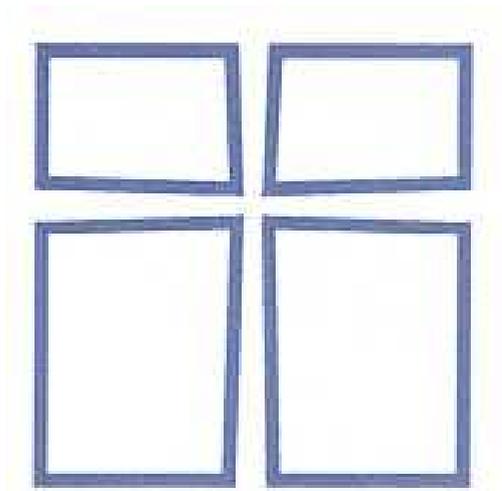


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# *Theodosia*

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Quarterly  
of the Sisters of Mercy  
of the Holy Cross  
Institute Ingenbohl  
CH-6440 Brunnen

Editorial Team:

Sister Christiane Jungo  
Sister Edelgund Kuhn  
Sister Anna Affolter  
Sister Elsit J. Ampattu  
Sister Dorothee Halbach

English version:

Sr. Roseline Kujur, India

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zeige Herz  
für Opfer von  
Menschenhandel

Our logo for anti-human trafficking, designed by Sr. Gielia Degonda, Ingenbohl

## Editorial

In the first chapter of the Bible we read: "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This statement is probably one of the most radical for the dignity and rights of every human being. If every person is God's image, there can't be class and rank distinction in life context. Every person is endowed with personality and dignity, and therefore qualified and entitled to freedom. But reality contradicts this statement of the Bible: human trafficking, discrimination, oppression and enslavement are a few key expressions that describe constrains, that hinder people's common, free life.

At the General Chapter 2008, delegates learned in a striking way how violence against women and girls is one of the most common human rights violations today. The concern at that time led to the decision that we want to strengthen ourselves as a global community against women trafficking. The mode of implementation of this resolution was entrusted to an international working group. Since then the "Theodosia" has reported in several articles about its work. In September 2017, a conference on this topic took place in Motherhouse in order to define its goals and positioning it for the future.

Sr. Anna Affolter, the General Councillor and head of the Working Group has allowed us to participate in these rich days organized under the title, "Stand for human dignity" - Conference for representatives of anti-human trafficking.

With her years of experience Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann enriched the deliberations of the representatives. The aid organization SOLWODI (SOLidarity with WOMen in Distress), founded by her in 1985 is internationally known. The "Theodosia" brings the written presentation entitled "Solidarity with Women in Need", as the oral presentation in its liveliness unfortunately cannot be reproduced.

The Feast of St. Francis in 2017 was a historic occasion for the sisters of the Province of Italy, namely the "Transfer of the Provincial Leadership of Italy to the General Leadership." The various contributions are prefaced with: "Statement of the General Leadership", summarized by Sr. Anna Affolter, the General Councillor; "From the Ceremony on 4<sup>th</sup> October in Besozzo", selected by Sr. Dorothee Halbach, the General Councillor; "Journey-Experiences" by Sr. Grazia Vittigni, the former Assistant; and "Memories of the Handing Over " by Sr. Elfriede Alber and Sr. Clara Palfrader, Province Italy.

On 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2017, Sr. Regina Lins, who had been the General Councillor and the General Assistant from 1984 -2008, died unexpectedly in Mengkofen D (Germany). We pay tribute to her with the obituary of her province Europa Mitte, and personal memories of Sr. Helene Leitner, a companion of hers from the Generalate. "Sister Regina Lins +".

Just two months later, another former General Councillor died. "Sister Monica Teresa Solcà +". The obituary she wrote ends with gratitude to the Motherprovince. Monica Teresa is also remembered with admiration by Sr. Louise-Henri, the former Superior General.

The year 2017 brought profound changes for 18 sisters of the Mengkofen nursing ward. They were shifted to the newly built "St. Elisabeth" nursing convent in Gemünden. Farewells and new beginnings in old age! From various events we read about it in "Big Move in Bavaria" by Sr. Petra Car.

Hardly any other province has such a variable history until it became its own province, like Slovakia. But now the sisters look back with joy and gratitude on the "90 Years, the Province Slovakia". Terézia Benedikta Majer áková tells us about the development of the province and the jubilee celebrations.

As members of an international community, it is especially important for young sisters to get to know each other across province borders. So in August 2017, the "Juniors Sisters' Get-together" took place in the Czech Republic. Sr. Kristina Lovrekovi from the Province Croatia shares with us experiences and memories of these days.

At regular intervals, a "Get-together with Former Fellow Sisters" takes place in the Motherprovince. Sr. Christiane Jungo summarizes how it happened and what makes such a day a real meeting day. Felicita / Verena Profos tells us why 7<sup>th</sup> October in Ingenbohl touched her.

"The Pilgrimage Retreat in Brazil" brought Sr. Geralda Kunz from the Vicariate Brazil, new faith and life experiences. At the same time, we feel how vibrant hospitality and religious practice look like in basic communities.

In the "Information from the General Leadership" we learn about the appointments of the Provincial Leadership in the Province Czech Republic and the forthcoming Visitation in the Vicariate Uganda in February.

Sr. Christiane Jungo

## **"Stand for Human Dignity"** **Conference for Representatives of Anti-Human Trafficking** **18<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017 in Ingenbohl**

Sr. Anna Affolter, Generalate Ingenbohl, Head of the Working Group against Human Trafficking

Under the motto "Stand for human dignity", the working group planned a conference for the representatives of anti-human trafficking in the provinces and vicariates. This fulfilled a long-awaited wish of the working group and several representatives.

The commitment to the poor and disadvantaged, including women, has always been part of our

charism. When searching for contemporary answers to the burning issues of today, the General Chapter 2008 focused on women whose lives and dignity are deeply hurt and destroyed. Until the conference in 2017, there has been an increased



Sr. Anna Affolter (right), and Mrs. Emerich-Scholliers (left)

determination in our congregation to fight against human trafficking, and to stand for human dignity.

So the time for a conference of the representatives became apparent. The sisters from different provinces and vicariates, the working group and the General Leadership took part in this conference. There were 29 participants from eleven different countries of four continents. Mrs. Emerich-Scholliers from Constance accompanied all through the conference in a sensitive, varied and competent manner.

### **Starting: Game in the convent church**

The public enactment, "When women become commodities" led to the beginning of the theme. An affected woman, who has gone through the shadows of life on her own path, expressed her experiences in the form of dance. In the meantime, Kathrin Karban-Völkl read insightful, poetically explanatory text that she wrote on the background of the dancer's life. The words full of life and the dance full of expression touched us deeply.

### **Get to know each other and the situations in countries and continents**

To get into the conference work, the facilitator helped us with different exercises to become more familiar with each other and to get some background information from each other.

In order to create a common ground on the one hand and to embed the topic in various cultural contexts of our congregation on the other, the human trafficking of a country was presented from Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Eastern Europe and Western Europe as examples. The information reflected a sad and scandalous reality: the profit through human trafficking worldwide is much higher than the drug and arms trade.

- In the Czech Republic, many young women fall for the "Lover Boy" method: Human traffickers emotionally apprehend young women and entice them with false



Participants of the conference

- promises abroad to force them into prostitution.

  - In India, 90% of human trafficking takes place nationally. Of the victims are: 54% women; 17% 13 -18 years old girls; 24% children (4 -12 years old); 3% boys aged 13 -18; 2% men.
  - The EU estimates that 800,000 people in Europe fall victim to slavery every year. Germany and Austria are popular with pimps as destination and transit country.
  - In north-eastern Uganda, women and children under the age of 18 are sold on livestock markets by agents and forced into household slavery, sexual exploitation and street begging.
- In Brazil there are 241 human trafficking routes for the purpose of sexual exploitation; 131 of them are international, the rest national. Pornography is unrestrained and removal of organs is common.
- We heard from USA that most of the clients are wealthy, prosperous men, the human traffickers and pimps are greedy and unscrupulous; victims of human trafficking come from poor families, from middle class and rich families.

## Answers of our Congregation

In a "market of opportunities", the representatives introduced their commitment against human trafficking. We also learned about many impressive commitments of the provinces and vicariates.

So we heard about

- the street work and work with victims in nightclubs in Prague,
- the Centre for Anti Human Trafficking in Manjhatoli / India,
- the Safe Shelter Rose Home in USA,
- awareness programs in parishes, communities and schools in different countries, information activities for seminarians in Croatia,
- the common house in Delhi, which the four Indian provinces have as a centre for Anti Human Trafficking opened in September of this year
- rescuing young women and children in India,
- collaboration with other organizations, etc.

