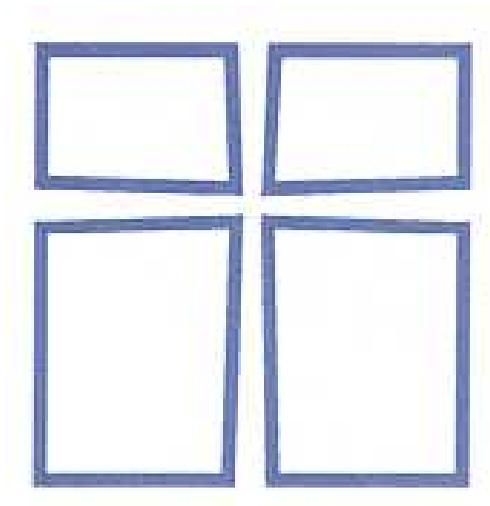


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# *Theodosia*

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Quarterly  
of the Sisters of Mercy  
of the Holy Cross  
Institute Ingenbohl  
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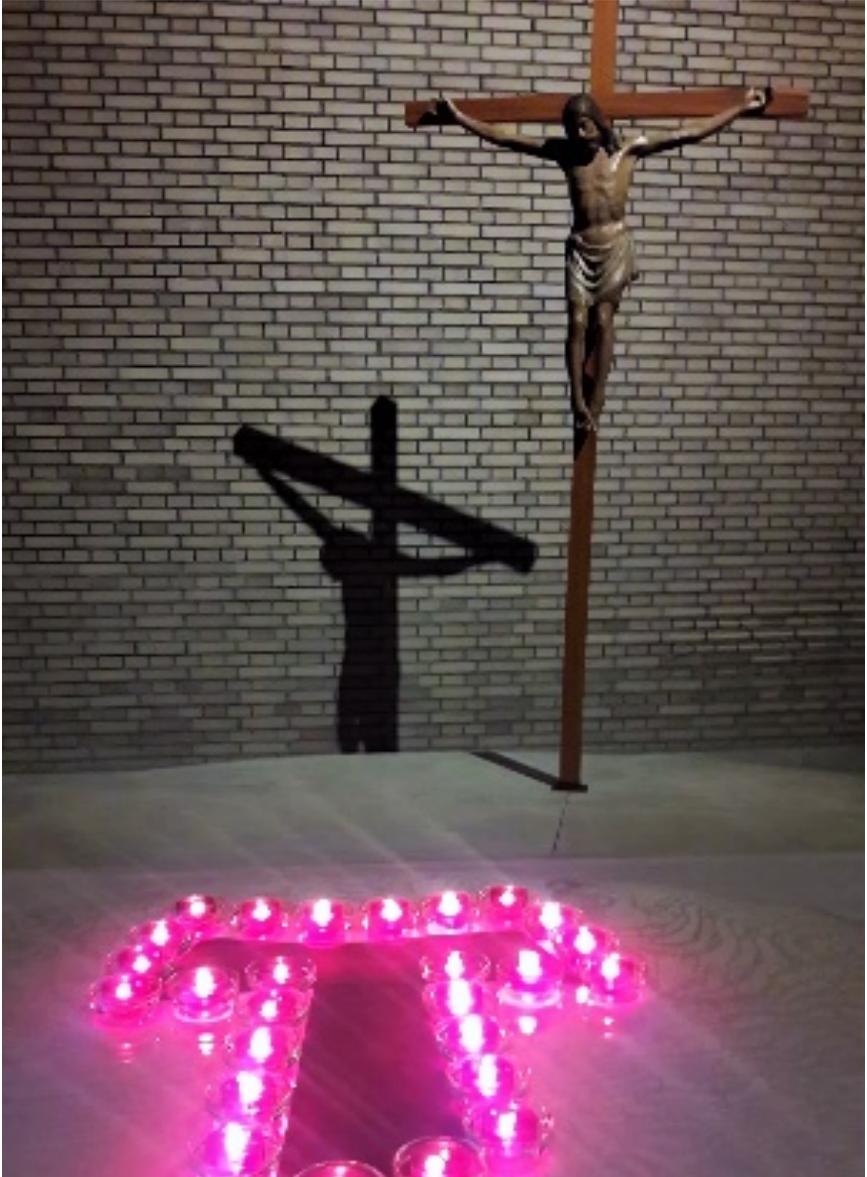
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Transitus celebration, convent church, Ingenbohl, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2022

## Editorial

Finally, the time was right in August 2022: The postponed General Chapter of 2020 could at last be held. It was not held in Ingenbohl, because space had temporarily become limited as a result of the construction work on the new St. Joseph Sisters' Nursing Home. In the meantime, we found out from reports that the St. Franziskushaus in Altötting offered ideal conditions for the 55 sisters at the chapter. In the foreseeable time, each sister will receive the documentation of the General Chapter.

From the first spiritual impulse of 7 August, I would like to repeat three aspects of spirituality that marked the work of the General Chapter:

"Spirituality of Nevertheless" as courage, not to give up even in adverse circumstances, in failure, in apparent futility, but to continue and remain open to new, different possibilities of the Holy Spirit.

"Spirituality of Diversity" that is open to colorfulness, variety, difference, otherness and strangeness. It invites to allow and accept experiences of this kind in the chapter as richness and challenge.

"Spirituality as Life out of and with the Spirit of God", e.g. remaining open to surprises, asking questions and leaving them as they are, can accept inspiration that the Spirit gives through others.

The last issue of the Theodosia of 2022 will give space for personal sharing to the five outgoing Sisters of the General Leadership. They will share with us experiences and memories of their terms of office. And we would like to thank them and continue to remember them, *"Fear not. It blooms after You."*

Other content includes:

*"Life Makes People Saints."* Father Emmeram Stacheder, OFM, summed up the message of this feast with his homily on All Saints' Day.

In the poem, *"In Retrospect"* Theresia Hauser looks back at times and events of her life and can only marvel.

In the series *"You will be My Witnesses"*, Acts 1:8, the life of *Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović* from the Province Croatia is presented and contemplated. She is the only one in our Congregation to have been given the honorary title of the State of Israel: *"Righteous among the Nations"*. From Sr. Meri Gotovac we also learn about preparations for her beatification.

Sr. Felicitas Mukhwana and Sr. Veera Bara from the Vicariate Uganda report on.

