

Mariannhill Centenary: A look at the Early Years

1982 marks the centenary of the establishment of Mariannhill Monastery, outside Pinetown, by a group of Trappist monks led by Father Franz Pfanner. The history of the monastery is inextricably linked with the name and the personality of Pfanner, although he was abbot only until 1893. Pfanner was the son of a farmer, born at Vorarlberg in Austria in 1825, and was described as a wiry, red-headed, energetic, hot-tempered man. He studied for the priesthood and spent some years as a parish priest before joining the Trappists in 1863. The time during which Pfanner was active was the period of the Kulturkampf in Europe and to this must be attributed some of the enthusiasm of Catholics for overseas missions as they closed ranks against Bismarckian opposition. It was also the pre-war period in which prosperity and stability were manifested in vast edifices, and this too had an effect on Pfanner's ideas and his plans. In modern terms he liked to 'think big'.

The Trappists have been described as twice reformed Benedictines.¹ The Benedictine Order, founded by St Benedict in the 6th century, was reformed by St Bernard of Clairvaux in the 12th century, and after it had suffered from wars and upheavals in France, it was again reformed by Armand de Rancé of the Monastery of La Trappe in Normandy, from which the Trappists took their name. Rancé re-introduced the strict observance which St Benedict had advocated, consisting of prayer, contemplation and manual work. The monks observed strict silence, began the day with Matins at 2 a.m., and lived on a vegetarian diet. They were to preach the Christian message, not through pastoral work but by silent example. Trappist Monks had been successful in establishing a monastery and an agricultural colony at Staouéli in Algeria and it was with this in mind that Bishop Ricards of the Eastern Cape approached the Trappist General Chapter at Septfons in France in 1879 asking for a group to come to South Africa to work among the Thembu.

Abbot Pfanner, then superior of a monastery in Bosnia, volunteered to come with 30 monks and the party sailed in July 1880. Ricards settled them in Dunbrody on the Sundays River, but despite their efforts the Dunbrody experiment was a failure, the drought and poor soil being too much even for the skilled cultivators among the Trappists.

In July 1882 Pfanner left for Europe to consult his superior, sending two of his followers to Pietermaritzburg to ask permission of Bishop Jolivet for the Trappist party to settle in Natal. With Jolivet's approval and the understanding that the Trappists would take over the unsuccessful St Michael's mission near Highflats and be responsible for their own expenses, the two returned to Dunbrody to arrange for the removal to Natal. The first



Abbot Pfanner outside the first 'abbey', 1885.

(Photograph: Father L.A. Mettler, C.M.M.)

party under Father Joseph Biegner left Dunbrody on November 24, 1882 and the second under Father Arsenius two weeks later. The first party was met at Port Natal by Bishop Jolivet and escorted to St Francis Xavier mission on the Bluff and soon afterwards Father Biegner set out with an Oblate priest to inspect St Michael's mission.

On December 18th Father Franz arrived in Pietermaritzburg to present his credentials to the Bishop and to inform him that he had no intention of taking over St Michael's because of its distance from the port; instead he intended to buy the farm *Zeekoegat* near Pinetown from the Natal Land and Colonization Company for the sum of £1 000.² Jolivet finally agreed to the change in plan, the ox-wagons were recalled from Isipingo where they were preparing to leave for St Michael's and the whole party set out for Pinetown, the first wagons arriving on December 26th 1882. The first Mass was celebrated by Pfanner on December 27th and the new venture began with the renaming of the farm as Mariannhill after the Virgin Mary and her mother St Ann, to whom, it is said, Pfanner had a great devotion. The name also commemorated Pfanner's stepmother Maria-Anna who had encouraged his priestly vocation and had assisted him financially.³

For some time the monks lived under canvas but slowly buildings were erected and one of the illustrations shows Pfanner outside his first abbey, a small wood and iron building. Development of the farm was high on the list of priorities, partly because there was an urgent need to grow vegetables and cereals for the monks' own use and partly because agricultural development was an intrinsic part of the Trappists' missionary method. With the motto