All these responses of our congregation to the urgent problem of human trafficking touched the participants,

motivated them and gave suggestions.

## Day with Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann

It was a joy for Sr. Lea Ackermann, Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa, to speak to us one day and work with us. In a lively way, she gave us an insight into her life and religious path and how she was confronted with encounters with the misery of forced prostitutes during her mission in Africa. In 1985, she founded the international work SOLWODI to help women get out of prostitution's misery, for example, Germany's SOLWODI today has 18 counselling centres where sisters from different communities work. 85 sisters now work with 2300 women from 104 countries.

Sr. Lea expressed her gratitude that two of our sisters work together with SOLWODI, in a safe home in Passau and in the newly founded association SOLWODI, Hungary.

From her store of knowledge and experience and the presentation of various projects of SOLWODI - such as help for the daughters of prostitutes or a football project - we were able to gain impulses and ideas for our own work.

Sr. Lea sees the challenge for the next few years in the fact that a society gets used to dealing with people that human trafficking is not detected because with it a lot of money comes into circulation, that men are increasingly addicted to sex and that prostitution brings high costs to taxpayers due to many illnesses in men and women and early incapacity to work. She encouraged, as religious to be a thorn in the flesh of society.

Sr. Lea gifted and motivated us through her lively nature and her prophetic commitment to the dignity of women in particular.

**Program to deepen and widen the theme**



Sr. Tresa Paul, North-East, India

To deepen and widen our knowledge, we went on a trip to a house for women in distress, run by the sisters of the Mother Province. The sisters of the community render remarkable service. They try to give a temporary home than just offering a protective shelter.

To familiarize ourselves with other jobs in Basel, the sisters and the team of the house interviewed, focused on the experiences of those affected by women trafficking, and prepared for us as videos. The encounters with the nurses and staff as well as the interviews with the other institutions showed that it required different capabilities and reference points in order to get in contact with women in need.



Sr. Celine Goessl, USA

## **Presentation by Sr. Tresa Paul - A Prophetic Answer to the Mission of Justice**

In her powerful presentation, our Sr. Tresa Paul presented her path and her motivation to become a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India. She gave us insight into the legal situation of women in India, about long paths through the institutions, the laws of India regarding women and human trafficking that are not implemented, and how she experiences women's struggle in India as a source of inspiration.

### **Two films**

A voluntary film offer on two evenings with the films "Trafficker, Smuggler and the Pope"; a report on human trafficking in India, "Girls in Bondage"; and a report on the Nigerian human trafficking, "Human Commodity".

### **Closing the day**

At the end of the day we were invited once again to look back the past day in the present in the light of God and to experience what God wants to show me of my day: How was the day? What

particularly touched me, made me happy, annoyed...? Where did I experience God's work today? What has become important to me? What am I especially thankful to God this evening? What does God expect from me?

### **Evaluation of the two projects**

An important part of the conference was the evaluation of our two projects of the Memorial Day, 25 November and the prayer network with the newsletter.

When talking about the prayer network, it became clear that the prayer network with the newsletter is an important element of standing for anti-human trafficking and human dignity, in which many sisters can participate and make solidarity possible. The newsletter increases awareness, is concrete, informs about engagements of sisters, stimulates and motivates.

In previous years the 25<sup>th</sup> of November has proven itself as a common Memorial Day at Congregational level. The representatives are clearly in favour of continuing it. It promotes awareness of the topic; it is actual

and connects the provinces and vicariates.

The participants gave various suggestions for improvement for both projects.

### **Final remark and conclusion**

From the closing words of Sr. Marija: *"At the beginning of the day in the past week, an important word from Psalm 8 has been projected on the wall: "What is man?" During the presentations and the talks, in the exchange and in the encounters, this word has always been in my mind as a question: "What / who is man?" It was very disheartening for us to learn how the dignity of many people, especially women, is cruelly trampled on by other people. However, in these days of the conference, we were also able to experience how you, dear sisters, as representatives, stand for the dignity of women in order to rehabilitate and strengthen them and empower women for a life in freedom. Your commitment is so varied and adapted to the respective social circumstances. It is my great hope that each one of you, encouraged and*

*strengthened, will return to your mission after this conference. It seems to me that the bond between each other and the knowledge of each other were strengthened. I sincerely thank every participant who contributed in it. ..."*

As a symbolic gift, at the end of the concluding ceremony, all received a burning candle from the hand of Sr. Marija Brizar. This was made in the Czech Republic by victims of modern slavery. Through the candles in our hands, we sent out vibrations of compassion and solidarity to all victims of human trafficking in the wider world and handed them over to God's protection.



Sr. Marija Brizar, Superior General

## **My conclusion**

The conference marks a milestone in the history of our congregation. During the week, the image of a congregation that commits itself for anti-human trafficking and stands for human dignity became apparent to my mind. It does not happen haphazardly, here and there. No, it happens in the congregation and as congregation. We can be

proud of that and continue to build on it. Every contribution to "Stand for human dignity" is important and essential, be it in the awareness programme, be it in active missions, be it in observing the Memorial Day, be it in prayer, be it...

### **1 Note:**

The presentation by Sr. Tresa Paul will be published in the next Theodosia. We will also prepare further contributions from the conference.

## Solidarity with Women in Need

Presentation by Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann at the Conference for the representatives of Anti-Human Trafficking in Ingenbohl

Sr. Lea Ackermann prepared a presentation for the conference in advance, from which various aspects were discussed, deepened and expanded. We have included it in this Theodosia to give everyone an insight.

Sr. Lea Ackermann, born in 1937 and a member of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa ("White Sisters"), was affected by the encounters with the misery of the forced prostitutes during her assignment in Africa. In 1985, she founded the aid organization SOLWODI (**SOL**idarity with **WO**men in **D**istress / solidarity with women in need) to help women to get out of misery-stricken prostitution. Her aid organization has spread worldwide.



Sr. Dr. Lea Ackermann

### Self-introduction and short history

In 1979, I flew to the Philippines and visited the convent of the Carmelites in Infanta. At the

entrance, I saw a tree trunk with the words inscribed "dedicated to the dreams of the Father". When I asked the meaning of these words, one of the sisters told me, "God loves us as parents love their children. And as parents have dreams for their children, so does God have dreams for each and every one of us. As Carmelites, we are so close to God. Through our life and prayers, we want to do everything we can to make the Father's dreams come true."

For me, this encounter is my second conversion. I too wanted to do everything to make God's dreams come true for his children. The time came in 1985 with my transfer to Mombasa / Kenya that year.



Logo SOLWODI

### SOLWODI

I saw there, women and children living in utter poverty. Many of them were stranded in prostitution because they saw no other way

out of their misery. I met them to listen to their life stories and search for ways out of their misery together. That was the beginning of SOLWODI. Now we have 34 counselling centres in Kenya, a vocational training centre and other projects to improve the living conditions of women and children.

Since 1987, Germany also has SOLWODI. First of all, we helped women who were lured by sex tourists, or trafficked through the international marriage market to Germany and got into trouble. It has changed in the course of time. We not only support migrants who complain of violence in a bi-national marriage or forced marriage, but also women who came to Germany through human trafficking. In these cases, it is usually not the victims themselves who contact us, but the police officers who are responsible for them. The women place their trust in us with the request for accommodation and care for everyday concerns.

### **Human Trafficking / Women Trafficking**

In 2001, the UN estimated that 4 million women and children were trafficked worldwide. According to the German Bishops' Conference, there were in the autumn of 2015 already more than 35 million

worldwide, i.e. nine times more victims. From our experience we know that the trend is on the increase.

In 2014, police detected 583 victims of human trafficking in Germany; the estimated numbers are higher and according to experts inestimable. Statistics recorded 95% of the cases were victims of sexual exploitation.

In recent years, the sex market has become the most lucrative and risk-free business. The introduction of the Prostitution Act in 2002 created a liberal climate for brothel owners and opened the floodgates for human trafficking. This law did not help Germany to improve the situation of the people in prostitution, but made the country degenerate into the brothel of Europe. Sex tourists now come to Germany by buses from abroad, attracted by flat rate offers (flat tariff) of brothels and gangbang parties.

Other countries follow the Swedish model and prohibit sex buying, but not Germany. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2017, a new law is in force, the so-called Prostitute Protection Act. It's a bureaucratic monster that hardly anyone knows how to implement. Some things cannot be controlled at all, such as the prescribed use of condoms;

street prostitution is not recorded at all. Women continue to remain victims. Mentally they are severely damaged by prostitution and are traumatized to the same extent as war victims.