*"Advent and Christmas Celebrations in Uganda"*. This random series of *"Festivals and Celebrations in our Vicariates and Provinces"* aims to broaden our sense of other cultures and customs.

With a *"Prayerful Closing of the Year"* by Gisela Baltes, we surrender everything that was and how it was into God's hands.

As usual, *"Information from the General Leadership"* completes the Theodosia.

Sr. Christiane Jungo

## Life Makes People Saints

Fr. Emmeram Stacheder, OFM, homily at the Motherhouse on All Saints' Day 2022

Sisters and brothers in the Lord!

"Sacra Conversazione" - Holy Conversation, was the title of a winged altar painted in 1517 by the famous painter Lucas Cranach for the west choir of Naumburg Cathedral. In 1541 this altar was destroyed by the iconoclasts. The side paintings were preserved because they depict the donors. The Leipzig artist Michael Triegel, who had become a Catholic, was commissioned to reconstruct the altar painted by Lucas Cranach. This year in July, this altar was inaugurated in an ecumenical celebration.

The excitement in the art world was great. It even went so far that people wanted to deny the cathedral in Naumburg the title of "World Heritage Site". Although the artist dealt with the subject, he did not repaint the saints depicted in the original altar engaged in the conversation with the mother of Jesus. In his rendering of the sacred conversation, Tiegel portrayed people of our world and time. People from his own circle of acquaintances and family. People who are not in the calendar of saints. There is, for example, a

Jewish rabbi whom he had met in Jerusalem, a beggar with a baseball cap whom he had seen in the streets of Rome, and the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Triegel's intention was: "To transfer the Christian event into the sphere of everyday life. Because for me, the saints are people of this world. The world of the divine and the human, the eternal and the earthly, the holy and the unholy interpenetrate." (Michael Triegel)

Communion of saints, holy communion, conversation about the sacred, the faith, God and His message. How does someone become holy? Who makes saints? The Church, or rather the responsible authorities in Rome who after long processes, recognize the heroic virtue of a person, then beatify and finally canonize? This is probably more about a selection process in which many others fail who are not or were not popes, bishops, founders of religious orders, theologians, missionaries or martyrs.

How does one become holy and who makes saints? I think life makes people saints. Things, that

people take upon themselves and what they go through in life. All that, they bring up in "Sacra Conversazione", in holy conversation about God and the world and with God, translates into action. This is the material from which the saints are made. And these saints exist "in real" until today and probably beyond. It is a colorful mosaic of people on whom God has rubbed off and who thus rub off on others and their lives. People in whose presence one likes to be, where one can live and where one gets courage to live.

The community of saints we celebrate today are those who have seen and lived holiness as service to the community. People for whom love and justice, mercy and goodness were and are not just words, but very normal works and services to people. Saints are people who have walked, and still walk the way of Jesus. A way as described in the beatitudes. Life itself proves to us day by day that this is not easy. These are paths that bring people together, not divide or fight with each other.

Let us still ask ourselves today: What will become of us as a



Sacred conversation (Photo: gallery Schwind)

church, as a community of those sanctified in Christ, if we make this communion difficult for each other, if we, even renounce it? What will become of society if we forget to tolerate differences, if we don't face the great tasks ahead of us together? What could become, if we cultivate this communion of saints, the Sacra Conversazione, remain in conversation with God, about God and our world? Perhaps a piece of perfect world, holy world, holy people! Amen.

## Fear not. It Blooms after You

After the General Chapter 2022, five Sisters of the General Leadership will take leave of us: Sr. Marija Brizar as Superior General, Sr. Verena Maria Oberhauser as General Assistant, Sr. Elsit J. Ampattu, Sr. Anna Affolter and Sr. Lucila Zovak as General Councilors. We are glad to hear about their personal experiences. Each looks back in her own way: partly on the basis of questions posed, partly as free reminiscence. Through the medium of the Theodosia we thank them for their long and intense service to our worldwide community. Each in her own way has helped to build and sustain the community. May our blessings accompany them wherever their journey continues. With Hilde Domin, we say at farewell: "Fear not! It blooms after you."

### Interview with Sister Marija, Superior General

*Sister Marija, you have been in the General Leadership since 1996. The first 12 years as General Councilor, and since 2008 as Superior General. You wanted to hand over office to a successor in 2020, but the circumstances of the Corona*



Sr. Marija Brizar

*pandemic caused a delay. What did the two-time postponement do to you?*

The Corona pandemic surprised the entire General Leadership and me in the middle of the preparations for the General Chapter. None of us was prepared for such an event. When it became clear that we would have to think about postponing the General Chapter, various questions arose in us: What now? What does this mean for the preparation of the Chapter? When will we be able to hold it and in what form? Will a General Chapter with the presence of all the chapter members be possible at all? It was precisely in this difficult situation that an opportunity arose: to prepare the General Chapter in a different way and in greater depth. The idea arose to take all the sisters with us on the way to the Chapter in a spiritual process. The inputs prepared for the Chapter retreat

were meant to invite reflection and reflection on the theme of the Chapter. Many sisters got involved. This brought joy to us.

*Would you tell us about some joyful experiences of your tenure?*

I am glad to share with you about some joyful experiences. Every year I had the opportunity to visit a province or a vicariate several times. Visitation was a very valuable experience for me. Meetings and exchanges with the sisters often enriched me, brought me closer to them, and I learned to know them and understand them. I was able to get to know many places where our sisters live out their mission and to come into contact with people where our sisters work. A variety of developed and well-organized apostolates could be seen, but also beginnings of mission in very simple circumstances. I was always impressed by the commitment, the perseverance and the joy of the sisters

In 2012 we were able to hold a Provincial Congress of Superiors in India. During the days of the congress, the participants were able to experience firsthand something of Indian culture and tradition, as well as to meet our sisters where they are at home. This event was an experience of openness within the Congregation.

From 2015 to 2020, we were privileged to participate as a Congregation in the UISG migrant project in Sicily. One of our sisters lived in an inter-congregational community and was part of this project, through which young migrants were able to experience help and diverse support.

A working group has spent five years studying the original writings of our founders. The writings were searched for in various places, collected, sorted, critically examined to see if a publication would make any sense and so on. This painstaking work has produced a valuable selection of writings, which the working group has compiled in a book. At the Provincial Congress of Superiors in 2016, we celebrated the publication of the book with much joy and gratitude.

