

## Sister Anne Assumpta Luei

In September 1924 five Sisters of Charity left New Jersey for a new missionary venture in Shenchow (later known as Yuanlin), China. There was much work to be done in this area devastated by famine, disease and warlords, so the Sisters immediately opened a free dispensary for poor people, an orphanage for abandoned girls, a catechetical center for women and girls, and a girls' school.

One day Luei Peh-Niang arrived at the Sisters' compound with her youngest daughter, Chiu-Chie. Recently widowed, Mrs. Luei would now become the wife of her brother-in-law, which was not to her liking, so she sought a way out. She asked Sister M. Finan, the Superior, for employment and shelter for herself and her daughter. Sister was happy to hire Mrs. Luei as the gatewoman and buyer because of the family's good reputation and gave them a room. Chiu-Chie began attending the mission school for girls and in time both mother and daughter were baptized.

Chiu-Chie grew tall and robust and excelled as a student. Upon completing secondary school, she elected to pursue teacher training. Upon graduation she moved to the mission in Wuki, which was fifty miles away. This mission had two compounds – one for men conducted by the Passionist priests and another for women and girls under the direction of the Sisters of Charity. The women's compound housed an orphanage for fifty girls, a catechetical center, a dispensary and a school for girls in which Chiu-Chie taught. After a few years Chiu-Chie asked Sister M. Finan if she could enroll in nursing school, believing that she could better serve the Chinese people as a nurse than in the more respected profession of teacher. She completed her nursing studies with honors and returned to Yuanlin to work under the supervision of Sister M. Finan.

As was customary, Chiu-Chie had been espoused in infancy to the son of another family. When she had completed teacher training her fiancé wished to marry her. Chiu-Chie replied that instead of marriage she wished to become a Sister of Charity, but he refused to release her. She was thirty years old when she returned to Yuanlin to practice nursing and the young man was tired of waiting and hoped to marry her soon. When she told him again that she wished to become a Sister, he finally respected her wishes and a banquet was held to announce that the espousal was broken.

Chiu-Chie became a postulant on the Feast of the Assumption in 1948 and received the habit six months later, taking the religious name Sister Anne Assumpta. On December 8, 1949 she pronounced her vows as a Sister of Charity.

Meanwhile the Communist army was progressing toward the interior of China. The local Bishop, Cuthbert O'Gara, told the missionaries that they might freely return to the United States and offered to send Sister Anne Assumpta to Convent Station for her novitiate. She replied that she would do whatever Bishop O'Gara commanded, but that she believed that she could do more for her people by remaining in Yuanlin. As a result, she was present for all of the trials that awaited the Sisters of Charity when the soldiers arrived.

After months of harassment and threats the American Sisters of Charity were forced by the Communists to leave China in April 1951. It was clear that the government would not allow Sister Anne Assumpta to go with them. Bishop James Walsh of Maryknoll, who was still free in Shanghai, arranged to have her join a community of Chinese sisters. On the morning after the Americans' departure Sister Anne Assumpta boarded a bus to Shanghai, but was removed from the bus a mile outside of Yuanlin and taken into custody by the Communists.



Sister Anne Assumpta was placed in a labor camp located between Yuanlin and her native hamlet to serve as a warning to her clan and to the Yuanlin Christians. After a year or two, she was released briefly, a ploy by the Communists to spy on whomever she contacted. She was imprisoned again, doing heavy field work for more than a quarter-century, in a labor camp for political dissidents and won the admiration of the other prisoners. In 1981 it was clear that she was very sick, swollen and tottering. The warden arranged for her friend Liao Ming, a staunch Christian, to move into the prison and care for Sister until her death a few days later. To the wonder of all, the warden gave her a decent burial and put a small stone over Sister Anne Assumpta's grave.

This Sister Story was adapted from a 2001 essay of Sister M. Carita Pendergast, SC, who went to China in 1931 and remained until the expulsion in 1951. Sister M. Carita is the author of *Havoc in Hunan* which recounts the twenty-seven years that the Sisters of Charity served the people of China.

Sister M. Carita met Chiu-Chie as a teenager and then lived with her several times "and learned to know her very well, and love and respect her." Sister Carita ends her remembrance of Sister Anne Assumpta:

I truly believe that Sister Anne Assumpta from her earliest days wished, as a Chinese woman, to help her country women. In life and in death she exemplified the words of Christ: "Greater love than this hath no man, that he give his life for his friends." (John 15:13)