Since the opening of the border to the East, thousands of women and children from Eastern Europe are lured and devalued into "commodities" in this sex market. Border roads to the Czech Republic are very popular with sex customers. Even children and babies are offered in Eastern Europe.

Especially in countries, where women and children are struggling for survival, they become prey for pimps or fall into false promises of criminal smugglers, who promise them a seemingly better life abroad. They are brought by bus, train and plane to Europe, Asia, the Middle East or North America and they land there with incredibly brutal violence into prostitution. In the worst cases, they lose their lives as well as personal freedom. Women trafficking, which is a form of modern slave trade, and violence against women and children, is condemned by the UNO. The European Parliament passed a resolution in 2014 stating that prostitution violates human dignity and gender equality.



Violence against women - photo sunny 7

## Backgrounds

Reasons leading to this form of sexual exploitation are:

- Economic unilateralism to the detriment of the vast majority of the population and to the benefit of a few
- Decline of the economic and social status of women in society

- The permissive, partially cooperative way that governments act against corrupt officials, or hardly address the issue of women and children trafficking
- The high profits that results from this trade
- Lack of cooperation between the countries of origin of the victims and the host countries.

Despite all the horror about this modern slave trade, it is not consistently tackled for several reasons:

Trafficked women and children are legally and economically underprivileged. They migrate to improve their economically miserable situation. However, restrictive aliens' legislation in most countries turns them into illegal, marginalized people who have no rights at all.

Demand is determined by customers who satisfy their sexual desires and cravings by buying women and children. So a very big part of society is interested in keeping this topic a taboo.

Women and children trafficking point to the unfair distribution of goods and the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Unjust economic structures are another reason to ignore the crime of human trafficking.

### **Example Natasha**

The example of Natasha is intended to show how young women become victims of human trafficking:

Before leaving for Germany, Natascha with her daughter lived for a year with her parents in a small Ukrainian town, separated from her husband. As a teacher, Natasha had no income for months. Therefore, she decided to go to Germany despite the lack of language skills. With the help of an acquaintance, she organized the journey. She came here looking for work as waitress in a resort area during the summer season, but in fact she was forced into prostitution.

Natasha reported on ten stations which she could not locate. If she refused, she was raped and beaten by the pimps. When her body was covered with bruises, she was chained to the heater. She had to stay there for a few days until the bruises disappeared. They drugged her. Natasha became pregnant by a suitor without knowing who the father is. After the pregnancy became known, the pimps avoided beatings in the abdominal area because they wanted to sell the newborn to organ traders.

Natasha should also be resold, maybe to Turkey or Berlin. After a year, Natasha finally managed to escape with the help of a suitor.

Her helper forwarded her to a detective agency in Rhineland, and the investigators made contact with SOLWODI. Natasha was brought to a safe home of the SOLWODI. Natasha attended an intensive language course until shortly before birth of her baby. She decided to give a testimony and received witness protection by the BKA (Federal Criminal Police Office). However, she had a great fear for her older daughter Anna, who was in her hometown and was later brought to Germany with the help of witness protection.

Natasha is just one of the women who came to us in the past 30 years. In 2016 alone, 2,295 women from 104 countries contacted the SOLWODI - Counselling Centres in Germany.

### **Advisory service SOLWODI**

It is frequently stated that women trafficking from Eastern Europe accounts for up to 80% of total trafficking in Germany. In 2016,

763 women from Central and Eastern Europe had contacted us. This corresponds to about a third of the inquiries last year. Among the Central and Eastern Europeans, the Romanians were the most frequently represented with 240 initial inquiries.

Through our counselling and support work, we try to help women to recognize their situation, to strengthen their will to survive, to support their self-esteem and to develop future perspectives together with them.

If these women are victims of human trafficking and want to testify in court, we also support them in this. We search for shelters, provide psychological care and engage lawyers, so that the women can also act as co-plaintiffs. We have realized that it is very important for a successful process that the victim is present and able to testify.

### **Processes**

In a study conducted by the Federal Ministry for families, senior citizens, women and youth in 1991, which I conducted together with the social scientist



Poster from USA province

Dagmar Heine-Wiedemann, we were able to prove that without the testimony of those affected, the perpetrators of human trafficking

are hardly condemned. We assisted with 33 criminal human trafficking cases. Of these, only 15 were prosecuted; only five of these indictments were taken to court for trial and only one offender was convicted - and even that one was freed on probation.

One of the main reasons for this unsatisfactory outcome was and is the fact that women, who after being picked up by the police and give their testimony there, are expelled to their home countries in most cases. In the vast majority of cases, this is how legal claims of women who have often experienced violence, end up.

A study by the German National Contact Point for the European Migration Network in 2013 concluded that residence permits for identified victims of human trafficking have slightly increased according to § 25, para.4a of the Residence Act for the period of the court proceedings and thereafter. The statistics also show that the majority of victims are female and between 18 and 35 years of age. The main countries of origin outside the EU are Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and India.

Back to Natasha: She was unaware that she had no legal residence and was carrying fake

papers. She did not speak German and did not dare ask anyone for help. She was suspicious of the police for what she had been told. In addition, she was constantly under supervision.

When the police came across Natasha, it was a lucky coincidence that she had approached SOLWODI. Natasha had received a corresponding proposal from the police. Although she was very frightened and suspicious, she agreed that we would put her in safe home. Gradually she began to trust and became more open to us. She responded happily when we offered her the opportunity to attend an Intensive German Course. By normalizing her life, attending school, by many conversations and new tasks, she became a happy woman that she certainly was once before.

The lawyer was able to establish a good contact with her. It took almost two years until the process was over. Natasha was exemplary. She made clear statements in court and was not deterred by the very cunning defence lawyer. The main

perpetrator was sentenced to ten years, the trafficker to six years imprisonment.

Natasha passed her German course with a good result. Since she had endangered herself by her testimony in her home country too, she could stay even longer in Germany.

Not often do we have as good results as with Natasha. The time during the trials, the testimonies in the presence of the defendants, in front of whom the witness is usually afraid; the outrageous questions of the defence, which tries everything in order to devalue a woman as unbelievable; reactions of judges and prosecutors etc., do not make it easy for women in court to go through with all the violence that had been done to them.

Since our foundation, we have accompanied many victim witnesses to trials and found that maximum penalties are rare as in the case of Natasha. Usually the perpetrators receive a sentence of up to 3 ½ years, or even suspended sentences.

The women recognize a sense of foreboding in giving testimony and endangering themselves. They must be protected beyond the sentencing period, and they must either learn or work while waiting for the trial date.

Many of our clients are severely traumatized. However, time and money are lacking for the required therapy. Women and children trafficking is the crime of our day that we must confront together.

### **Requirements**

For the above reasons we call upon:

1. International and European Cooperation for anti-women and children trafficking and a unified legislation that transcends rules across borders. It is unacceptable for countries such as Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Northern Ireland, France and Ireland to penalize the buying of sex in a unified Europe, and Germany still has a very liberal climate regarding prostitution.
2. The creation of a victim protection program, with a corresponding right of residence for victims in the European countries and the guarantee of a work permit beyond the existing paragraphs of the German Residence Act, which are often only directory statutes and are used sparingly in practice.
3. The guarantee to provide subsistence allowance, rent and financing of the medical treatment of the victims by public money, in order to avoid corresponding advance payments, or even payments by NGOs (non-governmental organizations).
4. Confiscation of the assets of the perpetrators and their use in favour of victim women.

## **Transfer of the Provincial Leadership of Italy to the General Leadership**

Four contributions from different sisters

The transfer of the Provincial Leadership of Italy to the General Leadership took several steps forward. The following contributions show different aspects and dimensions of the change process.

### **Statement of the General Leadership**

In an intensive and professional process, the Italian province spent the past three years studying its future and exploring ways of managing it. In the course of the process it became apparent that the direct governance by the General Leadership could be a wise path forward for the Italian province. With the help of experts, a so-called "model of delegated authority" was developed. This was approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome.

The Model of delegated-authority provides for two officials to be appointed instead of the Provincial Administration: delegate of the Superior General, or administrator of the province, and a legal representative.

The delegate has all the powers required by the Constitutions for a Provincial Superior. For all decisions that normally require the approval of the Provincial Council, the delegate needs the approval of the General Leadership. The delegate should be a General Councillor.