Ora et labora they set to work to cultivate crops of all descriptions, to build roads and to make bricks for the permanent buildings, all the time retaining the hours and rules of the Trappist Order in Europe. They kept silence except for an hour spent in recreation and the brothers engaged in manual work for nine hours a day, the priests for six. Three brothers were appointed to conduct everyday affairs such as shopping and welcoming visitors, and these were permitted to speak. Of their way of life Pfanner explained:

“What do I offer the monks in return? Well, an excellent diet. Only no meat, no fish, no eggs, no butter, no coffee, no condiments, no sweets. Nothing to drink except water and plenty of that. I offer them a hard paillasse to sleep on and coarse woven clothes to wear. I demand hard manual work, like digging, threshing, mowing, washing, chopping wood, scrubbing floors — and all this in the heat, wind, ice . . . For all this I offer and give no pay, no remuneration”.⁴

It requires little imagination to realise how extraordinary the whole enterprise must have seemed, not only to the Zulus but to the colonists as well, most of whom were Protestants, while even the Catholics among them had little knowledge of monastic life.

Christian missionaries had been working in Natal since 1835 when the Church Missionary Society sent Captain Allen Gardiner to work among the Zulus. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in March 1852, when Bishop Allard and a group of Oblates of Mary Immaculate established centres at Pietermaritzburg and Durban. All the missionary bodies had a similar



‘I demand hard manual work . . .’

Roadmaking, c.1883.

(Photograph: Father L.A. Mettler, C.M.M.)

missionary method and all depended to a large extent on grants of land from the Natal Government. Large tracts of land were set aside for mission reserves after 1855, a total of 70 777 ha. being allocated by 1864.⁵ On each mission reserve the glebe was used by the missionary and his family and staff for a church and a school while the remainder continued to be occupied by the chief, his followers and their stock. Initially after the erection of the chapel or church the tribespeople were invited to attend the opening ceremony when the word of God was explained to them; this was followed by visits to their homes by the missionary and catechists. Parents were invited to send their children to attend the school and from these openings the evangelistic process continued and eventually converts were made.

None of these conditions applied to the Trappists whose work was based on the centuries-old Benedictine method of attracting converts by example. Firstly, Pfanner did not ask for, nor did he receive, grants of land from the Government. He purchased carefully selected farms at places convenient to transport, as in the case of Mariannhill, with fertile soil, abundant water and with a reasonable number of kraals from which to draw pupils for his schools and, eventually, to make adult converts to Christianity. This enabled him to be freer from government control than other mission bodies and he could and did make his own terms with the occupiers of the farm lands who were now his tenants. No rent was charged for the first year but during that time the tenant and his family was expected to build a strong hut, preferably square, with at least one window and a door. Tenants with more than one wife were not interfered with but no extra wives were to be taken while the family lived on mission property. Pfanner saw tribal life as “the endless monotony of idleness” and encouraged his tenants to improve their own plots of land or to take paid employment on the mission property. Some men did arrive at the end of 1884 to work on road building but others found his insistence on standards of hygiene, sobriety and morality impossible to accept and moved off the Mariannhill property.⁷

In addition to the building of the monastery and the planting of crops the brothers at Mariannhill engaged in all kinds of trades and crafts. A printer was engaged in producing pamphlets and books reporting on progress at the mission for the benefit of donors in Europe. Two periodicals were published in the first years, *Fliegende Blätter aus Mariannhill* and *Vergissmeinnicht* and in 1889 the *Mariannhill Kalender*, an annual, made its appearance. The object of these publications was to keep donors informed of progress, to keep their interest alive and to keep the supply of money, so urgently needed, flowing in. Pfanner wrote many of the articles himself and they were illustrated with photographs to enable the reader to see how far the work had progressed. In later years he was to be strongly criticised by the Father Visitor for advertising the work of the mission and for publishing articles on non-religious subjects.⁸ A photographic studio was set up specializing in studies of Zulu life and customs, many of which found their way into the various Mariannhill publications. The Mission Archives still has negatives of hundreds of these photographs forming a unique collection. Mariannhill had been in existence for nearly two years before mission work as it was generally known was commenced.

