary, dangerous travel, taking me halfway around the world, I knew that I had really come home, in the deepest sense of the word.”¹ Between 1926 and 1948, a total of sixteen Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden served as missionaries in China, with Sister Mary Mark Mullen serving the longest, for a total of 14 years. In ministering there, the sisters were part of a missionary effort dating back to the middle of the nineteenth-century.

America Sends Missionaries to China

With the advent of the Treaty of Tianjin of 1856, religious liberty was guaranteed for Christians in China, including the interior. This treaty not only allowed Catholic missionaries to preach in the interior but also protected the Chinese converts.² The result was that “multiple missionary orders returned to China, and the Vatican began organizing ecclesiastical territories under the orders’ jurisdiction.”³ Among these early Catholic missionaries were the Spanish Augustinians, who entered Hunan, China, in 1879.

Because of the fatalities in Europe during World War I, there was a decline in numbers of European missionaries, resulting in the Catholic Church’s inclusion of America to help in this ministry.⁴ Providentially, in 1908, America was no longer considered to be a “missionary territory;” with this change of status, the Catholic Church in America was poised to provide missionaries to China. Even before the end of the war, Catholics in America were acknowledging that “due to the nature of war-time phenomena, these are the premises which are leading our American Catholics to the genuine conclusion and hearty realization that their dutiful attitude toward missionary enterprises must be one of hearty activity and cooperation.”⁵



In 1919, Pope Benedict XV issued *Maximum Illud*, an Apostolic Letter calling for the revival of missionary work, and this

furthered the missionary spirit in America. On the heels of this papal decree, the St. Paul of the Cross Province of the Passionist order of priests voted at their 1920 General Chapter to accept the mission in Hunan, China. And in 1921, thirteen young priests left the United States to take over the missions in Hunan from the Spanish Augustinians. Upon reaching China and receiving their assignments, these priests settled into their work by learning the language and working with the people. Facing many challenges, the young priests arrived in Hunan, a section of China that was still plagued by warlords and banditry.⁶ In addition, the work was made more difficult as there was a widespread famine, resulting in many orphans. In 1922, Father Raphael Vance alone reported taking in more than a hundred abandoned babies in his first three months as a missionary in the town of Chenki.⁷

Realizing that there was a need for further assistance, the Passionists turned to women religious to help fill the needs. With the Passionists having houses in both Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Convent Station, New Jersey,²³ the Passionists naturally turned to women religious in those dioceses. For the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the religious congregation that responded was the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden and the China Mission

In March 1924, Very Reverend Father Stanislaus Grennan, the Passionist Provincial, approached several communities of women religious, including the Sisters of St. Joseph. In his appeal, he stated that “there is a most urgent need for Sisters, to care for the orphans and the sick, and to teach the children,” turning first to “our own friends.” In his letter to Mother Bonaventure Callaghan, Mother Superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph, he asked that the community consider sending four to five sisters to China as missionaries.⁸



Sr. Mary Mark Mullen
Source: CSJB Archive

Acting upon this appeal, Mother Bonaventure in turn distributed a ballot to the professed sisters, asking for approval to agree to this new mission, stating that there would be “blessings” from “answering the call.” Additionally, “Father Stanislaus says God will reward us a hundredfold in vocations for what we sacrifice for the sake of the poor pagans.” Vocalizing her own perspective within the text of the ballot, she stressed the relationship between the two religious orders:

Personally, I [Mother Bonaventure] think we should make an effort to help the Passionists in their work. Gratitude for their goodness to our Community should prompt us to do so even were there no higher motives. For the past Twenty Years they have been untiring in their kindness



Boys Choir and Band,
Hunan, China, 1929
Source: CSJB Archive



Sisters Clarissa Stattmiller, Florence Sullivan, and St. Anne Callahan were in the first band of Sisters of St. Joseph sent to China in 1926.