The delegate of the Superior General is aided by the legal representative. This representative liaises the province with the civil authorities and the Italian state. She must be a member of the Congregation and an Italian citizen. She needs the written consent and approval of the delegate for her actions.

The General Leadership has appointed the following sisters for the two new posts:

- Sr. Lucila Zovak, the General Councillor, as delegate of the Superior General for the Italian province, with a term of three years
- Sr. Grazia Vittigni, former Provincial Assistant, as the legal representative with a term of one year

Sr. Hildegard Burger has worked as Provincial Superior along with



Sisters of General Team and previous Provincial Team, front row 3<sup>rd</sup> from left Sr. Grazia, back row extreme right Sr. Lucila

her Councillors with much dedication, perseverance and love for the province in the process of discerning the future for the province. This process has required a lot of strength, openness for new things and trust. We sincerely thank Sr. Hildegard and her team for their dedication and willingness to lead the province into the future with a new leadership model. We wish them much light and God's blessing on their journey. We also thank all the sisters in the province Italy who support and

accompany on this new path. May God's presence strengthen them!

We sincerely thank Sr. Lucila and Sr. Grazia for their willingness to take on the new task for the benefit of the province Italy. We wish them tremendous trust and God's blessing for the new path.

On 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, at the solemn Eucharistic Celebration, the Provincial Leadership of Italy was transferred to the General Leadership.

## From the Ceremony on 4<sup>th</sup> October in Besozzo

Selected by Sr. Dorothee Halbach, General Councillor, Ingenbohl

In an address at the Eucharistic Celebration, Sr. Marija Brizar, our Superior General expressed her thanks to the sisters of the province and all those involved in the process of transition. In felicitous words, she clarified and explained this turning point in the history of the Italian province. Some extracts from this address:

"The Spanish writer Antonio Machado writes in one of his poems: 'Travellers, there are no paths, paths are made by walking.'

When the new Provincial Leadership of the province Italy was commissioned by the General Leadership in 2008 to prepare for the future of the province, nobody knew how the way would look like, and where it would exactly lead to. The Provincial Leadership seriously took the order and moved forward step by step. That's how the nine-year journey brought us to this point. This path continues - also step by step - in a new way.

The paths are made by walking. This walking can take courage, openness, daring, seeking and finding help and trust in God's guidance.

On the way, the Provincial Leadership received competent, purposeful and loyal support from Fr. Giacomo Costa SJ. In recent years, they have been able to count on professional, competent and benevolent advice from experts in various fields of expertise in the areas of finance and economics, in construction, in civil and canon law.

The province Italy is the first province of our Congregation, which since 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 is administered according to the model of delegated mandate.

The paths are made by walking. I wish all the sisters of the province and the sisters appointed as delegate and legal representative that they walk together step by step, thus paving the way for the future.

I wish the sisters of the outgoing Provincial Leadership much light on their future personal journey. On this new path, Sr. Lucila and Sr. Grazia will accompany you and also the light of the candles that I would like to present to each one of you.

Let the word of our Founder, Fr. Theodosius accompany us all: 'Have trust, God leads you.' "

## Journey - Experiences

Sr. Grazia Vittigni, former Assistant, Besozzo, Province Italy

"We will do that after 4<sup>th</sup> October ..." "We will not make it until 4<sup>th</sup> October..." "It should be settled before 4<sup>th</sup> October ..." These and similar sentences appeared so often in our daily conversations in Besozzo in recent months and weeks that a co-worker once said, "Oh, God, this 4<sup>th</sup> October seems like before Christ and after Christ ...". It was a joke, but this date was and is indeed an important turning point in the history our Province and the entire Congregation. On this day, we have conducted the handing over of the Provincial Leadership of Italy to the General Leadership, the first Province of our Congregation to have such a status.

Other sisters still talk about organizing the day, which also required a lot of energy and strength. All that I have to say, from my side and from the side of the whole Provincial Leadership is a sincere thanks to all who have in some way shown their love and care: Sr. Marija, the sisters of the General Leadership and the sisters of the Motherprovince, who participated in the ceremony; the Provincial Superiors and Provincial Assistants of West

Europe, who through their e-mails have expressed their prayerful and sisterly support.

It was particularly important for me that everyone was present that day who in any way contributed to initiating this process regarding the future of the province, carrying through and achieving a good result: all the sisters of the province, including a group of sisters from South Tyrol, representing all communities, the General Leadership, who together with us dared to take this step with great courage, our consultants, who have been loyal and competent in the years, Fr. Giacomo Costa S.J., who accompanied us with great patience, wisdom, attentiveness and discretion, Mr. Zardus, our Manager, our collaborators, Prof. Colosio and the Principal, who will lead our school Rosetum into the future, friends of the group and families living with us.

It was especially significant to me that we all celebrated the Mass together because this day is first and foremost a gift from God who has guided us step by step in the past few years. Of course we also experienced emotions.... and how!



Symbols at Holy Mass

As Sr. Marija has so well expressed in her letter to the sisters, this process has demanded much strength, patience, openness to the new and unknown, trust, commitment from us. I am very tired, but at the same time very grateful that we decided to take this step instead of letting circumstances decide for us in an indeterminate way. For me, as the youngest sister of the province, after nine years as Assistant, this decision is a great relief, a source of security and confidence because the General Leadership supports us. We can count on them; we are part of a big Congregation!

Now the way to reinvent is completely new. "Traveller, there are no paths. Paths are made by walking." Sr. Marija repeatedly said this sentence in her address. It's true: Paths are made by walking. We ourselves have experienced it several times and are experiencing. These words sounded to me as an invitation to continue courageously and with confidence. They are like an echo of the words that our Pope Francis frequently reminds us, "Let's go ahead, and stay on the road! Let us not despair of our limitations. What is promised to us is still more."

## Memories of the Handing Over

Sr. Elfriede Alber and Sr. Cara Palfrader, Province Italy

"Have trust and God leads you!" This encouragement from Fr. Theodosius Florentini will sustain the sisters of the Province Italy to follow a new path. From the Feast of St. Francis 2017, it has a new canonical form. It was a happy and reflective day. Most of the sisters as well as the closest associates of our province have experienced it. Twelve sisters from our three communities in South Tyrol and Mrs. Monika, the coordinator, travelled 360 kilometres by bus to Besozzo at 5:00 a.m.

What a surprise, the sight of the newly built and the renovated house! What a joy the many encounters with sisters of the General and Provincial Leadership and many fellow sisters, many of whom we had not seen for a long time.

After the happy reunion, we gathered in the conference hall. Sr. Hildegard, our Provincial Superior, and her Assistant, Sr. Grazia, took us back in words and pictures over the past nine years. During this time, the Provincial Leadership was supported by competent professionals, to discuss about future opportunities for our works and buildings. Many changes were necessary and

numerous "flexibility exercises" were requested by the sisters: The provincial house was rebuilt. That means several sisters temporarily moved to other communities and came back as soon as part of the house was converted into a well-equipped nursing ward. Several other sisters from foreign branches also found a new home in the Provincial House, as numerous smaller and larger communities of sisters were closed during these years, and a few new ones opened. For instance: On our land and in vacant buildings, an attempt to collaborate with family communities is in progress.

Particularly since the Provincial Chapter 2013, the future of the Provincial Leadership was considered from all angles. In the presentation we were able to recall individual stages step by step and thank the Lord for that. Many pictures of sisters, who were called to the eternal home during this time, were impressive. May the Lord grant them eternal bliss!

On the Feast of St. Francis, the Provincial Superior, Sr. Hildegard Burger, and her Council resigned from the Provincial Leadership, and the General Leadership



Handing out the symbolic sandals; in front Sr. Lucila, to her right Sr. Hindegard

took over with Sr. Lucila Zovak, as Delegate General Councillor and Sr. Grazia Vittigni, the former Assistant as representative of the Province before the Civil Authorities.

Reasons for this solution are the increasing age of the members of the province and the lack of sisters. The Italian province still has around 100 sisters, six sisters under the age of 70 in 2017.

The grateful remembrance of the past and the confidence in the

future were continued with a subsequent, common Eucharistic Celebration. Thanks for the many newsletters that the Provincial Leadership has sent to the communities over the last few years, we thanked them for the past nine years of holding office, and the way with its ups and downs, joys and sorrows and the way paved for the future.

"Have trust, and God leads you," said the Superior General several times. Truly a brave step, also a great gift for our province, though

an extra task for Sr. Lucila and Sr. Grazia. May God give his Spirit, which finds ways and opens doors!