*What were the greatest challenges?*

There was no lack of challenges during the years of my term of office. I would like to mention some of them here.

It has not been easy to observe the decline in vocations in several provinces of the Congregation, or a lack of vocations for a long time. This has affected the age structure of our communities, provinces and vicariates, and has increasingly affected the possibilities for ministry. For

reasons of age, the sisters have had to give up many places of their ministry and of their presence among the people.

The process of the Congregation becoming smaller has become more and more noticeable during these years. Various provinces have been confronted with the question of possible ways forward and have courageously faced it. The General Leadership has supported them in their difficult process and encouraged them to follow the recognized path into a changed structure.

*In what way have you concretely experienced the richness and the limits of our international community?*

It is a gift to be present as an international community in different countries and cultures, on four continents, living our charism of following the merciful and crucified Jesus. The Sisters live their vocation and mission in each country in a way that corresponds to the culture of the country and the local Church. In many places they are close to the people and are there for them. Our charism is being lived out in many ways. All this enriches us as a Congregation.

In a certain sense, our richness also conceals our limits. Each Province and Vicariate goes through its own development.

Some provinces are in similar processes, e.g. Western Europe, and in provinces of India, construction is still going on, and new apostolates are being planned. In this asynchronous situation, interest in each other, attention and understanding of each other, and independent learning is required from all of us. We are shaped by "our" culture in the provinces and vicariates. Perhaps the time is coming to focus our thoughts and actions more on the Congregation as a whole, to look for ways of collaboration and networking.

*How have you experienced unity in all diversity?*

Our charism, vocation and mission as Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross unite us everywhere.

*Where do you see possibilities for the future?*

I see possibilities for the future in the priorities that the General Chapter has worked out. The chapter took an in-depth look at the topic of our future. Three important focal points emerged: our identity, our structures, increased networking and collaboration.

The General Chapter formulated Vision 2028. It contains a wonderful invitation to shape our common path into the future.

*Everyone is changing. Would you tell us in what way the office and its tasks have changed you?*

The contacts with all the provinces and vicariates have broadened my personal horizon very much. In the journey with the sisters and other people, I was able to learn a lot about them and their cultures. I have developed a deeper appreciation for them.

*What are you mostly glad about after having stepped down from the office of the Superior General?*

I am very happy that a new General Leadership could be elected which will lead the Congregation on the way into the future.

I will be able to take some time off, to rest, to refresh myself spiritually, to read books that I have always wanted to read, to orient myself to a new chapter in my life.

Throughout these years I have felt sustained and supported by the prayers of my fellow sisters. For this I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to each one.

### **Sister Verena Maria looks back**

Since February 2021, I have been a member of the Provincial Leadership Europa Mitte, so I am no longer in Ingenbohl. Memories



Sr. Verena Maria Oberhauser

of 12 years in General Leadership team live on in me: In the two terms of office in the General Leadership, I had the opportunity to experience, see, hear and perceive a lot – to carry out, and contribute one thing or another - and this on many levels of life in the communities. There were many opportunities to strengthen, encourage, comfort and honor sisters.

First of all, it is an international leadership team, a spontaneous closeness is present through the commonality of our charism, but at the same time the language barrier, the cultural differences, persist. A completely new way of

togetherness, in thinking, feeling, expressing and dealing with challenges, are required. The task of the General Leadership is unique, and is strongly marked by the persons to whom this mission is given in a particular time.

On a personal level, the years in the team were a spiritual learning process, a school of prayer, a formation - perhaps I may use the word "transformatio" for it. Now, after being away for two years, even the painful and arduous parts of those 12 years in retrospect, feel precious, and filled with gratitude.

The visitations, getting to know and experiencing the diversity of the worldwide Congregation is truly an almost indescribably wonderful gift. To be able to think of so many sisters by name, face and profile, of their places of work and home, of their diverse culture with beautiful customs, of their hopes and plans of their expressions of faith and celebration - but also of the existential challenges of a political, social and religious nature - all of this are so indescribably precious and enriching. It is impossible to forget or put aside. Unforgettable are the preparations for the visitations and the journeys themselves - the

intercontinental ones as well as those within a province, from one community to another. The weeks during a visitation demanded courage and trust, flexibility and letting go, attention and thoughtfulness for each sister and at the same time for the whole of a community.

The greatest gift I could bring along was appreciation, respect and gratitude for each sister.

I miss very much the daily direct contact with the different provinces and vicariates, with the events and developments. Never before have had I felt my love for the Congregation more than now. I am learning that I am a pilgrim on the way and that in every step there is a letting go and a new assurance.

I was able to feel and see the kingdom of God grow, confrontation and reconciliation in the midst of lives of suffering, violence, power and powerlessness. I was able to witness the inspiration, the power and dynamism of the Holy Spirit of God in the sisters in the places of their work and life - in the footsteps of the merciful and crucified Jesus.

I greet everyone with all my heart  
Sister Verena Maria

**Sister Elsit Ampattu writes poetically: Adieu Switzerland**



Sr. Elsit J. Ampattu

*Mother M. Theresa often emphasized, "God will provide." Were you able to experience this reality too? How?*

I take a walk down memory lane:  
Landing alone at the Zürich airport  
on 2 February 2009

The sky overcast with clouds, the  
piercing cold accompanying the  
chilly wind

Matched the uncertainty, fear and  
anxiety that engulfed me.

Something deep within whispered:  
"God will provide!"

On that memorable day -15  
February, it all began,

A new General Leadership Team  
with a new term of office.

Introducing tasks, arranging  
meetings, planning visitations  
Felt like a zero for the responsible  
mission ahead

With the language barrier, the  
struggle to communicate freely  
The inner voice whispered: "God  
will provide!"

Long and valued 14 years at the  
Ingenbohl Hill

that once heard the sighs of  
Mother Maria Theresa  
stand as a testimony for the  
inspiration and guidance I  
received from her:

Challenges and obstacles paved  
way to creative problem solving  
Failures and dark moments  
deepened inner strength

I never gave up, I trusted, I  
marched on

The inner voice whispered: "God  
will provide!"

In fact, He provided everything  
that was needed:

The right people at the right time,  
the right word at the right time!



