

fetched and poles and ropes were wound about with fresh green. Luckily we found many helpers. First the schoolboys and girls of Steyl helped with their small hands to pluck out the grass which was growing rampantly like a lawn between the paving stones in front of the house. Doing that their zeal was so great that at the time their classes were about to begin they could hardly be moved to exchange the pavement for the classroom. Later rubble and stones had also to be removed and help was needed for a small bricklaying job; that was a job for the bigger boys who began it with great zeal. The girls on the other hand preferred to clean the paths with shovel and rake. In the meantime a plum tree was shaken, and that gave new spirit and zeal to the little ones. When the greenery was cut, everyone was really busy. A mighty basket was filled in no time. When it was full they shouted: "Up with it!" And immediately four boys shouldered it and carried it, singing, to the place where they worked on the greenery. – The parents did not lag behind the children, they even willingly sacrificed quite a few hours of rest to help. And so we were gradually able to dress church and house in a festive robe which made us more than satisfied."

September 8, 1875

In the morning of September 8, the new mission house and the neighboring small parish church were decorated beautifully. In front of the door of the mission house written the words were: "Nisi Dominus aedificaverit...", which means, if the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labor. "In front of the house," so Fr. Arnold continued in the article just mentioned, "standing in a beautiful semi-circle, bound together with garlands were four tall poles with pennants in the papal and Dutch colors. The middle garland, however, bore an inscription in Dutch: ... 'Gaat heen de hele wereld door, en verkondigt het Evangelie aan alle Schepselen' [Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to all creatures]. A garlanded path led from the mission house to the church and here, in the place of prayer, shining high up in the choir surrounded by grapes were the beautiful words of the Lord: "Ask the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his vineyard." In the entrance hall of the mission house "the motto of the house was shining above the image of the divine heart: 'Vivat Cor Jesu in cordibus hominum' which means 'May the heart of Jesus live in the hearts of the people'.

In the festival room these words were above the cross of the Lord, which by now has overcome so many countries of Europe in a peaceful victory: 'Haec est Victoria, quae vincit mundum, fides vestra', which means, 'That is the victory which overcomes the world, your faith.'"

At 10 am the solemn High Mass for the inauguration of the mission house began in the parish church of Steyl. The celebrant was the parish priest of Neuwerk, Msgr. Dr. Ludwig von Essen. Arnold Janssen was the preacher.



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The Arnoldus Family Story

Finally in Steyl!

On August 27, 1875 Arnold Janssen moved from Kempen to Steyl and on August 28 he wrote his first letter from Steyl to his future co-worker Fr. Bill in Luxembourg. First of all he described the move from Kempen to Steyl and then he continued:

"Since I thought that you would prefer a room facing the water [the river Maas], I chose for myself the ordinary living room of the Ronk family facing the church. On the floor above, towards the River, there are two friendly living rooms right in the middle of the others. I told Mr. Reichart to choose the worse room for himself and to leave the better one free for you. By the way, there are still 3 more rooms for you to choose from which are among the best of the house. The beautiful room on the ground floor with the three windows facing the River is meant to be the conference and recreation room and during the winter it can also be heated and used as a common study room.

"I've just congratulated Fr. Rector Backhuis [of the parish church in Steyl] on his name day; his health condition has not yet improved. At the moment he has to apply cantharides and stay in bed. He requested me to ask the Bishop for jurisdiction. I told him that it would certainly be my great pleasure to help him; but I was afraid that under the present circumstances it was definitely not advisable. And then, Prof. Moubis is currently there and he hears confessions and takes care of the ordinary parish matters. I intend to celebrate holy Mass on weekdays at 5.30 am and the Brother will serve the Mass. ... for Sundays Fr. Backhuis asked me to celebrate holy Mass after the Professor at 7 am. Mr. Reichart and Henry [Erlemann] have both been living here quite contentedly and happily, in spite of having to make a few sacrifices. They have already had some visitors and have also put up an offertory box in the house which brought them some guilders as well. ...

"You will have received my letter of [August] 24 or 25, as well as the addresses of bishops through the mediation of Rev. von Essen. He did not come [for our meeting] on August 5, because the telegram which I had sent at 7. 30 am and which should have reached him in Gladbach at 9 am at the latest, did not get to him before 8 pm in the evening.

“Mr. Reichart, Henry and William [Br. Juniperus Janssen, OFMCap] send you their kind regards ...

“May the good Lord grant us the grace zealously to seek His holy will, so that through a simple, God-loving heart we may become more and more worthy of his heavenly blessings. ...”

Seminarian Francis Reichart added the following lines to this letter:

“I have actually nothing to add to the above letter other than to confirm it fully, as far as I am concerned. I have been the cook since I got here, and we had a lot of fun with our cooking. More later!...” (Peter Bill, *Korrespondenz* [Correspondence], unpublished manuscript, pp. 10-11).