Have trust, dear Sr. Lucila! Have trust also you, dear Sr. Grazia! Heartfelt thanks for the efforts and commitment until now. Much strength and good wishes for the future!

Our special thanks also to Sr. Hildegard Burger, Sr. Lucia Cecchinato and Sr. M. Grazia Ricci, and we wholeheartedly wish them God's blessing and his protective care.

In my heart, I cannot hide some nostalgia and some burning questions: Dear God, why did this have to happen? Where are you taking us? What are you doing with our poverty, with our wealth? I ask myself: How did you live and pass on the gift of charisma given

to you? Lord, say to me and each one of us, "Have trust, I lead you!"

Sr. Marija encouraged us to make the path by "walking". Padre Giacomo Costa, SJ, companion of outgoing Provincial Leadership, encouraged us to trust in God, the Father of the poor, who helps us to follow Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis, "so that we can remain united with him in joy and love."

The Holy Mass ended with the symbol of small hiking sandals for all participants.

This was followed by a sisterly-brotherly sharing on the terrace. This was a beautiful encounter with many sisters and co-workers. The view from the terrace and the beautiful weather appeared as good signs of hope to keep us trusting in God's guidance.

## Sister Regina Lins +

Province Europa Mitte - Region Bavaria

Born on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1943 in

Oberbibrach / Bavaria

Professed on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1967 in Gemünden

Died on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2017 in the convent  
Mengkofen

Luzia was born on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1943 as the fourth child of her parents Johann and Luzia Lins in Upper Palatinate Oberbibrach. Having already been preceded by three brothers, she was much desired as a girl. Out of joy that the newborn girl completed the "three-leaved shamrock to four-leaved", she was given the name of her mother, Luzia at baptism.

In the company of her siblings she spent a happy childhood. Early contact was made with Holy Cross Sisters, as two of their aunts had joined in Eger. After graduating from elementary school, she decided to attend the middle school of Holy Cross Sisters, who meanwhile had been sent into Bavaria - first for a year in Werneck, and then for two years in Gemünden on the Main. During this time her childhood dream matured to become a Holy Cross



Sr. Regina Lins †

Sister. On 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1960, she joined the congregation in Gemünden. As a candidate, she completed her studies in Women's College, and the Pedagogical Course in Manual Work of Erlöser-schwestern (Sisters of the Redeemer) in Würzburg-Heidingsfeld. While working as a trainee teacher from 1963 to 1965, she went through extra-occupational training as a shorthand teacher.

This was followed by religious education in postulancy and novitiate. In 1967, Sr. Regina took her first vows in Gemünden. She then worked for five years as a handicraft teacher in the basic education course for household and child care in Binabiburg. This activity gave her great pleasure. In addition to her assignment at school, she was also assigned to do boarding school duties.

In 1972, she took up studies at the Catholic University of North Rhine-Westphalia in Paderborn in Theology (pastoral / religious education), which she completed in 1975. After the practical year, she worked very hard for eight years as a community consultant in Wiesau / Upper Palatinate.

In 1984, she was elected for the General Leadership. It was not easy for her to say goodbye to community work, but she faced the new challenge to thoroughly familiarize herself with the complex tasks assigned to her and to do her best, especially when she held the post of the General Assistant for 12 years. After serving as General Councillor, she was entrusted by

the General Leadership, with the responsibility of carrying out various organizational tasks in the Hungarian province, and of accompanying the newly arrived sisters in the formation.

In 2008, Sr. Regina returned to Gemünden and took over the sacristy work here. In 2011, she was given responsibility for the sisters' convent in Caritas Retirement Home Friedheim in Regensburg, and at the same time she took pastoral care of senior citizens. When the sisters withdrew from the Friedheim in 2015, she took over the reception service in Mengkofen.

Sr. Regina had her heart in the right place. Wherever she worked, she quickly found access to people through her humorous and open-minded way. She never acted hastily. Even in difficult situations, she remained prudent and calm and made her decisions based on sound considerations and an inner stability. Her piety grew from a healthy, deep bond with God, which was characterized by authenticity and down-to-earth attitude and had a

convincing effect on fellow human beings.

Community life was an important aspect of religious life for Sr. Regina. She was happy to contribute to a good relationship with each other, personally got involved in common activities and sometimes brought cheerfulness and liberating laughter through exhilarating proverbs.

When Sr. Regina retired to bed on the evening of August 21, no one in the community had any idea that she would not be alive among them the next morning. An acute heart failure ended her earthly life quite unexpectedly. Although a fellow sister was immediately on the spot and called the emergency service, there was no more help in need.

Sr. Regina went before us to God. May he now grant her the fullness of his life and take her into his glory!

Sr. Helene Leitner from the province Europa Mitte, has a fund of fond memories of Sr. Regina from their several years together in the General Leadership: It was above all her sociability and hearty laughter that contributed to a good atmosphere. Living together was always spiced up with her innate sense of humour. Problems and situations could not upset her as she had a great "stamina". Other characteristics were her reliability in accomplishing tasks, her accuracy, her concern for clarity and her ability to assess different situations. While she was focused on the larger picture, she sought the opinion of each sister on issues, affording them due importance.

The best we can do after her unexpected death is: pass on what she has given us. May the God of the living be her eternal bliss!

## Sister Monica Teresa Solcà †

Motherprovince Switzerland

Born: 17.01.1949

Professed: 09.08.1980

Died: 19.10.2017

In a hymn we sing: "We joyfully believe in your word. Yes, Lord, we live forever".

Faith gives us strength and comfort in this hour as we bid farewell to our dear Sr. Monica Teresa Solcà.

She wrote down her own extensive resume and told us the following:

«I am grateful to my family where I was loved, led and encouraged. It gave me great wealth for my life - not least because of the three cultures and languages that are still alive in it today: the culture of Ticino, West Switzerland and German-speaking Switzerland.

On 17<sup>th</sup>, January 1949, I was born as the first of three children in the Holy Cross Hospital in Chur. Living with my parents and growing together with my siblings Peter and Angela experienced love and joy.



Sr. Monica Teresa Solcà †

I went to kindergarten at Marienheim in Chur and the primary and the secondary school at Hofschule in Chur. After elementary school, I was able to enter the Cantonal Teachers' Training College in Chur. Going through this training period was further enrichment for me because we were familiar with the three

departments (German, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romanic).

During and after the training, I put what I learned into practice in different places. I taught in the village school Avers (in the highest inhabited valley of Europe) in Arosa; in Zollikerberg and in Zug. Children of different origins were entrusted to me. They were all dear to me - from shepherd boys to immigrants. I tried to promote them so that they could cope with life in the future.

In Arosa, I had the opportunity to travel to the USA and live there for one year in an American family and get to know the country and its people. I met people who enriched my life. I think of my Norwegian friend, later in whose family I celebrated a midsummer night. For me, this festival was a sign of Christ, who is present day and night in our lives.

The travel lust led me a little later to the passenger service of the Swissair. Here I learned a lot in dealing with people from all over the world and of different callings.

In 1977, the call to religious life had become unmistakable, and after meetings with people who convincingly lived their religious life in the service of their fellow human beings, the call for me was confirmed.

My day of joining in Ingenbohl (August 15, 1977) had come. After the religious formation, I celebrated my first profession in 1980. In the Holy Scriptures, the word: "**It is the Lord**" struck me. It became one of my guiding principles.

A few days after profession, I travelled to the Canton of Freiburg, to the bilingual Guglera Institute. For 18 years, I helped to shape the life of young people in school and boarding school. I took over secretarial work too until in 1997 when the call to the General Administration came to me. In this situation, I sent the following call to heaven: "Come, Holy Spirit, with the power that unites us and creates life!"

The guidance of God's Spirit in the General Leadership during the

years 1997 to 2009 and in the encounters with sisters in different provinces and vicariates was always new, concrete and overwhelming experience for me.

My horizon expanded through encounters with the sisters of our provinces and vicariates and through our visits to their places of work.

Like the petals of the water lily, our Congregation so unfolded for me as unity in diversity in that period and also deepened my own vocation on the respective common search processes according to God's plans.

It was not easy to let go of this diversity and vastness in the General Leadership after 12 years. But it followed, though only for a short time - a wonderful time in the pilgrim service.

Then I was given responsibility for the community of Theodosianum in Zurich.

As a result of a health problem, I returned to Ingenbohl in 2013. This turning point in my life was hard, but also brought the time of grace to live in the here and now.

After first successful therapies I was again given a period of time to use my remaining energy in church social counselling (KIRSO) ». So far the personal notes of Sister Monica Teresa.