Lake Lucerne and myths

The words of Mother Maria Theresa continue to accompany me:

"Always forward, never give up!  
Trust courageously!  
Follow faithfully the Crucified One!  
God will provide!"

*What will you (probably) miss?*

Lonely walks on the shores of Lake Lucerne,  
watching the water flowing,  
sometimes calmly, sometimes stormily,  
watching the boats and ships of all kinds drifting by,  
noticing the people of different colors, cultures and languages,  
capturing the breathtaking panorama with their cameras,

watching the ducks and swans exercising their young in the creeks

under the lush green and shady trees,  
marveling at the blue sky and green meadows,

feeling the gentle cool breeze caressing my cheeks,  
enjoying the overwhelming beauty of fountains,

surrounded by magnificent mountains, like the inviting myths overlooking Ingenbohl:

all this was a feast for my eyes  
a joy for my heart and a delight for my soul.

*What are you most grateful for?*

For the spirituality of the cross that binds us together, for the spirit of

unity in the diversity of our community, for the always timeless motto "The need of the time is the will of God", for the search for new ways to help the needy, the poor and the marginalized, for the statements of our founders that inspire, guide and motivate, for the subdued atmosphere in the crypt that invites us to silence, for the source from which I draw strength, for the enriching experiences of the visitation in different provinces, for the personal encounters with sisters and their touching life stories, for the care, attention and small gestures of love, especially from older sisters, for relationships that make life beautiful and meaningful: I value all of this very much and keep it in my heart. I say goodbye, dear Sisters, but we remain united in thoughts and prayers.

Sister Elsit

### **Sister Anna addresses all the sisters**

Dear Sisters, the General Chapter 2008 changed my life a lot. I was allowed to enter into new tasks,

new worlds, different cultures and other ways of thinking, to learn from them, to get involved, and to experience wonderful encounters. In dancing along with the fiery and fascinating dances of indigenous people, I was able to sense something of the transforming primordial rhythms and sounds at the bottom of life, spirituality in the depth of being.

This vastness and diversity of the Congregation has always touched me, motivated me and enriched me with many treasures. The trust that many of you sisters have always given me has been my joy and support.



Sr. Anna Affolter



Flower at night

Various experiences have also brought me into contact with never imagined dark sides of the Congregation. Where there is much light, there is also much shadow. Some of them lost their terrors because they could be looked at together and changed in the light of God.

The General Chapter of 2022 will greatly change my life again. The most important task that now confronts me in these weeks and the coming months was very aptly expressed by Marie Luise Kaschnitz:

*Do not stop at the pain barrier*

*Do not stop*

*Go one word further*

*One breath*

*Still beyond you*

*Reach out in the void*

*The Easter flower*

With heart full of thanks for all the good, beautiful and colorful living that I could receive and experience, I hope and wish that in our personal, and common challenges, we may succeed time and again, undeterred at the pain barrier, and to take hold of the Easter flower in the void.

Sr. Anna

### **Sister Lucila remembers**

*What do you take along as a precious experience?*

Besides many different tasks and experiences, the personal encounters and conversations during visitations were the most profound and beautiful experiences for me. It was so often that I met the sister for the first time in my life and yet we could exchange so deeply and openly. Several times the sisters said that they had not shared this with anyone until then. So much trust is hardly possible to experience, and I am deeply grateful for every encounter with every single sister. I send my warmest greetings to all of you.

*Would you like to share an experience that you will probably never forget?*

During a visitation in India I was with Sr. Anna Affolter in the plane from Delhi to Bagdogra (INO). On the plane there were many Europeans who spoke Italian. After landing, all these people were looking for a cab and seemed quite lost at the airport. Waiting for the two of us were fellow Indian sisters with the chauffeur and soon we were in the community. From there, each traveled in a different direction. After about two hours of driving, I was welcomed by fellow sisters, with a whole school of children. Often I thought: wherever we go, we are immediately at home. Other people cannot have this experience.

Sr. Lucila



Sr. Lucila

## In Retrospect

Thoughts by Theresia Hauser

Pausing in the passing of time,  
looking back and seeing  
what life has given.  
Wondering,  
how much has been accomplished  
in the decades that have passed.  
Being grateful for the good, the beautiful  
on our way through life.  
Perceiving and letting that to be true,  
how fast everything went by.  
Being amazed again and again,  
to have come through  
through dangers, fears, illness,  
many a harsh disappointment.  
Feeling pain again  
about partings, separations, dying.  
Perhaps making up for mourning.  
Being frightened once again  
about war, injustice, crime,  
the absence of humanity  
in our century.  
Remembering and not forgetting,  
but also allowing joy  
over walls that fell.  
In the passing of time  
to prayerfully remember the protection we have experienced.  
Looking back, discovering:  
We were guided.  
From all that we have experienced  
drawing confidence:  
In every future YOU are our life.

*Theresia Hauser, women's pastor, 1921-2016*

## **You will be My Witnesses, Acts 1:8**

### **Witness of Our Time - Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović**

Provincial Superior of the Province Croatia from 1943 to 1955  
Sr. Meri Gotovac, Đakovo, Province Croatia

In a random sequence we are introducing sisters who lived their religious life in the footsteps of Jesus, and our charism in an impressive way.

Sr. Meri goes one step further: she delves into the life and work of Mother M. Amadeja and introduces us to her saintly life because of the prospect of a beatification process.

Since the article is too voluminous for one issue of Theodosia, we take the liberty of postponing two chapters to a later issue, namely "Testimonies of bishops, priests, sisters and friends collaborators" and "Answers to prayers through the intercession of Mother M. Amadeja."

One more note: The original text in Croatian and the full German-language translation correctly contain many footnotes. Since these refer to Croatian sources, we leave them out for the translation into other languages.

#### **Led by the stars**

One of the leading physicists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Werner Heisenberg, once expressed himself as follows: "Our technologically shaped, democratically diverse world today resembles a huge ship whose iron and steel masses are so strong and large that they attract and confuse the needles of the compass, so that the ship only turns in circles, constantly pointing the direction to itself." In this image of the ship, we can easily recognize today's culture, which sails without orientation, faster and faster, but without a destination. If we want to face the dangers of our time, we must orient ourselves anew by the stars. These stars are saints, witnesses of faith and holiness. They are the real and true

compass of our life, which shows us the way, steep if narrow, but which leads to a sure destination. Following the saints, we follow Christ, the model of all holiness. With his life he made clear to people what it means to be holy and what holiness is appropriate for man. Through Christ in the Holy Spirit we are chosen and called to be holy and blameless. Holiness is God's original plan for man's salvation (Eph 1:1-10).