On September 2, Fr. Arnold went to see Bishop Paredis in Roermond (Alt, *Journey in Faith*, p. 79).

September 3, Fr. Arnold wrote a further letter to Fr. Bill in Luxembourg:

“Dear Rev. Bill!

On Wednesday, September 8, we will celebrate the blessing of our house and I consider it my duty to invite you, leaving it up to you whether you are able or wish to come. The High Mass is at 10 am. It is the wish of Rev. Fr. Rector [of the parish church in Steyl] that I preach; Mr. Reichart is going to Neuwerk today to invite Rev. Dr. von Essen to celebrate holy Mass. In the afternoon the dean of Venlo will bless the house on behalf of the Bishop of Roermond. The priests from the neighboring parishes and some friends [among them Dr. Henges] will be invited.

We would be pleased if you can come. Presently we are praying a novena to prepare ourselves. You will surely join us in spirit and ask the good Lord for his holy blessing for our house. ...” (Bill, *Correspondence*, p. 12).

As just noted, seminarian Reichart went on September 3 to Neuwerk and invited Msgr. Dr. von Essen to celebrate the solemn Mass for the inauguration of the new mission house on September 8. Msgr. von Essen accepted the invitation (Bornemann, *Der Pfarrer von Neuwerk Dr. Ludwig von Essen und seine Missionspläne* [The parish priest of Neuwerk Dr. von Essen and his mission plans], Steyler Verlag, St. Augustin, 1967, p. 111).

Arnold Janssen’s reflections on the inauguration of the mission house on September 8, 1875

In the September 1875 issue of his mission magazine “Der Kleine Herz-Jesu-Bote” (The Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart), Fr. Arnold published the article: „Eröffnung des Missionshauses zu Steyl“ (The Inauguration of the Mission House in Steyl). There we read:

“Is it not too great an honor for the insignificant men, who with God’s help have undertaken the foundation of a German-Dutch mission house, to speak immediately after the feast of the Nativity of Mary about the birth of their house? And yet this connection is only natural. For, provided that nothing unforeseen occurs, the feast of the Nativity of Mary, September 8, 1875, will also be the feast of the birth of their house.

“In a certain sense they can also call June 16 of this year the birthday of their undertaking. For on this graced day, following the prayer of consecration which Rome had published for that day, the foundation of the above-mentioned project was laid in a joint act of dedication by which they dedicated themselves to the Divine Heart of Jesus for this undertaking. On that day the definitive declaration of intent to buy the house in Steyl was also made. On the feast of the holy father Dominic on August 4 this year, the house came into our legal possession through deed of purchase in the presence of a notary. According to reports, September 8, 1875 will be the inauguration day and the beginning of that life of prayer, work and self-denial which is to be led in this house.

“Even though they may regard the birthday of the great patroness of the church, the holy Mother of God, also as their birthday, they must think of it less as an honor or similarity, since there are so few points of similarity, but rather as a call to strive to make themselves more and more worthy of the protection of their exalted patroness.”

Every Christian “is a child of his parents since he owes his natural life to them. He is a child of the church since he owes the supernatural life of his soul to her, supposing he still possesses it. This life is sanctifying grace. He owes it to the church and therefore the church is his mother and he is a child of the church.

“But the Christian is also a child of Mary, since the church is the living Mary insofar as Mary gave birth to the first Christ, and the church through God’s grace gives birth to Christians. Therefore Matthew says that Mary gave birth to Christ, her firstborn son.

“Since in that way all of us are the later-born children of Mary, our mission house may also call itself a child of Mary. May it become a child that pleases her. She is such an exalted holy woman! This newborn child, once it has grown and become stronger, is to help her bear for divine grace and mercy many more children destined for eternal life.

“May the holy Mother, therefore, deign to look on this young child with motherly love! What kind of situations may still be in store for it when it will need a powerful protector! May it grow in strength, especially inwardly, and by attaining a good spirit may it deserve to become a beloved child of Mary! Amen”

Last preparations for the inauguration of the mission house

Wednesday, September 8, 1875 was to be the inauguration day of the new mission house. In the October 1875 issue of the “Kleiner Herz-Jesu-Bote” (Little Messenger of the Sacred Heart) Arnold Janssen described the final preparations for the inauguration of the mission house:

“The kind reader can easily imagine how much had to be done before the inauguration. In a new house everything is lacking at first and now it had to be prepared for a feast. It was a matter of helping bravely, and nobody asked first, ‘is this or that work too much for me or too little’; but each one did what he could. They scrubbed and swept, shoveled and raked, trees, flags and pictures, greenery and flowers were