The Speeches given at Sister Barbara’s Farewell Ceremony  
Friday June 21st 2013  
At the Nurse Training School, Murambinda Mission Hospital.

The Ceremonies Begin

Guests arrived during the hour from 9.30 to 10.30 am. They were seated on chairs and benches set out under the tented awning, facing the verandah of the Training School. Each guest, as they arrived, was presented with a bright buttonhole – a red artificial flower with small coloured ribbons. Nurses and nurse students pinned them to the lapel of each guest. The verandah was set out as the Altar for the opening event, a Mass of Thanksgiving to mark the end of Sister Barbara’s 33-years at Murambinda Mission Hospital.

At 10.45 a dancing procession led by women from the Church, all dressed in long skirts proclaiming the charisms of the Little Company of Mary, - ‘Prayer and Care for the sick and the dying’, and ‘Bringing Happiness, a gift of God’ - heralded the arrival of the priests who would con-celebrate the Mass. The procession was accompanied by singing from the gathered guests, driven enthusiastically by musicians with drums and shakers. Parish Priest of St Richard’s, Father Isidore, presided. He was accompanied by five other priests, including Brother Walter Gallagher a Franciscan, and two ordinands, and Brother Juniper, a senior Franciscan monk. Brother Walter and Brother Juniper had both been at St Richard’s during Sister Barbara’s years at the hospital.

Introductions

At the invitation of the Director of Ceremonies who is a young local teacher, Father Isidore introduced all the Church dignitaries.

The Director of Ceremonies then called on the District Medical Officer, Dr Ncube, to introduce the other dignitaries.

We are all here today to honour someone who is a legend in the Health Service, Sister Barbara Armstrong!

I invite these dignitaries please to stand when I call your name, so that we may recognise you properly.

The District Administrator Mr Madondo... Well, I know he is coming...

The Guest of Honour, from Harare, the Director of Nursing Services for Zimbabwe, Mrs Chasokela... Well, I know that she is here already... She is somewhere...

From Buhera Rural District Council, Mrs Chivago... I don't see her...

And now welcome to members of all Government Departments... Ah, they are not here yet...

And from the sister Hospitals, including Mount St Mary’s... No, I do not see them...

It seems that all the people I call to introduce are not here today!
But I am here! So let me introduce myself! I am Dr Ncube, District Medical Officer!
Now, from the District Health Board.... I am not seeing them at all.
And Chairman of the Hospital Board of Management, Mr Matsindi... I know he is coming...
Board Member, Sister Ivy from the Little Company of Mary. Welcome, Sister Ivy.
From the Hospital Executive, Administrator Mrs Chipanga. Welcome Mrs Chipanga.
The Medical Superintendant, Dr Ngwiri... He does not seem to be here...
And the Matron who is stepping down but who is so strong and well, Sister Barbara. Welcome, Sister Barbara.
And we know that the new Matron being appointed is Sister Shamu of the LCM, and that everything will be in good hands. Acting Matron Sister Shamu will you please stand? Welcome to you today.
And the Tutors from the School of Nursing, Sister Mudzingwa, and Sister Matava. Welcome, Sisters.
And the Heads of Department in Murambinda Mission Hospital... Ah, they are working....
And Ministry of Health and Child Welfare employees. Welcome to you all.
From ZACH [Zimbabwe Association of Church Hospitals]... I am not seeing anyone...
And Friends of the Hospital, from the UK Mrs Mary Miller and Mr Miller, and the Dutch Friend... your name please...
“I am from Denmark. Torvald is my name.”
Thank you all!

The Mass
The introductions now completed, the Director of Ceremonies respectfully transferred the conducting of the next phase of the ceremonies to Father Isidore.
Welcoming all the guests, and explaining to the non-Catholics present that they were most welcome to the Mass, and that there would be no kneeling: people would just stand or sit at the different points of the service, Father Isidore assured everyone that since they were running late the service would be quite short. He had chosen two Bible readings which fitted the needs of this very significant day – a day which drew from him an expression of, ‘an oxymoron - two contradicting facts - for it is a day of both sadness and joy.’ Sadness because it was Farewell to Sister Barbara, but joy because they were celebrating the wonderful work she had done for all those years.
He explained that the two Readings would speak for themselves.