As the health of our dear sister worsened rapidly, she was moved into a room in St. Josef sisters' home, where she was called home on 19<sup>th</sup> October by the Lord.

Sr. Monica Teresa has repeatedly emphasized that it is important for her to express her gratitude:

- Thanks to those responsible for the community and all the sisters.
- Thanks to the people who were her special gift and support on the path of life.
- Thanks to the family that laid the foundation for a rich life.
- And thanks for the loving care in St. Josef sisters' home.

Dear Sr. Monica Teresa

We also thank you. You've worked in healthy days with many skills in our worldwide community. And in sick days you carried the cross courageously and sturdily. When the seriousness of your illness was obvious, you bravely dealt with the idea of dying -

according to your motto: **"It was and is the Lord!"**

Pope Francis recently said in an address: "Christians need not be afraid of death; Jesus himself will come and take them by the hand". This faith comforts us now in the hour of farewell. We know you are secure in the Lord. But we keep you in our memory.

Sr. Louise-Henri Kolly, the former Superior General, adds:

"In 1997, after the unexpected death of Sr. Sebastienne Keel, the General Councillor, Sr. Monica Teresa was appointed to the position by the General Leadership to lead the entire Institute. It was not easy for her to leave Guglera, where she was a passionate teacher. But she said yes to the appointment.

In the General Leadership, she used her special talent for foreign languages and computer work to great benefit. With courage she got involved in the work, took on the challenges of an international

team ever better, and immersed herself in the vastness of the new task. She was mainly the contact person for the Motherprovince and the Vicariate Brazil. Although she had much interest in the worldwide congregation, it was not always easy for her to leave home and go on visitations for several weeks. Rather quiet and withdrawn, Sr. Monica Teresa was valued for the quality of her listening. Her organizational talents and design skills have greatly helped the preparation and conduct of Congresses, General Chapters and excursions.

Sr. Monica Teresa was a woman of prayer. In union with Christ she found strength to continue on her way. In the illness she prepared herself for the great encounter with much confidence and full consciousness and recognized him, the Lord, in the dark hours.

Thank you, dear Sr. Monica Teresa, for your quiet and so deep witness. Be there now and forever where He lives!

## Big Move in Bavaria

Sr. Petra Car, Wels Provincial House, Province Europa Mitte

### Farewell celebration in Mengkofen

On 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, Sr. Gabriele Schachinger and Sr. Petra Car organized a touching blessing ceremony in the castle chapel for the moving out of 18 sisters. In her review, Sr. Petra recalled the development of the nursing home since 1950 and the work of many sisters in this place. Sr. Gabriele used to take care of the sisters here, and had

experienced a lot of gratitude. She encouraged the sisters to let go of cherished things of the castle and be reconciled to the move. The light of a candle should accompany the "pilgrims to Gemünden" and illuminate their way. Following the common celebration with the whole household, Sr. Gabriele and Sr. Petra visited each sister in her room and listened to their concerns.



Farewell in Mengkofen



New house chapel in Gemünden

## Moving to Gemünden

On 24<sup>th</sup> January, the move to Gemünden began. With heavy hearts, most of the sisters bade farewell to the familiar Mengkofen. Some also rejoiced to return to their former home. The more than 300 km long journey required good organization. A small group of 2-3 sisters moved weekly, the sisters in need of nursing care went by ambulance and some sisters could also take the private

car from Lower Bavaria to Lower Franconia. In Gemünden, all were warmly welcomed and received kind-heartedly by the sisters. Many helping angels assisted them with packing and unpacking.

The first inhabitants of the new nursing ward were four sisters from the "Elisabeth Community" and two sisters from the convent, "St. Francis Community".



St. Elisabeth community in Gemünden

**Commissioning of the Superiors' team and of new nursing staff**

On 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, Sr. Petra Car entrusted Sr. Ambrosia Schmerbeck and Sr. Renate Wolf with the responsibility for the new convent "Elisabeth Community" of nursing care before the elderly sisters present there, and before the entire nursing team.

She officially appointed Mrs. Carola Gehrling, the Nursing Specialist, as House Coordinator. Subsequently, Ms. Gehrling welcomed the 14 nurses and 6

staff members for domestic service. She urged her new colleagues to an appreciative, caring and attentive treatment of the sisters.

**Blessing of the new chapel on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor**

On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, Fr. Rudolf Scherbaum blessed the new chapel, Maria Lichtmess and celebrated the first Holy Mass with the community. Sr. Petra Car introduced the sisters to the insights of the artist Robert Michael Weber from Grafing, near Munich, who designed the sacred

space. The eight sliding yellow-glazed stained-glass windows represent the creation on the one hand, but also point to the resurrection depicted at the entrance of the chapel, passing through the dark-gray door. The cross inscribed in the wall is simple and gives the observer the certainty that Christ embraced us all with his arms into eternal safety in God.

### **Visit by the Provincial Leadership**

On 10<sup>th</sup> March, Sr. Gabriele Schachinger, the Provincial Superior and Sr. Magdalena Walcher, her Assistant visited the sisters in their new rooms as part of the opening ceremony of the newly renovated south wing. Some were still struggling with homesickness although they enjoyed the beautiful rooms and the beautiful view over the Main Valley. At noon prayer, Sr. Gabriele presented the decree of appointment to the two responsible sisters, Sr. Ambrosia and Sr. Renate for three years.

### **The Solemn Blessing of the South Wing on 11<sup>th</sup> March**

Many guests and sisters were present in the convent church for the Holy Mass. First of all, the nurses from the nursing sector - a row of wheelchairs in front of the altar - were rather unusual for the Gemünden sisters!

The main celebrant, canon Clemens Bieber described the renovated house as a "place of life" in which the sky rises. The church choir of St. Andreas from Karlstadt gave the Holy Mass a particularly solemn character. Sr. Gabriele, the Provincial Superior, in her vote of thanks, acknowledged the challenge to the sisters, who in their old age had to accept a big change in their place of residence. In the changing history of Bavaria, there were particularly profound changes of place: On 29<sup>th</sup> January, the sisters commemorated the founding of the province 70 years ago. At that time, the focus was on growth. Today it corresponds to the need of the time, to give the sisters a dignified retirement.

After the Mass, the management on the ground floor provided 11 rooms for the senior citizens on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and the living

quarters of the sisters on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floor were blessed. Fr. Scherbaum had prepared inspiring prayers for it. In the banquet hall, everyone awaited a culinary delight.

The district administrator, mayor and architect Kraus found appreciative words for this work of Holy Cross Sisters, in which young and old meet and enrich each other. Thereafter, all

interested parties were invited to have a look in the south wing. It was a successful celebration with much appreciation and recognition of the good progress of the construction work.

May all sick and elderly sisters in Gemünden now experience a satisfying retirement on the way to heaven! Sr. Gabriele said, "Home grows in a house where God dwells."

## 90 Years, the Province Slovakia

Sr. Terézia Benedikta Majeráková, Trnava, Province Slovakia

### Becoming of the province Slovakia

Holy Cross Sisters first arrived in Slovakia (former Hungary) in February 1865 at Chyzerovce and Zlaté Moravce to take care of the sick. Fr. Theodosius had personally visited this place earlier. The first three sisters came a few days after the death of Fr. Theodosius, i.e. on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1865. They were: Sr. Leontia Fümberger from Tarsdorf in Bohemia, Sr. M. Regelinda Foppe from Linz. The name of the third sister is unknown. With their

courageous commitment, they laid the "foundation stone" of the province Slovakia.

The community in Zlaté Moravce was the only place of activity in Hungary for 10 years. It was directly assigned to the community in Chyzerovceder of the province Slavonia (today province Croatia). The reason for this was that Sr. Adelheida Dilenz, the new Provincial Superior, who worked for several years in Zlaté Moravce. In 1873 the hospital was shifted to new premises.



Festive decoration with pictures from the early days

From 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1885, the community in Zlaté Moravce became part of province Moravia, which was founded in 1872. In 1913, Hungary became a separate province, and so the communities in Slovakia were assigned to the province Hungary.

After the emergence of the Moravian province, the number of sisters grew and it became necessary to decide on the autonomy of Slovak Holy Cross Sisters. The sisters began to work in hospitals, elementary schools and kindergartens.

In 1922, Sr. Theresia Beck, the then Superior General agreed to purchase the castle and the garden of Count Dražkovi in Podunajské Biskupice. The castle had to be renovated and some buildings needed to be built. At the beginning of 1923, the Slovak commissariat was established. The independent Slovak province was confirmed by the decree of the Holy See from 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1927. The new province officially started on the feast day of St. Elisabeth on 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1927. The first Provincial Superior was Sr. Teodózia – Mária Hossová. Podunajské Biskupice became the provincial residence. The new province had 230 sisters,

28 novices and 89 candidates. The sisters worked mainly in hospitals and schools. In Bratislava they ran the first nursing school of Slovakia. Overall, they worked in 18 communities in Slovakia.