In 1884 a Basuto catechist, Benjamin Makhaba, joined the Mariannhill staff and began to visit the kraals in the vicinity of Mariannhill. He found six

boys whose parents were willing to allow them to attend school; later the chief ordered that two boys be sent from each kraal and the number increased considerably. Instruction at the school was rudimentary with concentration on the three R's. Each day began with ablutions and the donning of a shapeless white garment supplied by the monks for use during the school day.⁹ It was Bryant, one of the men particularly concerned with the educational aspect of the mission work, who had pity on the young boys who were expected to sit for long hours in the classroom, in the way of German and French boys. He arranged for them to spend each afternoon in the open air learning from the many skilled brothers who practised their craft in the workshops and in the fields.¹⁰ Soon Pfanner, dissatisfied with the slow progress, decided to build a hostel and to turn the school into a boarding establishment so that the newly acquired knowledge was not forgotten as soon as lessons were over. This was an entirely new idea to the Blacks and was difficult for them to accept. Many complaints were made that children were being forcibly removed from their parents, and modifications in the original plan had to be made before the experiment was successful. In addition to the three R's Benjamin instructed the boys in Christian doctrine and at the end of 1884 four of them accepted baptism and were given Christian names. From the first Pfanner insisted on lessons being given in English and, as the only Englishman, Bryant was invaluable.

Little girls were accepted as pupils after 1885 when Pfanner's advertisement for women to help at Mariannhill was published in the Trappist news magazine *Vergissmeinnicht*. A party of five German and Austrian women arrived in Natal in September of that year; they were given a uniform and put to work as lay sisters.¹¹ One of their duties was to teach the girls and it was this group that laid the foundation of the Congregation of Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood which works now in Natal and the Transkei and in other parts of the world. Pfanner caused an outcry in the Colony when he insisted that his objectives were to train good Zulu wives and mothers and not to provide domestic servants for the colonial households. Indeed it was his educational ideas that brought a great deal of publicity to the monastery, much of it unwanted. His article in the Mariannhill publication *Natal Record* found its way into the Government House files with its controversial and somewhat dogmatic statements about education for girls.

"A . . . girl should be able just to read as much Kafir as would enable her to learn the catechism and her prayers, she should be able to undertake the simplest arithmetic viz. to ascertain how much her twenty eggs or her sack of mealies is worth; this should suffice".¹²

His views on the place of Black women in the home would not have found favour with modern feminists:

"If a girl be able to read like a boy, to count like him, to write like him, and then gets married, woe to the husband . . . She will not work for her partner; she will not mend his clothes when they need repairs; she will not till his little garden; she will not look after her kitchen but she will try to dress herself and desire to be waited upon like an English-woman, she will lead a useless and unprofitable life . . ."¹³

Pfanner's argument was that it was pointless to send inspectors to test Zulu children on complicated points of English grammar, the knowledge of

which, in the circumstances and as first generation school-goers, would be irrelevant for their future life which he saw as being spent as well trained artisans or agricultural labourers. Sir John Akerman commented on the article at the Governor's request remarking that many people would take exception to the place assigned to women by the Abbot since "in this age of the world 'woman' is regarded as the equal of the man. Tradition which oft times insists on the necessary inferiority and ignorance has become superseded by the light of experience and the voice of the centuries . . ." ¹⁴ Nevertheless, Akerman seems to have exaggerated since the education of the majority of European girls in colonial Natal was certainly not equal to that of boys, especially as regards curriculum and length of schooling. Writing of the 1850s and 1860s Vietzen describes the characteristics of education for girls as "brevity, uncertainty, improvisation, opportunism" ¹⁵ and in Europe, while a minority of the upper classes might send their daughters to be educated away from home, the majority of girls were given an education quite different from that of their brothers.