Source: CSJB Archives

to our Hospital and at the present time we are depending on them for daily Mass there. The Sisters who have lived there and worked there could recount untold sacrifices which the Fathers have made for us – the Community should not forget this when an opportunity has arisen to show appreciation....⁹

Only sisters who were professed twenty years or longer were eligible to vote; the resulting vote was 74 sisters in favor, 1 sister against, and two sisters not voting.¹⁰

In 1926, the first four Sisters of St. Joseph set out for China, eventually finding their way to their mission in the city of Chihkiang.¹¹ The goal was to have the sisters staff an orphanage, teach school, run the catechumenate, provide a preparatory school, and work at a dispensary. Facing periods of unrest as well as anti-foreign sentiments, the sisters dealt with “Reds,” bandits, and war lords, all of which were often undistinguishable.¹² In 1927, missionaries across China were forced to evacuate the interior and it was during this exile that Sister Clarissa Stattmiller, one of the Sisters of St. Joseph, succumbed to malaria. Over the following years, more sisters arrived in China while others left, generally because of health issues. In 1930, the city of Chihkiang experienced a siege that lasted slightly over two weeks – a forewarning of what the future held.

Sister Mary Mark Mullen Goes to China

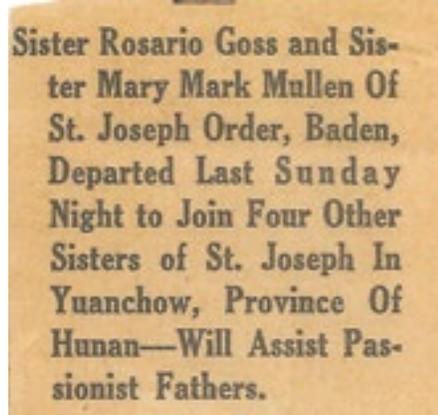
By January 1932, Monsignor Cuthbert O’Gara, who was vicar apostolic in China at the time and later became bishop, asked for two more sisters. One year later, in February 1933, the chosen two, Sisters Mary Mark Mullen and Rosario Goss, set out for their new lives in China. They arrived in Chihkiang in April 1933, bringing the total to six Sisters of St. Joseph on mission in China at that time. On June 29, 1933, a 58-day siege of the city began and the

two newly arrived sisters were immediately thrust into the ravages of warfare.

With a siege to welcome her, it is a wonder that out of all of the Baden missionary Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Mark would serve the greatest number of years in China. As shown by her entrance to the Sisters of St. Joseph, Sister Mary Mark Mullen proved to veer slightly from the path of a traditional sister. Born as Marie Mullen in 1892 she was the oldest of 11 children. One of her younger sisters entered the congregation in September 1923 at the age of eighteen. While that sister, Sister Germaine, was the typical age for entrance, Sister Mary Mark entered the following January at the age of 32, which at the time was an age that required a special

dispensation.¹³ Within a few months of her entrance, Sister Mary Mark would have been living at the motherhouse at the time of the community’s ballot approving missionary work in China.

In 1930, Sister Mary Mark professed her final vows and soon after, she submitted her request to become a missionary in China. After spending her initial years as a teacher, Sister Mary Mark’s request was granted in 1932 when she was selected for the China mission. In preparation for this new work, she was enrolled in a special six-month missionary medical course at St. Joseph’s Hospital.¹⁴ Upon completion of the course, she set off for China in February 1933; she would have been 40 years old at the time. From 1933 through 1944, she ministered to the orphans, the sick, and the elderly in Chihkiang. During that period, she experienced the unrest of the years of banditry and a civil war, followed by the Second Sino-Japanese War/World War II. She also was present for the modernization of Chihkiang.



Through it all, she maintained her sense of humor, which was considered important in a missionary.¹⁵ The Chinese gave Sister Mary Mark the title of “Slowly, or after a while, Sister” because “she so often used this expression and partly because she was accustomed to act with deliberation. Short, thin, wiry, calm, quiet. Was Superior for last six of her twelve years in China. Took charge of the orphans. Prepared trousseaus for marriageable girls.”¹⁶ She was a woman with a missionary spirit.