### **Jubilee celebrations in Cerová and Haniska**

The main theme of the regional day comes from Pope Francis' thoughts: "*remembrance, charism and mission*". The sisters had the opportunity to meet and experience a spiritual atmosphere with the help of a message from Sr. Šebastiana Tuptová, our Provincial Superior. In her speech, she stressed on the importance of our roots, which must always be refreshed through prayer, life with God, and lived sisterhood.

The sisters could also recall three important pillars that shaped our history: commemoration, charism and mission. The sisters were able to reflect on Pope Francis' thoughts, which are in harmony with the vision of our founders and pose a great challenge today.

The regional days were not a formality, but above all an encounter, an encounter with God and also with each other. They were a great opportunity



to pause, reflect, and listen to God, who in his goodness guides us throughout history and constantly shows us his plan. The highlight was the Holy Mass. On this occasion, we also had the picture of the face of Jesus before us that the first sisters brought from Ingenbohl to Slovakia 150 years ago.

In Cerová, we celebrated the Regional Day on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2017. There were about 100

sisters gathered to express togetherness and joy of vocation. The main celebrant was Monsignor Stanislav Zvolenský, the Archbishop Metropolitan of Bratislava. It was a day of prayer, so we concluded the prayer day by praying the vespers together. It was prepared from the words and messages of our founders.

On 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, we met in the sisters' community in Haniska. About sixty sisters came together

from different communities. The main celebrant of the solemn Mass was Monsignor Stanislav Stolárik, the Bishop of Rožava. The sisters spent time together again, experiencing the power of fellowship, and refreshing the enthusiasm of following Jesus in the spirit of our charism.

We are constantly on the way. History continues, and we are its makers, we and our life. It is good to come back to the roots, to cherish the memory, to recall the first encounter with Jesus, the

moment of vocation. It is a time of grace. Every sister in the mosaic of our history is significant; every stone is different, but important. Every stone symbolizes a sister, therefore it is so meaningful. God unites us; it is he who designs the image.

God's guidance repeatedly convinces us that the province Slovakia *"is like a tree, planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers"* (Ps 1:3).

## Junior Sisters' Get-together in the Czech Republic

Sr. Kristina Lovrekovi , akovo, Province Croatia



Prague

The European Juniorate get-together of the Holy Cross Sisters took place from 9<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2017 in the Czech Republic. The meeting was organized at the Provincial House in Krom lž. 34 sisters from different provinces participated in it: Europa Mitte, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Motherprovince and Croatia. There were nine junior sisters from the province Croatia and three junior sisters from the Kosovo region accompanied by Sr. Finka Tomas. The meeting started on 9<sup>th</sup> August,

Wednesday, evening. Sr. Daniela Švecová, Sr. Emanuela Vévodová and Sr. Beata Zemanová of the host province prepared and facilitated the gathering. Translations into German and English languages helped a lot. With the help of participants conversant in languages, we communicated in all native languages. That made the meeting interesting and attractive despite all language barriers.

After we got to know each other on the first day, we visited the

Provincial House and got acquainted with the activities of the sisters of the Czech province, which currently has 99 sisters. The house is spacious and beautiful, and the sisters have opened their doors for sick priests. Five are accommodated in the hospital ward. Civilians, including the sisters' parents are also welcome. There is a separate floor for sick sisters.

In the following days we had the opportunity to visit the various sights of Krom íž, the beautiful flower garden and the Bishop's Park. We also hiked to Radhoř Hill - to the famous Chapel of St. Cyril and Methodius, where we attended the Holy Mass for pilgrims. The impressive chapel on the hill attracts many tourists and families from the surrounding area. We also visited the city Choryne, where the first Provincial House was. The province used to be named in the past as province Moravia.

On Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> of August, we travelled by bus to Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. There we were accommodated in the Dominican convent. We visited the places where our sisters fruitfully work: in hospital and in pastoral ministry. We were welcomed very warmly everywhere. We felt the common

roots and the one spirit that guide us with the same charism. Blessed with good weather, we had the opportunity to go by boat on the Moldau (Vltava). We visited the Prague Castle, and the former Benedictine monastery, which was founded by St. Agnes of Bohemia and is now a beautifully decorated museum. The most famous sight of the city is the Charles Bridge, which connects the old town with the other side of Moldau and is decorated with numerous sculptures of saints. The most outstanding of all is the statue of St. John Nepomuk, the patron saint of Prague, who was thrown from the bridge into the Vltava River and drowned. We visited the magnificent Basilica of St. George, where we had the morning reflections. On our last day in Prague, we made a visit to the Carmelite Church, "Our Lady of Victories", where there is also the miraculous image of Prague Infant Jesus. It is believed that it originally belonged to St. Teresa of Avila. It was beautiful to celebrate the Holy Mass in this church. In addition to the singing and playing the organ, we junior sisters also contributed songs in Croatian and Albanian to the solemn liturgy.

It is impossible to name the many warm moments and the deep experiences of meeting with

sisters, priests and other people who made this meeting possible. Despite the war, the Czech Republic retained a certain pre-war splendour through the various sights and precious crystal items that were seen in many shop windows. Last but not least, there are always a large number of tourists to be found here.

The crowning part of the meeting was the concluding evening - the evening of gratitude and impressions - as we sincerely thanked our leaders, Sr. Daniela, Sr. Emanuela and Sr. Beata, and Sr. Miroslava Bortlová, and especially the Provincial Superior, for taking us to Prague accompanied by a small group of sisters who supported us all the time. Our being together was accompanied by much music and songs. The musical sisters' groups sang in different languages, the others sang as well as they could. The evening ended with farewells,

because the following day the return trip was announced.

The impressions can be summarized as follows: we felt the diversity of the spirit and the same charism; we experienced the beauty of the liturgy, which was carefully prepared each day by the sisters of different provinces, and the joy and beauty of community life delighted us. It was an experience as in the prayer of Jesus: "... that they may be one" (Jn 17:11).

Once again many thanks to our sisters from the Czech Republic, who organized this meeting and gave us such cordial and sisterly welcome. We had the opportunity to return to the source in the footsteps of St. Francis to rediscover the beauty of the religious vocation as gift and value. Thanks to everyone for allowing us to attend this gathering.



## Get-together with Former Fellow Sisters

Sr. Christiane Jungo, Ingenbohl, Motherprovince Switzerland

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2003, 14 years ago, the first get-together with former fellow sisters took place. On 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, it was the seventh of its kind.

These gatherings have grown out of a decision of the Provincial Chapter in 2001. At that time, we saw it as a mission to stay in touch with our former sisters, because we share a common path, and we are "responsible throughout our lives for what we have become familiar with" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry). The working group of four sisters received from the delegates of the chapter a free hand, which meant that could employ the best options available to make the gatherings memorable.

With the help of all the sisters of the province, we located unknown addresses, wrote to our former fellow sisters and invited them to the get-together. The response was overwhelming. We realized that the shared experiences and memories, the years spent together, unite us with the spiritual home of Ingenbohl, Fr. Theodosius and Mother Maria Theresa, even though our paths got diverged.

In addition to the personal contacts that some sisters have always maintained, a certain tradition has developed for continuing the relationship with former fellow sisters:

- A narrative letter in March of each year as a review of the past year of our community.
- A get-together (every 2-3 years).
- The invitation to participate in the convent events.
- Subscribing to Theodosia (2017: 36 subscriptions).

The content for the get-together have evolved from needs and desires. This resulted in the following determinations:

- Personal encounters with as many sisters as possible from the convent hill: Common experiences in communities connect across all years and events.
- An exchange among the former sisters themselves: A spiritual theme gives an impulse to talk about life and faith.
- Common lunch.

- An arranged prayer time in the crypt, mostly musically framed by former sisters.

Our former sisters are getting older. Many have died since the first gathering. Yet we welcomed about 30 former sisters. The oldest participant in October was 94 years old.

We agreed that these days were a precious experience. They unite, strengthen and heal. They make us wonder about the ways of God and thankful for surprises.