Sister Catherine of the LCM read from the Book of Acts, chapter 20 verses 17 to 38, reading in *Shona*. St Paul, about to set sail from Miletus to an unknown fate in Jerusalem, called the elders from Ephesus to meet with him before he left. He told them how in his *three* years with them he had taught them everything he knew about the Gospel, visiting them day and night with tears, and now he urged them to keep to those teachings. He warned them that bitter conflicts would arise and that they should feed the flock and support the weak. He commended them to God in prayer. They knew that they would never see his face again. And with tears they accompanied him to the ship and parted from him there.

The second reading, from the Gospel of John, chapter 15 verses 11 to 17, was read in English by Assistant Priest Father Tendai. Jesus was telling his disciples that they were not servants to him, but friends. And he gave them his new commandment, that they should love one another.

Father Isidore re-told the story of St Paul at Miletus, putting Sister Barbara in the place of St Paul, and made many complimentary references to her life, and her dedication to God and her devotion to her nursing profession and to Murambinda. Among his words:

‘This gallant daughter of God came 10,000 kilometres, 13 hours’ flight in a plane. It was the Gospel which brought her here. And here she has been part and parcel of our life in Zimbabwe. As we have learned from Saint Theresa, you may have wanted things to go one way, but you cannot have it that way if the Lord wants it this way. And so it was with Sister Barbara, coming so far from her own family. God called her to be a Nun. And in time the Church and the Government made her the Matron of this hospital. The word Matron comes from the Greek and Latin words for ‘Mother’. And that is what Sister Barbara has been: she has been the Mother of the hospital, and she has been like a mother to many, many members of the staff, and also to patients. So she has been a true Matron, a true mother. She would say, ‘I was coming to minister to people – from fundamental options I made to help patients and souls.’

I myself have been here in Murambinda for these short years, but I have come to know Sister Barbara well. And I must tell you this. I often found the hospital full, yes, full. But not just full of patients. Full of Sister Barbara! She was here, she was there, she was everywhere. The Maternity ward, the Paediatric ward, the OPD, all sorts of places that I don’t understand and don’t know the differences between, she was there in them all.

I must also tell you that we had our differences. I used to enjoy our differences, because they showed the kind of person she is. She was always there for Mass at 6.30 in the morning. And sometimes she would say we were late. We weren’t really late: it was just that we weren’t there for Sister Barbara’s ‘early’. And she was always wanting the Fathers to come into the
hospital, to bless the patients and to anoint those who were dying. So it was just what a Matron should be doing. She was a Matron par excellence.'

Using the verses from the Book of Acts, Father Isidore narrated how Sister Barbara had come from far away, and spent years and years in this place. She had taught the people she was with, and taught them all she knew. And day and night with all her energy and tears she had visited them and cared for them. And the time had now come when they knew that they would not see her face again, and they would have to bid her farewell as she set sail for Ireland. Thankfully, unlike St Paul, she was not going to be arrested and imprisoned, but would instead be going to be in her community, and near to her own family.

Turning to the reading from the Gospel of John, Father Isidore spoke of how the image of servants and friends was appropriate for the day. It was like this, for the hospital staff and for the patients. Although Sister Barbara was going away from them, they were still her friends, and she was still their friend.

'I remember my Latin professor,' said Father Isidore. 'He taught us about the meaning of the word 'Sacrament'. The famous meaning is 'an outward and visible sign of an inward, invisible, grace; instituted by Christ for the salvation of souls'. But my professor who was from Scotland, James Carruth, gave us a new definition of 'a sacrament'. He said, 'It is a sign of God's love, and also a communication of that love.'

Now I say to you that Sister Barbara exactly fits James Carruth's definition of a sacrament. She is a sign of God's love; and she is a means of communicating God's love. And I think of what the Nurse Training School has done: all those young nurses, 100% passes from the students under the teaching of the Sisters. I call for a Royal Diadem for Sister Barbara.