Besides the already beatified Sisters of our Congregation: Blessed Mother M. Theresa Scherer, Blessed Sister Ulrika Nisch and Blessed Sister Zdenka Schelingova, Divine Providence opens our eyes to another holy Sister, namely Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović, Provincial Superior of the Croatian Province from 1943 to 1955.

## From the life and work of Mother Amadeja

With her self-sacrifice and brave spirit, she shaped the spirit of the entire Croatian Province through her holy life and heroic virtues in the leadership of the Province, especially during the Second World War and the difficult post-war years. This is evidenced by the sisters who are still living and by many written testimonies. Very important is the testimony of Mrs. Zdenka Bienenstock Grünbaum - a then 11-year-old Jewish girl from Osijek, whom Mother Amadeja had saved from Nazi persecution despite the danger to her own life and to the lives of the sisters. This heroic love of Mother M. Amadeja towards the girl, and her gratitude towards her remained in the heart of Mrs. Zdenka all her life. She took this memory with her to America, where she lived with her family. After many years, the Lord touched her heart to proclaim before us and before the world that a holy sister and a "Righteous among the nations" lived among us. Based on her testimonies, in 2009 the State of Israel honored Mother M. Amadeja with the posthumous award of Righteous among the nations. (Righteous among the nations is an honorary



Mother M. Amadeja

title established in Israel after the founding of the state in 1948 for non-Jewish individuals who gave their lives to save Jews from being murdered under Nazi rule during World War II).

This event, as well as the initiative of numerous sisters who immediately after the death of Mother M. Amadeja, began to seek her intercession with God were a challenge for us, the sisters of the Croatian Province, to collect as many original data and testimonies as possible from still living witnesses, as well as archival material, in order to obtain the clearest possible picture of her.

## **Collection from documents and testimonies**

In 2010, when we asked the General Leadership for permission to collect documents about Mother M. Amadeja, we received a positive response. Thereafter, her letters and circulars that she had sent to individual sisters and communities during her tenure as Provincial Superior were taken up by the archives. It was easy to see that from all these writings emerged the authentic spirit of this religious woman, who cannot be admired enough.

The strongest impulse for getting to know the person and life of Mother M. Amadeja was given by the celebration of the 50th anniversary of her death, which lasted from November 26, 2020 to November 26, 2021. (She was born on January 28, 1895 and died on November 26, 1971). We conducted a variety of events and activities during this time, and especially the book, *I Serve God. The spiritual life of Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović*, written by the distinguished theologian, long-time altar boy of our monastery church, Dr. Ivica Raguž, professor for dogmatic at the Catholic theological faculty Đakovo, were aimed at familiarizing the general

public with the personality of Mother M. Amadeja..

Recognizing the holiness of a person and bearing witness to it is part of our responsibility. It is a service to the Gospel to speak of the possibility of holiness, to speak of the life of holiness. We are all invited to this service. We were encouraged to take this step by Fr. Tomislav Mrkonjić, the Consultor of the Congregation for the Processes of the Saints in the Vatican. Based on everything he has heard about Mother M. Amadeja, he believes that there are enough elements to start the process of causa. To this end, he gave us the necessary instructions and willingly offered his collaboration.

### **Who is Mother M. Amadeja?**

Karolina Pavlović was born on January 28, 1895 in Petrovaradin to esteemed parents who lived with their three sons and three daughters in the most beautiful harmony and love, which also shaped Karolina's character. She spent her childhood and earliest youth in the parental home. She completed six grades of elementary school in Petrovaradin and attended seventh and eighth grades in Novi Sad. When the Pavlović family lost all its property, the love and harmony of all family

members came into the forefront all the more. The eldest sister Marica earned money for the education of the younger brothers by sewing. Karolina graduated from business school and got a job in the district office in Zemun. With this, she initially helped bring up her brothers Francis and Joseph. Joseph later became a priest of the Đakovo-Syrmium diocese. Karolina joined the Congregation of Mary in Zemun. There she served as a secretary and took care of girls who were poorly taught about faith. As she says, in Zemun she learned to venerate the Heart of Jesus and to go to the Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent for daily Holy Mass. Observing the sisters, she began to think about the religious vocation. Praying for clarification of these thoughts and on the advice of her confessor, she decided to enter the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross. Karolina entered the convent in Đakovo on November 4, 1922.

When she entered the novitiate on August 12, 1925, she received the religious name Sister M. Amadeja and took her first vows on August 15, 1926.

She completed the Teachers' Training and the Higher Pedagogical Academy in Zagreb in 1929/30. Immediately after her profession, she worked as a

teacher at the State Citizen School in Đakovo until 1930, and from 1930 to 1941 she taught Croatian language, geography and history at the Citizen School of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Đakovo. She was especially devoted to helping disadvantaged children.

In 1937, Sister M. Amadeja was elected as a member of the Provincial Council and in 1940, she was appointed as Assistant to the Provincial Superior. In 1943, she became the Provincial Superior and discharged her duties until 1955. It was during the most difficult years of the World War II and the post-war turmoil.

Faced with the challenges, hardships and difficulties of the war and post-war years, nothing could stop her from doing all she could to maintain the good religious spirit of her sisters and thus the religious community itself. With great and determined courage, she resisted the new communist authorities when they tried to confiscate much of the convent's legitimately acquired property and to forbid the nurses who were employed in public hospitals, to wear the religious habit. Fearlessly she stood up for the sisters and fought for their

rights. When she faced difficulties from opponents of the Church and religious communities, she discussed them with the Bishop of Đakovo, Mons. Antun Akšamović, and developed a confidential relationship with the Archbishop of Zagreb, Blessed Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac. After the Second World War, when the sisters were dismissed en masse from state service, she was supported by the Archbishop of Zagreb, Blessed Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac, in her decision to remain faithful to the Church and to the Congregation, and he blessed her idea of introducing the sisters who were dismissed from state service into the apostolate in the parishes.