It was for industrial education that Mariannhill was particularly well equipped. In 1887 the Inspector of Native Education, who examined the schools and the workshops at Mariannhill, approved a grant of £100. By 1889 the schools were well established and a great variety of technical instruction had been offered; skilled printers, blacksmiths, carpenters and joiners, wagon-makers, coopers, bricklayers and stone-cutters, tanners, tailors, shoemakers, bakers, bookbinders, plumbers, clock-makers, saddlers, and glass-makers were at work on the mission. The abbot, therefore, decided to apply to the Council of Education for an increase in the grant from £100 to £500. There was an immediate outcry and both the superintending Inspector of Schools, Robert Russell, and the Inspector of Native Education, Robert Plant, were sent to inspect the monastery schools. Their report was published in the *Government Gazette*, ¹⁶ receiving a great deal of publicity and showing disagreement between the inspectors. Russell reported favourably while Plant was critical both of the amount and the standard of school work offered. The press took up the argument assisted by numerous letters to the editor. In the end Mariannhill did not receive the additional grant despite the praise by both inspectors for the thoroughness and variety of industrial training given to 177 pupils. As compared to the £100 given by the Colonial Government, Pfanner spent £6 300 in that year alone on education, board and clothing; this money was donated by his benefactors in Europe. ¹⁷ After 1893, the Natal government appointed a special committee to investigate the subject of native education and it duly recommended that the main object of the schools should be to train Africans to work, while education should be kept to an elementary level. The cost to the Colony was not to exceed £4 500. Under the new regulations for industrial schools Mariannhill lost its grant altogether and in the first year £1 061.2.6d was granted for the whole Colony, no school being allowed more than £250. ¹⁸ It was about this time that colonists began to show concern that the skilled artisans from industrial schools run by mission societies might offer strong competition to white artisans and mechanics, with the result that industrial education in mission schools fell into disfavour.

Although the Trappists differed from other missionary bodies in the

Colony in many respects, there was a similarity which was in fact typical of 19th century Europeans in all parts of the world. Unlike the missionaries sent to England by Gregory I in the 7th century, who were told, "Baptise, but do not destroy the realities", most 19th century missionaries saw little worth preserving in African religion and tribal beliefs, which appeared to them only as superstition and paganism. They were similar also in their attitude to nakedness, which seemed to disgust them, and all made attempts to clothe the Blacks as quickly as possible. Pfanner's collectors in Europe appealed for clothing and large quantities arrived to be received, apparently enthusiastically, by his tenants and the families of the school children.¹⁹

Although unappreciative of these aspects of African life, the Trappists were nevertheless vitally interested in the Zulu language. Soon after their arrival they arranged for the Oblate missionary, Father Louis Mathieu, to ride over from Oakford each week to give lessons to the Trappists, one of whom, A.T. Bryant, soon outstripped his teacher. Bryant prepared a number of word lists and grammars for the use of his colleagues and translated many educational and religious texts into Zulu.

Bryant, one of the few Englishmen who worked at Mariannhill, had a deep interest in the Zulus aroused during the Anglo-Zulu war. He had heard Pfanner speak, during a visit to England, about the need for missionaries to educate the Zulu children and to preach the Christian message, and he volunteered, arriving in Natal in 1883. His first literary work printed at Mariannhill in 1887 was *Roman legions on Libyan fields; the story of the Trappist missionaries among the Zulus in Natal*, written under the pen name Sihlobosami. His interest in Zulu language and culture increased with the years and he began to collect oral evidence, especially on early events and lineages, as soon as he had mastered the language. His best known works are *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* and *The Zulus before the White man came* and although his work is criticised by modern scholars it still offers an excellent example of 19th and early 20th century scholarship. In the words of Shula Marks

"his work is, and must remain, the most important single source of Nguni history before and during the Mfecane and is of very considerable importance to anyone trying to understand the structure of the Zulu state throughout the 19th century".²¹

Later, another Mariannhill priest, Father Willibald Wanger, built up an enviable reputation as a Zulu scholar and linguist with his publications including *Konversations-Grammatik der Zulusprache*, based on Colenso's *Grammar* and *Scientific Zulu Grammar*. The last abbot of Mariannhill, Abbot Gerard Wolpert, was a considerable Zulu scholar and his translation of the Bible forms the basis for the Zulu Bible now used in Catholic churches.