Jesus goes on to say, 'There is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends.' Sister Barbara has laid down all these years of her life for her friends, the staff and the patients of the hospital.

And now I return to St Paul leaving Miletus, as we read in the Book of Acts. He warned his friends that, after he left, fierce wolves would arise to do harm to the flock. We can only pray that no such thing will happen here after Sister Barbara leaves. No. We must pray and we must make sure that we follow the Lord's command, that we should love one another.

And now we proceed to the Sacrament, which is the Lord's reward for those who have done His will, for the future citizens of heaven, of whom Sister Barbara is certainly one.'

When the Sacrament had been celebrated and the Mass was ended there was an Interlude.

An Interlude
Three young teenagers, Community Adolescent Treatment Supporters - ‘CATS’ – from the hospital’s Child and Adolescent Resource Centre (‘CARC’) now came forward and recited their poem, written specially for Sister Barbara’s Farewell. CARC has established itself as a valuable resource, giving psycho-social support and increased resilience to children and adolescents facing all the challenges of an HIV-Positive life:

**STARTING TO DANCE - Poem by CARC for Sr. Barbara’s Farewell**

When we were born, our parents’ joy  
Was quickly turned to sorrow.  
Their hopes and dreams were shadowed by  
Their fears about tomorrow.

And as we grew, we longed to join  
The games all children play,  
But other people called us names,  
Or simply turned away.

The doctors saw that we were sick,  
They started us on ART,  
But though our CD4s improved,  
We still were losing heart.

And then our Dr. Glenshaw said,  
“These children need a chance  
To play, to share, to grow in care  
So they can start to dance.”

They put their heads together  
And then they started CARC.  
Now hand in hand you see us all  
Come dancing from the dark.

With Sister Barbara and the team  
We’ve grown, we’ve fought, we cope  
With all that life can throw at us.  
We give each other hope.

Now Sister Barbara’s going away.  
We want to thank you, Sister.  
We know in times to come we’ll say,  
“Ah, ah, how we have missed her.”

At the close of the poem the three young teen-aged girls sang together as they performed a little dance – dancing from the dark...
There followed two songs from the Dananai Choir. This Choir has been formed by a group of adults who declared publicly their HIV Positive status. This public disclosure of their status has given other HIV Positive adults the courage to face their problems openly. Their singing of the song, ‘Have a Nice Day’ lifted everyone’s spirits.

Speeches in Honour of Sister Barbara

1. A Member of the Hospital Board – LCM Sister Ivy

   All Protocols observed.

   I speak today on behalf of all the Board Members. As a Board of Management of the hospital, one of our roles is to ensure that we have the right personnel, resources, and procedures. And we know that during all her years here Sister Barbara did everything to make sure these were all in place, for she was so devoted to serving the people of Buhera. Sister Barbara worked hard all these 33 years. She worked so very hard, not for gain, but because there is a God in heaven. For much of the time she was the only white woman. But she was never thinking she was white; she was simply the Matron of the hospital.

   Often a time to speak about people is after a death or when they have been discharged from their work. Today we are happy that we come together not at a death or at a discharge from work. But today we are meeting so that Sister Barbara can pass on the baton in the relay. We think about all that she has done, so that we can continue the work that she has done.

   I have heard it said that Sister Barbara, if she was a plane coming in to land, has overshot the runway. Many people have a retirement age, and at that age of 65 they come in to land. But Sister Barbara has been working on even past the age of 80 years, and so she has overshot the retirement airport! And this has been because of her passion for Murambinda Mission Hospital. Sometimes in a Board Meeting she would challenge us, saying, ‘This is the wrong direction to be taking. I am here to serve the poor, and this direction will not be doing that.’ She always wanted the best for the people of Buhera.