What is best known of her so far is her courage and trust in God. She risked her life and that of her sisters by taking in and hiding the Jewish girl Zdenka Bienenstock, who had lost her family because of racist hatred during the war years. Thus she exposed herself and the other sisters to great danger. She was able to hide and save the girl among the boarding school children. The girl lived in Đakovo under a pseudonym from June 1941 to May 1945.

In 2007, Mrs. Zdenka Bienenstock came to Đakovo from the United States to visit the grave of Mother M. Amadeja. In April 2008, she asked Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to investigate the case of Sister M. Amadeja Pavlović and award her the title *Righteous among the nations*. On March 23, 2009, a ceremony was held by the Israeli Embassy in Croatia at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Đakovo, during which Sister M. Madeja Pavlović was awarded the title *Righteous among the Nations*.

After serving as Provincial Superior, Sister M. Amadeja Pavlović served as House Superior at the convent in Sušak, Rijeka from 1955 to 1959. It was also to her great credit that she compiled and wrote down the chronicle of the Province and prepared a detailed list of the nationalized convent assets, which formed the basis for the subsequent process of property restitution. She was transferred to the convent of Vrhovac, in Zagreb, she took care of the candidates who attended various schools there. In 1966 she returned to the provincial house in Đakovo, from where she was transferred to Sušak in 1971. She died suddenly there on November 26, 1971, and was buried in Đakovo, in the grave of the Provincial Superiors.



Being awarded the title "Righteous among the Nations"

### **From her spiritual life**

There would be much to say and write about the spiritual life of Mother M. Amadeja. One thing is obvious. Whoever approaches her texts and writings are fascinated by her inner harmony and wisdom, the faith, the tenderness, the courage, the justice and the love of this holy religious woman. The reader is impressed by her life and words, which are permeated by God's Spirit. He cannot remain indifferent, but feels drawn to follow her, to call upon her in his intentions. To delve a little into the richness of her spiritual life, let us be enriched

by a few quotations from her letters written to the sisters on various occasions.

In a letter to the sisters in Tvrđa, Osijek, she encourages them to live by faith:

*A religious woman who lives by faith knows that the good Lord has prepared precisely this house, this community, these sisters, this superior, this work that she has accepted in obedience, especially for her, because He wants her to reach her holiness in this community, with these sisters, specifically under the leadership of this superior and in these situations. Here God is preparing*

*special graces for her. But the good God respects our free will so much that He leaves to each individual whether he wants to use these graces in his daily life, or whether he wants to ignore and reject them, and thus suffer that great degree of perfection that he could reach through God's determination, as neglected and rejected graces. The sister who lives by faith is always cheerful, always content, not interested in worldly things, and rejoices in her own community.*



Karolina, a young woman

What has really left a mark in the memory of the Croatian Province is her courageous and fearless stand before the communist authorities when they tried to ban the sisters from wearing the habit. From the chronicle of the Croatian Province we learn the following: When the Communists took power, they did not want Sisters in public service, so they began to dismiss them 'en masse', and where the sisters had to remain at work because of lack of substitutes, they were asked to take off their religious habit and continue working in civil dress. They were subjected to great pressure. In faith and in the hope that the Lord would be with her and her sisters, she answered the state authorities courageously: *If we accept a public service in civil dress, we would be doing a great service to the state, which is afraid to prohibit by law the religious dress before the public. Therefore, by its actions, the authorities wanted to force us to voluntarily take off the religious dress and appear in civil dress. We maintain our position of preserving our religious dress to the closest limits of what is possible. If the religious*



Karolina, a candidate

*dress would be forbidden by the law, then the Holy Church will speak its own law. Then this will be the will of God for us, and then we can count on His grace and help. At least we will not have to reproach ourselves for having given the legal advantage to the ungodly authorities and for having done them a great service in this difficult and drastic time for religious life.*

After much pressure, persuasion and intimidation of the sisters in public service from the authorities, Mother M. Amadeja was determined to encourage the sisters to hold out, to preserve their religious dress at all costs. She justified her position by

*saying, "One thing is certain, the authorities will not stop demanding that we take off our religious dress at work. It is only the beginning. It will be followed by the deprivation of the common dining room for sisters and the pressure to go to the common cafeteria because they are no longer different from others. Then comes the compulsion to attend various meetings, then the prohibition of common prayer and church attendance, and everything else that leads directly to the obstruction and destruction of common religious life. And where there are no such institutions, there is no more monastic life. That is their real goal, not to mention the confusion and scandal that the sisters in civil dress will cause among the good people, and beyond that, all the bullying and ridicule that those who are impudent and to whom we are a thorn in the flesh will allow themselves.*

On July 14, 1954, Mother M. Amadeja wrote to Blessed Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac. He understands her, encourages her, and advises what must be done to persevere in the consistent implementation of her views. Some of his letters bear witness to this. With faith and hope for victory, the good Mother M.

Amadeja Pavlović won the struggle for the realization of the rights of nurses to wear the religious habit in public service. On November 30, 1954, she again informed Blessed Cardinal Stepinac, who praised her for this in a letter on November 30, 1954, adding that the communist authorities nevertheless "respect and appreciate those who courageously defend their religious convictions, even if they outwardly behave differently." Mother M. Amadeja affirms her trust in God's help and protection

in difficult historical circumstances with the words she addressed to her sisters in a letter in 1949: *You must not forget that the dear God carries us in His arms through all these afflictions which we do not like, and where, humanly speaking, we do not wish to go.... Through all these humiliations, the dear God will lead us to his great nearness and to his great heights.* She reveals her great trust in God above all by praying for herself and for others. The sisters testify to this in several places. Sister Lauda Adamović writes in her



Final profession in Đakovo, 15 August, 1932

memories of Mother M. Amadeja: She was always collected. She always went to the church gallery. Her eyes lowered, she did not look around. Sister Charitas Schmidt also testified: *"She spent a lot of time in prayer. She was very happy about every sister, and if we did not have what we needed to live, she said, let us ask the good Lord to provide us with what we need."*

In the life of Mother M. Amadeja, one of the main guidelines was love for neighbor. Her great love for God and neighbor radiates clearly from many testimonies about her life. Sr. Beatissima Beretovac testifies to the courage and love she had for her sisters during the most difficult days of the war: *In 1945 I was in Donji Miholjac. It was war front there and because of that the connection with Đakovo was broken. One night, Mother M. Amadeja reached us, passing through the gunfire and over the rubble (with the help of our soldiers). We were four sisters in the community and sought refuge from the gunfire together with our fellow residents in a hollow in the straw of a neighboring chamber. The night visit of our dear mother surprised us very much. She spoke to us in a half-destroyed school building. She then took me, the youngest, with her to Đakovo.*