Mariannhill was also early in the field of journalism, producing a number of short-lived journals in the 1890s while in 1912 a Zulu newspaper *Izindaba Zabantu*, appeared, changing its title to *Umafrika* in 1929, under which name it is still published weekly at Mariannhill.

Another monk who became well known in Natal was the skilled architect and engineer, Brother Nivard Streicher who was responsible for designing a number of monastery buildings including the church and the cloisters. He constructed bridges, installed and maintained the turbine engines which

provided power, and established the water supply on the various missions. He also acted as consultant to the Colonial Government on many occasions, particularly when large bridges were to be erected and he was well known among the farming community for his ability to repair boilers and other equipment.²² At Newcastle he built the campanile and the garden pavilion in the grounds of St Dominic's Academy, now declared national monuments.

In addition to priests and brothers, Pfanner, (who was appointed abbot in 1885), introduced a group of mission helpers called Franziner. These were priests or laymen who came at their own expense on annual contracts. To be accepted they had to be trained in a trade or profession, be free of debt and of good character and be prepared to pay their own return fare to Europe. It was these men, and the women mentioned earlier, who helped Mariannhill to develop so rapidly and enabled the abbot to open new foundations. Pfanner made frequent visits to Europe to recruit monks and laymen for Mariannhill and by 1898 it had become the largest abbey in the world both numerically and in the number of its extensions.²³



Abbot Pfanner and Brother Nivard set out on a missionary journey.

(Photograph: Father L.A. Mettler, C.M.M)

In 1886 with Mariannhill firmly established Abbot Pfanner began to think of opening daughter houses, the traditional way in which monasteries extended their influence. The original foundation served as a nucleus for the establishment of other centres, each with its own superior and a large measure of independence, but retaining close contact with the mother house whose abbot made periodic visitations. Pfanner planned to open his new monasteries each about a day's ride from Mariannhill or from each other and the first was Reichenau on the Polela River, 216 km from Mariannhill, opened in 1886. Reichenau consisted of 2 227 ha with a river frontage which

included a waterfall capable of being harnessed for power. One of the reasons for selecting this farm was that the chief, Sakayedwa, was most anxious to have a school opened and had promised his support. Pfanner's next purchase was a small farm at Rosebank outside Richmond, which, being surrounded by white farms, was not ideal for a mission station, but was half way between Mariannhill and Reichenau and thus a useful overnight stop. Also in 1887 a farm of 1 240 ha. was purchased in the Blitsberg on the Ixopo Road where Mariathal Mission was established; another 588 ha. was bought in the Highflats district for Oetting mission.

Between 1887 and 1892 Kevelaer mission was established at Polela Road near Bulwer, Lourdes in East Griqualand, Centocow at Dronk Vlei in the Creighton district, Maria Ratschitz in the Biggarsberg, Rankweil near Westville. Maria Ratschitz was situated far from the other Trappist stations and was the only one to be overrun during the Anglo-Boer war. In 1890 the Trappists took over St Michael's mission, the old Oblate mission that had been allocated to them in 1882.