The former fellow sister Felicita / Verena Profos shares with us her experience from October 2017:

On the day of the meeting, three things particularly touched me:

1. When we put former sisters in the group room in a circle, I saw many unknown faces. For a moment, I felt almost alienated in that circle, but then it occurred to me that, whether known or unknown, we all had something in common and connected: we all had been looking for something on our way that finally led us to the Motherhouse in Ingenbohl and all of us had then someday set the course differently, so we became

"former". I was very much touched by this thought.

2. I was also impressed by the good atmosphere that characterized this get-together. How warm, cheerful and relaxed, for example, the atmosphere in the guest refectory was, when after lunch, sisters and former sisters met and were given the opportunity to meet and talk, and that there was no limit between the "inside" and the "outside", but simply cordial joy of meeting one another.

3. It is not self-evident that such get-together with former fellow sisters would take place at all and will still succeed. It took courageous steps and that's what convent Ingenbohl did with its YES and invitation to attend the meeting days. This YES testifies to inner generosity and the willingness to respect that life-paths can go differently than intended. Conversely, it also needs the invitees because they first make possible and prepare the days for meeting by their coming.

A hearty THANKS to all of you, who have contributed in any way to the success of this day!

## The Pilgrimage Retreat in Brazil

Sr. Geralda Kunz, Sao Caetano, Vicariate Brazil



Pilgrimage group with host

For a long time I had the desire to make the pilgrimage retreat. This year I was given the grace to participate in a pilgrimage retreat with a group from 30<sup>th</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> May. I am happy to share with you some important moments of this experience.

There is a difference between pilgrimage and making a pilgrimage. In a pilgrimage, the believer has a special purpose in

mind. One may want to visit a shrine to thank God for graces received, or to ask for favours. Everything is well-planned. The people from north east Brazil, especially the poor, like to go on pilgrimage to Mother Mary's shrine.

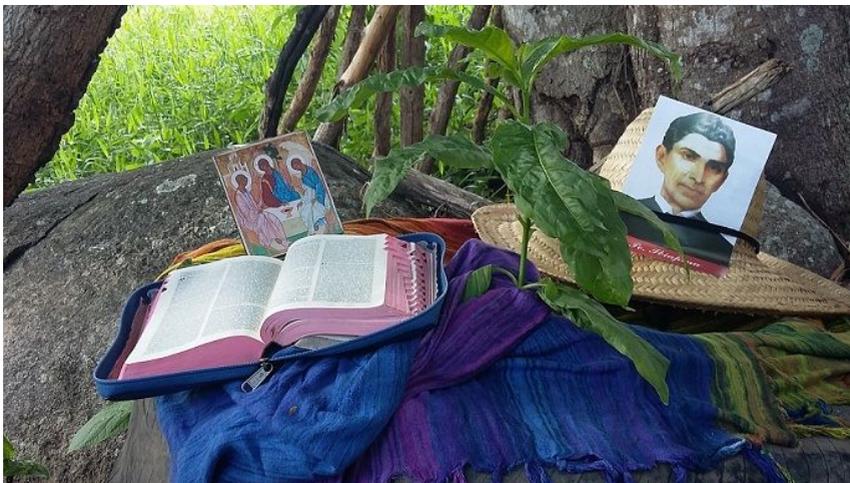
When it comes to making a pilgrimage, the most important thing is the way and the walking. Pilgrimage is physical work, but at

the same time, an inner effort, namely: seeking intimacy with God, encountering oneself, solidarity with fellow pilgrims. The pilgrim listens to the soft voice of God, attentive to what one encounters along the way and perceives the unexpected.

We were a small group of six people: two sisters and four men, one of whom was a priest. We followed in the footsteps of Fr. José Antonio de Maria Ibiapina, one of the greatest missionaries of north-east Brazil. He was born on 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1806 in Sobral, Ceará and died on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1883 in Santa Fe, Paraíba. For 30 years he lived and worked as a layman and another 30 years as a priest. Fr. Ibiapina was a teacher, lawyer, judge, politician and defender of the poor. In the time of a major cholera epidemic (1855) he purposefully decided to risk his life for the poor. He renounced success, wealth and applause to become a pilgrim of Christian love. There was a time when there were no roads or means of transport, he walked long distances, or rode horseback through different states of the northeast. He is known especially for the original method of his work. He built chapels as places of encounter and prayer; hospitals

and cemeteries. In the drought zones, he guided people to build ponds. He built 22 houses (casas de caridade) to give widows and orphans a new home. It's interesting that he remained in any one place only for a short time. On leaving, he left behind a group of responsible persons to carry out the works. In the poor houses "devout" women, so-called Beatas, worked.

During the week of our pilgrimage, I recognized many signs of God. The path led us through a hilly area and demanded physical exertion from us. We walked many miles a day. The path began in Bananeiras and ended at the shrine of Fr. Ibiapina in Santa Fé. The climate was generally rather cool except for some very hot days. We experienced a lot of wind and also rain. We were without money, food and telephone on the way. We trusted only in God's merciful love. Often we met people who filled our empty water bottles and offered us something to eat. Each late afternoon we were received by a group of believers. They took us to families, where we had the opportunity to take a shower and a hot meal. Later, we prayed with the people in their chapel, and also in the morning before our



Symbols of missionaries

departure for the onward journey. There were basic communities that pray together, share the word of God and also support each other socially.

In all places the people showed a great joy at the pilgrims' visit and regretted that we stayed only for a short time. During the day, we silently walked for hours, trying to look back into our life and experience God's guidance. Sometimes we shared our experiences with one person in the group. The priest gave us every day a biblical orientation and familiarized us with a part of the life story of Fr. Ibiapina. At lunchtime we took a rest under

shady trees or at the entrance of a house and shared with one another what we had received from someone on the way: bread, biscuits, fruits...

What particularly touched me during the pilgrimage was the hospitality and joy of the poor people. Terezinha, a widow who lost her son a year after her husband's death, vacated her bedroom for Sr. Jacqueline and me. She slept on the floor at the entrance to the house that night. All the people, who provided for our overnight stay, showed great interest to talk to us. They narrated their life story, shared

many concerns and sufferings with us, but also shared about rich experiences of God, and being looked after in the ecclesial community.

In one of the basic groups we experienced them following the example of the first Christians, an early Christian Community. We met with the faithful at the required time in the chapel. Each family brought something for the common dinner. All came together for a shared meal. Afterwards we went to the chapel for prayer prepared by a group of young people. People also wanted to hear from us our experiences as pilgrims along the way. It was a big sharing. In the morning at departure, after the common pilgrim prayer, the group surprised us again with a common breakfast. God's love and care is great.

The last stretch to the shrine of Fr. Ibiapina was very steep, and it was midday. The afternoon gave us the opportunity to get to know the area, to visit the museum, etc. On Sunday morning we shared

our experiences in our group and celebrated Holy Mass together with the Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen. After lunch we got ready for the return journey.

I am very grateful for the experience gained during the pilgrim's retreat; for the unforgettable moments on the way: the silence, the daily sharing of the word of God, the life together in the group; the testimony of Fr. Ibiapina; the encounters with the people, the experience of the religiosity of the simple people. It was an experience of lived faith for me. Faith and life formed a unity. The testimony of the little ones and the poor touched me deeply. They cope with their hard existence (drought, lack of water, lack of financial resources, unemployment ...) solely out of faith in God. For my future life, I try to continue my life as a pilgrim, receiving the unexpected from God every day, and making sisterly encounters along the way.

"What we sow among the people will never die!" Fr. José Comblin

## Information from the General Leadership

### Appointments

On 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2017, the General Leadership appointed a new Provincial Leadership for the province Czech Republic for the next three years:

Provincial Superior: Sr. Miroslava  
Bortlová  
Assistant: Sr. Tobia  
Mat jková  
Councillors: Sr. Agata  
Davidová  
Sr. Zuzana  
Mace ková  
Sr. Daniela  
Švecová

Official start: 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2017

We sincerely thank our new or re-appointed sisters for their readiness to accept this demanding mission. We wish them strength and confidence for

their new task. May our trust and accompanying prayer support the sisters who carry out the mission together!

As Sr. Miriam Tomková, after nine years resigns from the Provincial Leadership, we thank her for the loyal and dedicated service for the good of the sisters and the province. May God's blessing accompany her on her future journey!

### General Visitation

The General Visitation of Vicariate Uganda will take place from 12<sup>th</sup> February to 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2018. Sr. Marija Brizar and Sr. Sheeja Kolacheril will conduct the visitation. May God's good Spirit accompany all concerned during the weeks of the visitation and support them in their meetings, discussions and consultations.

Quarterly  
of the Sisters of Mercy  
of the Holy Cross  
Institute Ingenbohl  
CH-6440 Brunnen