Her trust in God was particularly glowing in times of war horrors and adversities. One of the sisters who knew Mother M. Amadeja well and lived with her testifies about her extraordinary faith in God's providence or her hope that the Lord will (provide): *In many events, that is, in difficulties and dangers, she was a model of trust and unshakable faith in the providence of God. When the communist authorities stole the harvest that had just been gathered from the granary, and Mother M. Amadeja went to the bakery to make sure that the last handful of flour had been kneaded, she went to church and said to the sisters: "Sisters, pray to St. Joseph for this intention." After two hours, the sister came from the convent gate and invited Mother M. Amadeja to the convent courtyard. The father of our Sr. Cecilia Shen came with a cart full of flour, grain, corn and gave everything to Mother M. Amadeja. She was very surprised and asked, "How do you know that we have no more grain? We did not tell anyone about it". He replied, "We saw that everything was taken away from you, and we said, "Our sisters have fed so many hungry people, we can't let them starve now." Mother M. Amadeja said then, "This is an obvious miracle of St. Joseph!" It was clear to all of us that her*



Mrs. Zdenka Bienenstock Grünbaum in Đakovo, 2007

*lively, unwavering faith had been rewarded.*

In addition to caring for her sisters as Provincial Superior during the difficult days of World War II, Mother M. Amadeja left indelible traces in many places and situations. This is also testified by Mrs. Zdenka Bienenstock, whom Mother M. Amadeja saved from Nazi persecution when she was a girl: *"As a small child (under 14) I did not have to wear a yellow bracelet with a Jewish star and did not have to be registered as a Jew. The Mother Superior, Sister Amadeja Pavlovic, was the only one to whom my Jewish origin was known. I attended the Sisters' school and lived in the Konvikt under the pseudo name as a refugee child from Bosnia. They called me Zdenka, but in my*

*documents there was the name of a deceased child, which I have forgotten. Venerable Mother Amadeja was really like a mother to me; she invited me to her office from time to time, asked how I was doing, and she gave me all kinds of little things, like soap, which was a big thing in that war time. Because of me, Mother Amadeja exposed herself and the whole convent to danger. The crimes of harboring, aiding or rescuing Jews were punishable by death. She kept my secret despite the danger to herself and to the whole community in the convent. The fact that I survived the terrible period of World War II, graduated from Hebrew University and have a wonderful family is due to the generosity of spirit, deep faith and courage of the Provincial Superior Mother M. Amadeja.*

In her letters and circulars written to the communities of sisters, she often emphasized love for the Lord and for each other. At the conferences of the house superiors, she addressed the following words to the sisters: *If we know how to suffer for Christ's sake and out of love for Christ, we will be like him. He worked,*

*suffered and humbled himself all his life. He experienced misjudgment and injustice. He was misunderstood and persecuted. He suffered and endured hardships of the heart and soul, precisely because of me and because of each of us, so that he sweated blood. Both in his work and in his suffering and in all the humiliations until his terrible death, he carried me in his memory. For my sake, he endured everything so that I became a child of God.... And now, at this very time, in this very place, in this very duty, he waits for me to continue the work of his redemption, by the very sacrifice, suffering and forgetting myself.*

*And when others see us persistently offering ourselves and doing what Jesus asks of us... carrying out the mission of his love, when they see our character, our goodness, our honesty, our sincerity, our perseverance in doing good, then they will come to know Christ and recognize him in us, because we are like him.*

Sisterly love was especially close to Mother M. Amadeja's heart, and she therefore recommends it to the sisters. To the community of

sisters in Sisak she writes: *Dear sisters, respect one another! We are all children of one Father in Heaven, and we are all redeemed by the Blood of the Son of God, and we are all His brides. Let us be kind to one another. Let us rejoice when one succeeds in her work. Let us praise, let us rejoice together. This makes life bearable and fellowship beautiful. We judge gently. Each of us has her own weaknesses, and we must bear with each other. And the better we understand our sister, the closer we will be to the dear God, the easier we will forgive and excuse each other.*

One of the most important characteristics of Mother M.



Graves of Provincials in Đakovo

Amadeja is the fact that despite the numerous difficulties and prohibitions of the communist regime, she was in contact with two saints and martyrs of that time, namely Blessed Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac and the Orthodox bishop, St. Varnava Nastić. She not only wrote letters to Blessed Cardinal Stepinac, but also visited him in his house arrest in native village Krašić, where he was imprisoned in the rectory after the imprisonment in Lepoglava from 1951 until his death on February 10, 1960. There she provided him with various necessities and books. In the correspondence with the Orthodox bishop Varnavatripp particularly her ecumenical spirit became prominent.

For all that is written here, there is no better summary of Mother M. Amadeja's life and work than her own words, which she wrote down as resolutions at the end of her spiritual retreat in 1950: *For Him, for the Congregation, for the sisters, I sacrifice myself. I will not spare myself. I will not seek anything for myself. I will forget*

*myself. I will not rely on myself. I will not complain or talk about myself, only before the tabernacle....* After the light of God that shines on us through the character and life of Mother M. Amadeja, we can only thank God for this wonderful star that draws us to Jesus with its light. She, who during her lifetime, was ready to sacrifice everything, including her own life, to help others in their needs, surely now wants to and can help us even more. Let us experience God's goodness through the intercession of the late Mother M. Amadeja Pavlović!

### **Note**

All those who feel the need to turn to Mother M. Amadeja in prayer for your intentions can post your intentions on the website: <https://sestre-sv-kriza.hr/majka-amadeja-karolina-pavlovic-1895-1971>.

Every 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, the convent community includes in the celebration of Holy Mass all concerns that have been offered through the intercession of Mother M. Amadeja.

# Advent and Christmas Celebrations in Uganda

Compiled by Sr. Felicitas Mukhwana and Sr. Veera Bara

From our fellow sisters we learn about the rich treasure of customs in Uganda, where Christmas finds expression on different levels.