   Sister Barbara was comfortable in her role in the Hospital. She knew how to make things work well. I will never forget what happened when I was in training. I had finished my work on the Ward, and I rested my head on my arms at a table and went to sleep. I was wakened by Sister Barbara saying, ‘You don’t come to work to sleep. If you’re sleeping you should be in your room.’ So I got up and went away to my room to sleep. The other nurses there said, ‘No! No! You should get back to work!’ and I realised I had completely misunderstood what
Sister Barbara meant. But I can tell you, Sister Barbara, that I have never ever again slept when I am at my work.

Sister Barbara was always concerned for the staff. She knew them all. She related to all the staff.

In her own personal life she took care of her health. Every day she went walks. Quite apart from the walking she did every day through the wards and the corridors of the hospital, you would see her, when she was off duty, going out for a walk, keeping herself in good health. She was very strong minded about looking after her good health.

Sister Barbara had a very strong bond with Doctor Glenshaw. And when Dr Glenshaw died we wondered how she would manage. But she did manage after Doctor Glenshaw’s death.

And now, at this time, we know that we must pass on the gifts that Sister Barbara has given us. Everything she did was for the benefit of the poor.

We, as the Board, will do our very best to keep it all going.

2. Representing the Little Company of Mary – Sister Ellen

Sister Barbara has worked for all these years, first in South Africa, and then in Zimbabwe. Let me give you a brief history. Sister Barbara was born on August 20th 1932 - almost 81 years ago. She was born in Dublin in Ireland. She was number Four of the Ten children in the Armstrong family. In 1957 she enrolled in the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary. In 1965 she went as a Sister to South Africa in the Apartheid years. And she worked in accordance with the main charism of the LCM, to pray and care for the sick and the dying.

33 years ago, after many years in South Africa, she came to Zimbabwe. We are very happy, Sister Barbara, for what you did in your years here. And now we are sad that you are going away. But we gratefully thank the Ireland Sisters for welcoming you home. Yes. We would love to have her around with us here in Zimbabwe. But she deserves her rest. But we are sure that she will not be retiring. She will still be fulfilling the two great charisms of the LCM. The first charism is to pray for the sick and the dying. The second charism is to care for the sick and the dying. She will still be doing this, we know.

We know she will think of us all here. For at every meeting, if you wanted to see Sister Barbara come alive, just mention Murambinda. She would light up when talking about the work of the hospital at Murambinda. She has shone now for over thirty years, and the time has come for her to go away.
I was talking to some of our Sisters from Australia and to some Sisters from the United States. They were saying that this is the first work in Zimbabwe to be left to the black people. Are we equal to it? We must keep the same high standards for which Murambinda Mission Hospital has been so famous. And we thank you, Sister Barbara, for all you have taught us and all that you have done.

3. International Friends of Murambinda Mission Hospital – Mrs Mary Miller

All Protocols observed

Dear Friends, It is a pleasure and a privilege to be asked to speak at this great occasion on behalf of Friends of Murambinda UK - mainly doctors, nurses and students who have worked or studied at MMH.

These Friends, also SVMH in the Netherlands and the friends from Denmark who support CARC, send their best wishes to you today, and at our meetings we often share memories of Sr. Barbara - the high standard of nursing care on which she insisted, her legendary attention to detail, her close involvement with the lives of so many in the Hospital and in the District.

My husband John and I have had the privilege of spending a great deal of time here over the last 6 years and we have our own powerful memories, of Sister Barbara as the hostess of the Hospital, welcoming visitors with close concern for their comfort and ensuring that introductions are made across the Hospital and everything is done to build and maintain the close relationships of friendship that have helped this Hospital to flourish. It is our avowed intention that the friendship will continue into the future thanks to the firm foundations that have been laid and cemented over many years by Sister Barbara.

John and I will have an opportunity that the rest of you here will not have, in that when you are drying your eyes at Murambinda after Sr. Barbara leaves, we will be able to travel with her to UK where we will deliver her to the other Friends of Murambinda for a lap of honour, when former colleagues can salute in person all she has done for them and all that Murambinda Hospital has meant for them in their continuing lives as health practitioners.