Of all these missions Lourdes was the largest, consisting of 20 243 ha, and was part of the land belonging to Donald Strachan, one of the earliest traders in the region and a friend of Adam Kok. About 4 000 ha. were put aside for the use of the monastery, the remainder being used for Christian and other Black tenants. It was at Lourdes that the brothers revived the medieval system of marsh or bog drainage to produce excellent wheat lands; horse and cattle breeding was also introduced in addition to crops. A waterfall on the property was harnessed to provide power for the turbine engines and the monastery buildings were set on the hillside overlooking the farm lands.²⁴

In 1892, ten years after the arrival of the Trappists in Natal, they could look back on a period of remarkable progress. Mariannhill had beautiful buildings, workshops producing articles of all kinds and fine farmlands which enabled the monks to be virtually self-supporting. The schools were flourishing, the number of converts was growing steadily and the Abbot continued to attract monks and helpers of all kinds as well as generous donations of money; at the same time the daughter monasteries were becoming established. In that year the General Chapter of the Trappists decided to send an apostolic visitor to report on Pfanner's work and Father Francis Strunk, Abbot of Ölenberg was appointed. As a result of his visit Pfanner was suspended for a year for contravening certain Trappist regulations and before the year was up he resigned and went to live at Emaus mission near Lourdes in East Griqualand where he and two companions continued their mission work, opening a model dairy farm. Pfanner remained there until his death in 1909.²⁵

Pfanner's successors continued almost unchanged the work he began at Mariannhill, including the extension to other areas and the method of establishing Black Christian communities on monastery farms. Under Abbot Amandus Scholzig (1894—1900) eight new properties were acquired including Maria-Zell near Matatiele, Maria-Telgte in the Swartberg district, Maria-Hilf or Maryhelp between Emaus and St Michael's, Clairvaux near Impendhle, Citeaux outside Bulwer, Mariatrost in the Highflats area, and in East Griqualand Hardenberg and Maria-Linden. During Abbot Amandus's time the first missions outside Natal and East Griqualand were opened. Two



Plenary meeting outside the monastery church. c.1903.

(Photograph: Father L.A. Mettler, C.M.M.)

farms were acquired in Rhodesia; Triashill, the land for which had been granted to Abbot Pfanner by Cecil Rhodes, and Monte Cassino. A migrating mission or *Wandernden Kirche* was established in Johannesburg to serve the needs of the Zulus and Basutos working on the gold mines. A group of Mariannhill monks and Precious Blood Sisters also entered the mission field in East Africa in 1897.

The third and last abbot of Mariannhill was Father Gerard Wolpert (1900—1904) who like his predecessors was faced with the impossible task of combining the strict and inflexible monastic Rule of the Trappists with the ever growing needs of the many mission stations. During his period in office three new stations were opened, St John's at Highflats, Himmelberg and Maris-Stella in Southern Natal. In 1903, having called together the missionaries from all the stations, he explained that it was no longer possible to continue in the old way and that he was going to Rome to consult with his superiors. He tendered his resignation the following year, returning to his mission and handing over administration to the Father Visitor. Under the Visitor, Abbot Edmund Obrecht from Kentucky, all further extensions were stopped and the Trappists in East Africa were recalled, their work being handed over to the Holy Ghost Fathers. Efforts were made to transfer the Rhodesian foundations to the English Jesuits; in exchange the Trappist were to be responsible for running the Jesuit mission at Keilands in the Eastern Cape. Unfortunately the many changes and the tightening up of regulations by Obrecht brought disunity among the Mariannhill staff, leading to a crisis in 1909 when Mariannhill was separated from the Trappist Order as the Religious Missionaries of Mariannhill under Father Gerard Wolpert as the first provost. Under Wolpert extensions began again with the purchase of a

farm at Besters and St Anne's Mission, Loteni, Far View mission near Mount Fletcher, Stockville Farm on the borders of Mariannhill and numerous outstations.