Beacon in the Dark

In the fall of 1944, all foreigners were ordered to evacuate due to the conditions from the Second Sino-Japanese War and with that, Sisters Mary Mark and Rosario started their journey home, setting out in November and ending in Baden the following August. Soon after her return, Sister Mary Mark was determined to write an



Mother Genevieve Ryan traveling in China.

Source: CSJB Archives.

account of the China mission, resulting in the manuscript *Beacon in the Dark*.¹⁷ Within this work, she wove together many of the sisters' stories from the 1933 through 1944 missionary period as well as her circuitous nine-month exodus from China. In the credit pages for the book, she references Sister Rosario Goss as providing "invaluable help in the compilation of this book" and she dedicated the work to the memory of "Sister Mary Clarissa Stadtmiller [*sic*], the first Sister of Saint Joseph to give her life for China."¹⁸

Sister Mary Mark's biological sister, Esther Mullen, was involved with the initial attempt to publish the work in 1947. In March, Esther submitted the manuscript to The Society of Propagation of the Faith for consideration of publication. In August of that year, the Mother Superior, Mother Emerentia Snyder, provided Esther with a copy of Bishop Hugh C. Boyle's imprimatur for the book; Mother Emerentia wrote "I trust it is all that is necessary for you to go ahead with your plans."¹⁹ However, the book was never published; according to a 1997 document compiled by then-Archivist Sister Helen Marie Shrift, the reason for this initial non-publication stemmed from miscommunication:

Esther Mullen said the publisher broke his agreement to print after he called MGA and asked the number of Sisters we had. An unidentified person told him we were a small Community; thirty Sisters were here at MGA [Mount Gallitzin Academy]. He did not feel we could sell a run of 1,000 books.... The arrangement was never restructured. At the time we [Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden] had many grade and high schools, and were about 500 members.²⁰

The time has finally come to publish Sister Mary Mark's work. Her account appears to rely not only on her own memories but also on correspondence from the sisters in China to the United States, along with accounts written by Sister Rosario Goss and Mother Genevieve Ryan. At times, her story places events out of order, perhaps to tell a more convincing story.

The fall 2015 issue of *Gathered Fragments*, contains Katherine Koch's article, "The Pennsylvania Passionist who Became Chinese: Fr. Basil Bauer, C.P.," which includes another perspective of the missionary work in Hunan, China.²¹

NAMES OF WOMEN AND MEN RELIGIOUS MENTIONED IN THESE PAGES OF *BEACON IN THE DARK* AND THEIR YEARS ON MISSION IN CHINA

Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden:

- Sister Catherine Davenport
1935 - 1941
- Sister Christina Werth
1926, 1928 - 1930; 1930 - 1944
- Sister Clarissa Stadtmiller
1926 - 1927
- Mother Genevieve Ryan
1928 - 1934
- Sister Mary Mark Mullen
1933 - 1945, 1946 - 1948
- Sister Magdalena Ivan
1930 - 1944
- Sister Rosario Goss
1933 - 1945
- Sister St. Anne Callahan
1926 - 1933, 1935 - 1936

Sisters of Charity of Convent Station:

- Sister Carita Prendergast
1933 - 1951
- Sister Maria Electa McDermott
1924 - 1941
- Sister Patricia Rose Hurley
1924 - 1951

The Passionists, St. Paul of the Cross Province:

- Father Anthony Maloney
1924 - 1949
- Bishop Cuthbert O'Gara
1924 - 1953
- Father Edward McCarthy
1929 - 1935
- Father Linus Lombard
1931 - 1954
- Father Timothy McDermott
1921 - 1941
- Father Jeremiah McNamara
1924 - 1945
- Father William Westoven
1924 - 1953