Health is international, like Sister Barbara. It crosses all bounds of nationality, politics, race and culture and unites us all around the ambition of care for the sick and suffering that has characterised the work of LCM and especially of Sr. Barbara here at Murambinda.
Barbara, on behalf of all the international Friends of Murambinda I wish you well, I wish you every blessing on your retirement and I look forward to continuing our friendship when we are able to visit you in Dublin.

May God go with you.

4. Catholic Health Desk –

An official from the Catholic Health Desk made a speech in Shona, expressing love and respect for Sister Barbara, and gratitude for all that she and the hospital had done to bring hope to people who carry the Virus. He spoke only briefly, because he wanted to introduce a younger representative of the Health Desk’s interests. He had written a poem, which would be recited by one of his school students.

A girl aged no more than 9 years stepped forward and gave, in Shona, a solo recitation of the poem. This little girl is another of the children who attend CARC. She spoke with wonderful fluency, raising laughter among the listeners with some of her detailed descriptions of the life of a child in her circumstances. She gave a history of HIV/AIDS, demonstrating with widening movements of her arms how the Virus spread to people all over Zimbabwe, all over Africa, and all over the world. She spoke of the difficulties of being rejected by other children because of the stigma of the Virus. When the poem narrated the hopelessness of such a child’s situation, she sank to her knees and intoned a heart-felt prayer. Then she sprang to her feet and the poem climaxed in statements of hope. Her contribution to the ceremony, reciting the poem without a hesitation for more than six minutes, was loudly applauded.

5. District Administrator for Buhera District – Mr Madondo

Ladies and gentlemen, comrades and friends. This is no small function. For we speak of someone whose local service has been so special. We are here to say, ‘Bye Bye’ to a valued friend - to a friend in need, a friend indeed. The type of colleague we would all wish to have.

Thank you for your long service. After completing service a person should sit down and ask, ‘Have I done justice to what was expected of me?’ With this lady here there is no doubt. Of her commitment there has been no doubt. Taking care of the sick and the elderly. Taking care also of the District Administrator, when I was myself in the hospital. The number of times the Matron looked in, day and night, to see if I was comfortable!

No wonder the reputation of Murambinda Mission Hospital is known all over. ‘Oh Murambinda,’ people say. ‘Drugs that are in short supply elsewhere are available here. The care is of the highest standard.’

How do you go about it? The most important ingredient in an institution is the human content. And that is here in Murambinda. But even the best people cannot do their best without leadership. So much depends on the head. When you
go somewhere where the systems are upside down it does not work well. Here you worked together and brought results through other people's efforts.

I am head of a District, and I know how important leadership is. And you would find Sister Barbara everywhere, in every room.

I wanted to say more about our beautiful lady, but I was told, 'Only five minutes!' I am disappointed that the traditional leaders are not here, for they represent the beneficiaries of the care which the hospital gives. I am disappointed that they are not here to join hands to say, 'Bye Bye' to her with us.

6. Senior Hospital Staff – Sister Mudzingwa, Senior Nurse Tutor
   All Protocols observed.
   Let me tell you what kind of person Sister Barbara is. She is a servant. She is a leader. She has a powerful love to serve others. She delights in working for the good of others.
   She has been a neighbour, a Mother, and a friend. She taught us to work as a team, and to keep high standards of nursing care.
   Sister Barbara, we will always remember your words: “United we stand. Divided we fall.”

7. The Guest of Honour – Director of Nursing Services for Zimbabwe, Mrs Chasokela.
   Sister Barbara, I am so glad to be here today. I was making a visit to Matabeleland and thought I would not manage to be here. But I completed my four days of work there in three days, and so I am here.
   This is such an important occasion that I knew I must wear my Sunday best! Often to be the last speaker on a day like this is very difficult, because everyone has already said what you want to say. But it is not difficult today because there is so much to say.
   You have been part and parcel of the hospital and its nursing services but also in the education and training of nurses. You have also been part and parcel of so much development - the coming of electricity, the great improvement of the roads, and you have seen a reduction of overcrowding in Wards.
   You have worked tirelessly and so the area round the hospital is now a much better place to live...
   You gave leadership to the sense of being a 'Nursing Profession'. You have enabled many nurses to improve themselves and their skills by further training.
Your outstanding leadership qualities have contributed to the historic development of the hospital.