The First World War was a difficult time for Mariannhill since most of the monks came from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Eastern Europe. Their long period of service to the African people in South Africa and their complete separation from political affairs stood them in good stead, however, and with the assistance of Bishop Delalle and the co-operation of General Louis Botha they were allowed to remain at their posts without interference.²⁶ Both new staff and supplies of money were cut off during the 1914—18 period, and with worries about families and colleagues in the war area this was in every way a difficult time. Finally in 1921, after a plenary chapter had been held, the new constitution, drafted in 1913, was approved. Father Adalbero Fleischer was elected first Superior-General of the Mariannhill Missionary congregation as Vicar Apostolic of Mariannhill, now completely separated from the Natal vicariate.

During the First World War Father Bernard Huss, well known as an educator, began to be recognized for his economic and social activities among the Africans. In 1915 he became principal of St Francis' Teachers' Training College where he taught agriculture, psychology and music, writing his own text-books. In addition to his teaching activities he lectured widely on economic subjects, during the course of which he came into contact with Clements Kadalie's Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union which he believed to be militantly anti-White and anti-Christian. To counter the rapidly growing influence of Kadalie, Huss and two other Mariannhill fathers, J.B. Sauter and E. Hanisch, founded the Catholic African Union with the motto "Better homes, better fields, better hearts". This movement was successful in the 1920s and 1930s and its scope was extended to include co-operative societies and people's banks.²⁷ Huss also wrote a series of articles spanning the period 1925—1947, to the Catholic newspaper *The Southern Cross* in the hope of bringing White Christians to a better understanding of Black problems and aspirations. The total membership of the Catholic African Union is unknown but its annual congresses were attended by several thousand Africans and Huss's influence can still be felt in the Mariannhill diocese.

African catechists and teachers were trained at Mariannhill and its extensions from early days, but in the last decades of the 19th century it was decided that the time was ripe for training African priests and religious. The first young men were sent to train in Rome, returning to work in Natal. The Protestant Churches had taken this step of training indigenous people for the Christian ministry, much earlier, Tiyo Soga having been ordained as early as 1856 but this was the first time the Catholic Church in South Africa had admitted novices. In 1925 a minor seminary was opened at Mariathal Mission, leading to an increase in the number of Black priests. In 1923 the Franciscan Familiars of St Joseph were formed and Black sisters were trained at Mariannhill as the Daughters of St Francis of Assisi after 1922. There were 209 sisters in 1945²⁸ and at the present time the Congregation numbers about 300.

In 1921 the Natal vicariate was reorganised. Mariannhill gained Southern Natal and the Transkei and lost Maria Ratschitz and St Joseph's Mission,

Besters. In 1930 and 1935 there were further divisions to form the dioceses of Umtata and Kokstad; in 1954 the Umzimkulu diocese was detached. At the present time the borders of Mariannhill comprise Ixopo, Impendhle, Umzinto and part of Bulwer, Himeville, part of Port Shepstone, Umzimkulu, parts of Camperdown and Mariannhill itself. The diocese consists of 12 612 sq. km. and has a Catholic population of 245 400.²⁹

Mariannhill in 1982 no longer has the large numbers of lay brothers and priests which enabled it to maintain the many skilled workshops in earlier days. Government legislation has brought about many changes in land usage and occupation. Schools are still run on mission properties on traditional Catholic lines and like other Catholic mission schools are financed privately, but public examinations are written. Mariannhill mission has a well equipped hospital, an orphanage, a large cathedral and is the residence of the Bishop of Mariannhill, now for the first time a Zulu, the Rev. Paul Mngoma. It is also the mother house of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood. On the property is a retreat house, a guest house, a retirement home for staff and the catechetical training school Khanyisa. Mariannhill missionaries are at work also in Zimbabwe, Brazil and New Guinea.

One hundred years have seen tremendous progress and achievement as well as setbacks and the necessity for adaptation. The spirit of Abbot Franz Pfanner still pervades Mariannhill and its daughter houses, imbuing the

The recently renovated monastery church, 1982.

(Photograph: Father L.A. Mettler, C.M.M.)



missionaries with that energy and wide vision combined with the practicality and lack of sentimentality that were characteristic of its founder, and which have made Mariannhill well known not only in Southern Africa but in Europe and the United States.

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