## Diversity

Uganda is a member of the East African countries, dominated by different ethnic groups and languages. She is rich in African culture with diversity due to the different indigenous groups. I would like to draw your attention, that Uganda as a country was Christianized back in 1877 by the White Fathers. As a country, the Advent and Christmas celebrations are not only viewed from a religious angle but as social and external preparations and celebrations.

## Customs of Advent

Advent, a period of waiting for the birth of Christ as well understood by many Ugandans, is celebrated in different ways. We take a look at how physically, advent is celebrated. First and foremost, many Ugandans pay attention to homesteads. The houses always get a new look, from smearing and coloring especially those with earthen and semi-permanent houses. It is always followed by drawings on walls, hanging pictures, and putting various writings on walls. For those with





permanent houses, at least, painting is done and all the necessary cleaning within the house is done. This follows the cleaning of compounds especially pruning of trees and daily sweeping of the compounds. It is within this period of Advent that most homes in Uganda observe the cleanliness of the highest order. During this time, many people look for new outfits and referred to as “Christmas clothes.

“This is the time when markets are crowded, and tailors keep busy stitching because the demand is too high.

Purchasing food items mainly ‘Matooke’, millet and dry cassava, rice, and wheat flour is part of anticipating the Christmas day. People also celebrate this advent season by visiting friends and at times partying and engaging in sports.

Looking at the spiritual aspect of how advent is celebrated, the church ministers focus on preaching the message of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation of lives. Seeking to live a peaceful life with our neighbors and being charitable is highly preached. All these celebrations take place anticipating a bigger celebration which is Christmas. Christmas celebration begins on 24th December with vigil. This is the only night; one can easily notice new faces in the church. Many wait to go to church on this day however much they have not been actively going to church.

### **Christmas traditions, Christmas season**

On Christmas day the churches are always full. People also take time to celebrate with all varieties of food and drinks and, loud music played in every corner of the

homestead. It is during this time with the poor. In conclusion, advent and Christmas celebrations are highly valued, anticipated, and celebrated not only by Christians but even the Muslims and other religions in Uganda.

In Religious houses, Christmas is celebrated equally to family feasts, whereby the members of the same community gather community wise. Student sisters look forward to returning to the communities and joining in preparing themselves spiritually, mentally, and physically. We pack

that many also remember to share charitable Christmas gifts for the poor and neighbors, like sugar, rice, meat, bread, card, etc. In the last weeks of the advent, the poor people start knocking at our doors for some help to celebrate Christmas. We sisters of Mercy try to organize some type of Christmas gathering for HIV Aids patients, old people, co-workers of the schools and health centers, school children, and so on.

Together with the external preparation and celebration, we make sure that we have a recollection, sacrament of reconciliation, renewal chapters,



taking 'Christmas partners' to pray for etc. We participate in church liturgies, go to the villages to conduct the Christmas service, or accompany the priests to share the joy with the Christians of outstations. Normally sisters in the communities take up cooking since cooks go to join their families. In the afternoon of Christmas day, we come together to disclose our Christmas partners and exchange gifts with each other. The superior of the

communities surprise the community members with some Christmas gifts. From 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> December some communities join the deanery Christmas gatherings or picnics depending on the arrangements of the communities. If possible, we try to organize the gathering at the vicariate level where we celebrate the mass and contribute the food items from different communities and spend the day celebrating and sharing the joy of Christmas.



## Prayerful Closing of the Year

Good Father

at the end of this year I thank you  
for all that has been successful,  
for everything that has made me happy and joyful,  
and for the strength to endure  
what has been a failure,  
and what made me sad.

I let go of what has passed  
and surrender them into your hands,  
so that my hands are empty for all that  
what you will give me in the coming year.

Full of confidence I look  
to the new year,  
even though I know  
that it will bring not only joy,  
but also sorrow.

I ask You,  
do not let me forget in my happiness  
that others need my support,  
and let me find people in sorrow  
who are there for me and help me carry.

© Gisela Baltés, graduate theologian and author

## Information from the General Leadership

### Appointments

**On July 02, 2022**, the General Leadership appointed to the Vicariate Leadership team of the Brazil Vicariate, for a term of three years:

Vicariate Superior:

Sr. Cláudia Regina dos Santos  
3<sup>rd</sup> term

Councilors:

Sr. Ledineia Pereira dos Santos  
Sr. Rosângela Maria Santana da Silva  
Sr. Ana Helena Santana do Vale

Official start: January 25, 2023

We express our heartfelt gratitude to the newly appointed and reappointed sisters of the Vicariate team for the Vicariate Brazil, for their willingness to serve in this demanding ministry. We wish them strength, courage and confidence for the task they have taken on, as well as God's continual blessing.

We also thank the outgoing Vicariate Councilors Sr. Alcenia Barreto da Paz, Sr. Beatrice Krstacic and Sr. Terezinha de Jesus Bernardes for their dedicated service for the good of

the sisters, and the Vicariate and wish them all the best and God's blessing in their future work.

**On July 05, 2020**, the General Leadership appointed as Provincial Leadership for the province of Slovakia for a term of three years:

Provincial Superior:

Sr. Mária Terézia Dobrovičová,  
1<sup>st</sup> term

Assistant:

Sr. Tatiana Repková

Councilors:

Sr. Jozefína Jedličková  
Sr. Monika Forgáčová  
Sr. Marianna Petro-Venceľová

Official start:

February 15, 2023

We express our heartfelt gratitude to the newly appointed sisters of the Provincial Council for the Province Slovakia for their readiness for this demanding ministry.

We wish them strength, courage and confidence for the assigned task, as well as God's continual blessing. We sincerely thank the outgoing Provincial Superior Sr. Šebastiána Tuptová and the

outgoing Provincial Councilor Sr. Terézia Benedikta Majerčáková from the Province of Slovakia for their dedicated service for the good of fellow sisters, and the Province. We wish them God's blessings, and all the best in their future ministries.

**In mid-October 2022,** the General Administration appointed Sr. Rebekka Breitenmoser as Provincial Assistant for the

Province Switzerland for the course of the already existing term of office.

We wish Sr. Rebekka a good start in her new office and God's blessing.

Sr. Marie-Marthe Schönenberger, previous Provincial Assistant, was elected Superior General by the General Chapter on August 18, 2022, and another sister had to be appointed in her place for the office of Provincial Assistant.

Quarterly  
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