We remember that for a time during the Liberation War the hospital was closed. That was how it was when you first came. But in just a short time after being re-opened the hospital became excellent.

I am glad to have been a friend of Sister Barbara from the days when she worked hand in hand with Doctor Glenshaw. I also want to acknowledge the outstanding personality of Sister Barbara. She knows everyone, and she remembers names. In the hospital she was everywhere, covering kilometres of distance every day. And by taking such care of herself she was able to do everything.

She was a peg that fitted in every hole, round, square, or oblong. She excelled in clinical management, and had competence across the range of hospital practice. Sister Barbara, you have worked as a team leader, and as a unifier – and your love for children is well known.

To young nurses here today, ask yourselves what will be said when you take your leave. Wouldn’t it be nice to have such things as this said of you then?

My own aunt was a nurse. When she died they said nice things about her at the funeral. But talking with people afterwards it seems that she was a horrible nurse. She spent her time knitting, and had only harsh words for the patients. But Sister Barbara has had such a commitment to the nursing profession. Many of us have taken strong vibes from you, Sister Barbara, and we will do our best to emulate you. Your interaction with the profession has been very valuable.

Now let me, on behalf of all of us – Buhera, Manicaland, the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, and the Nursing Directorate, bid Sister Barbara a very sad, but happy, farewell, and wish you a long and healthy retirement. After working for so long you’d expect to see a crippled Sister. But I don’t see anything like that!

Pray for us. And for Murambinda. And for the Nursing Profession.

I want to thank your family for letting you be so long away from home. I want to thank the Roman Catholic Church for bringing you here to serve Zimbabwe so committedly with all your might and power.

Now I want to say to the LCM Sisters, ‘Don’t Worry!’ All of us are here to support you. The entire Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, and the Nursing Directorate, do not want you to fail! Zimbabwe does not fail! The offices of all our Department are yours! We all keep open doors!
Sister Barbara. You are a true nursing hero, a true Star of Nursing!

Response from Sister Barbara

What can I say in response to all these kind words? I can just say, Thank You.

You know that all the staff of the Hospital have worked so closely together for all these years. The Sisters in Charge were appointed in the early 1990s, and we all worked at things together. And the Nurse Training School has been such an important part of the hospital’s work.

We’re all One, no matter how junior or how senior we are. And we have meetings to praise and thank people, and other meetings when there are things we need to improve on.

I know that the time has come for me to go. I’m in my 80s, and it’s time for me to go when I can still walk on to the plane myself!

But you know, the hospital’s work and its effectiveness is not only the Matron. It’s the Administrator and everyone else in the staff. The students have learned from us all in their time in the hospital - for every moment in the hospital is important to us.

My 33 years here have been a joy to me. And I see progress in so many things. These words of thanks to me - they are not just to me: for I could not have done anything by myself. It has been all of you, too. All of us. Thank you.

A Celebration Lunch

The speeches now all delivered, Sister Mudzingwa led forward a small child, dressed in a miniature nurses’ uniform, on her head the blue veil of the LCM Sisters. This tiny nurse presented a wrapped parcel to the Guest of Honour, Mrs Chasokela. She then brought three parcels to Sister Barbara, farewell gifts from the Hospital staff: a crucifix, an emblem of The Sacred Heart, and a new skirt.

As a final event, a beautiful big cake was brought in, with white and blue icing, decorated with a picture of Sister Barbara at her office desk. After a prayer from Father Tendai, Sister Barbara and Mrs Chasokela cut the cake with a knife decorated with a red ribbon.

With all these formal ceremonies completed the dignitaries and the other guests moved away from the tented area of seating, to enjoy a delicious Murambinda lunch served at tables set out in the classroom of the Nurse Training School.