

**WE CELEBRATE 150 YEARS
OF GRACE, FIDELITY
AND APOSTOLIC CREATIVITY**



1871-2021
SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINT MARY

DUC IN ALTUM!

150

years of grace, fidelity and apostolic creativity



1871 - 2021



Introduction

From May 3, 1871 to May 3, 2021, one hundred and fifty years of history since our birth as a Congregation. Our desire must be to enter into this history to discover “... *the Congregation as a whole: in what it lived together, suffered and hoped together, together it built and feared, together it organized and purified*”.¹

It is necessary that together we support the events of this historical line, because they're a message for us today that reveals the action of God in our family life.

This brief historical excursus is dedicated to the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary and to those who have the desire to know the origins and developments of this Congregation.

Its purpose is to cover the most crucial events of this long history of foundation to discover “*the spirit, to understand the constants that had become the charism of the Congregation, because it had determined its initiatives and choices, because it had characterized the life of every day, because, ultimately, it had become the style of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary*”.²

The chronological criterion has been chosen to report the various events following as a guide “*The Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria, history and spirit*”, by

¹ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria, la storia e lo spirito*, Torino, 1997, p. 6.

² Ivi, p. 5.

Lorenzo da Fara. The history of the 150 years has been divided into three periods. At the end of each section, reflections, questions and prayers were added to become aware that all of us today are part of it.

It was difficult to summarize in a few pages so many years of life, identifying the stages, taking into account not so much the number of the years, but rather the decisive turning points.

To make this history stand out as a history of salvation, we refer to the Word of God through the various titles and subtitles.

The logo created for this celebration consists of:

- **The name:** Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria symbolizes the Congregation
- **Open hands:** symbolize to each of us who thanks and offers.
- **The book:** it is the story from its foundation to today. The book is open because the story continues.
- **150 years:** the phase of our history
- **The cross with the heart:** symbolizes the love of Jesus crucified for us, the fundamental inspiration of the spirituality of the Foundress and ours.
- **Duc in altum!:** it is an invitation to all of us, today, to dare to set sail in the sea of life.

The memory of the past teaches us that history always has “*courses and recourses*”, that living always has its efforts, its challenges, its joys and its hopes. Only God has the past, the present and the future in his hands because **He is the eternal present** and deigns to

build the history through us. Only the present belongs to us. Let us live it, therefore, in the love of Christ, convinced that “... *we know that everything contributes to the good of those who love God, who have been called according to his plan ...* ***So who will separate us from the love of Christ?*** *Perhaps the tribulation, the anguish, the persecution, the hunger, the nakedness, the danger, the sword? I am in fact persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither present nor future... can never separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord”*.³

Suor Rosaria Nicoletti

Sister Rosaria Nicoletti

Superior General

³ Rm 8,28 ss

FIRST PERIOD

1871-1940

1

AT THE BEGINNING GOD THOUGHT OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY OF SAINT MARY

1.1. **The torch of Christ's Charity inherited from Mother Clarac (1871-1887)**

Mother Clarac, from the beginning of her life, was touched by the warmth of charity in the Vincentian style that taught her to love *“with her hands, with her feet, with her heart, with all of herself”*. *“Charity is inventive to infinity”*, motto of San Vincenzo, was her driving force, which motivated her, made her dare, made her strong in every situation. She had her eyes open to the society in which she lived, a society that was changing “foundations”,⁴ she took care of its poverty, she listened to the cry of the young, the poor and families.

She was a consecrated woman, faithful to the Vincentian charism, but at the same time creative as to make her a daughter of charity, original because she gave different answers to the needs of her time. She was able to transmit this *“fire of charity”* to her first daughters by

⁴ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 11.

defining a lifestyle: “... to dedicate themselves to the most hidden works, to the most neglected and forgotten souls ... she wanted her daughters as little gleaners\workers in the vast field of the Church, and to work only for God”.⁵

She gave her daughters two precious jewels: love for the young and the poor, and taught them to follow the “*method of the heart*” in carrying out the mission.⁶

The 1871-1887 period was marked by an unshakable faith in God’s will for her, by the appreciation and support from the Church, by all the people who understood the importance of her charitable actions and benefited, but also from misunderstandings, from lack of communication with Bishop Lorenzo Gastaldi and with the Daughters and Dames of Charity. Despite her struggles, Mother Clarac dared to expand her charism of charity in Turin, in Marche and in Civitavecchia.



To live with greater fidelity

When the fire of charity is fed by the Charity of Christ, no one and nothing can extinguish it.

The motivation of Mother Clarac’s action, especially in the darkest moments, led to one question: what idea of life does it propose to me?

“Mother, we are your daughters, reveal the secret of your resilience”.

⁵ Ivi, p. 25.

⁶ Ivi, p. 26

1.2. “Mother Clarac planted, Mother Odile watered, God made it grow” (1887-1910)

On June 21, 1887, the torch of charity was passed to Mother Odile Serra of Santa Maria, who had grown up and trained in the shadow of Mother Clarac from the age of 5, the torch of charity was passed to feed it and put it on the bushel to illuminate inside and out. Mother Odile accepted with faith from the hands of the Foundress to be appointed first Superior General of the nascent Religious Family.

To enter Mother Odile’s mind and heart, we report here some of her thoughts faithfully recorded in the diary written from July 1887 to April 1888: *“O death, how cruel you are, you ruthlessly kidnap what is dearest to us in the world, forcing us to bury the lifeless body in the bowels of the earth”*.⁷

It was a cry of pain, but also of help.

In fact, on 11 August 1887, she wrote: *“Lord, Lord! Come to our aid! And you venerated our Mother, assist and protect us so that your Works, in peace, modesty and charity, continue to prosper, but above all, pray for us, for me who need it so much!”*.⁸

These are notes that give us a glimpse of Mother Odile’s heart when she takes upon herself the responsibility of leading the Institute.

⁷ *Diario di Madre Odile*, p. 149.

⁸ Ivi, p. 169.

From 21 June 1887 to 7 January 1888 it was a period of pain, of supplication because the memory of Mother Clarac was still very much alive ... these expressions in the diary point out: *“Oh Mother, if you see your daughters from above! Now that we are missing you down here, what empty, what desolation in our house. Our Mother, welcome our fervent prayer and pray to God for us who are left alone to mourn your departure!”*⁹ And again: *“It is true you left us as a memento a ‘testament of love’, your family fortune, and the foundations of a vast building. But in the face of so much arduous work, our courage fails and the future scares us”*.¹⁰

After five months, on January 7, 1888, with a confident heart she noted: *“Let’s begin a new era! and this diary will mark, if God wills, one by one the days that will follow, narrating with simplicity of style and sincerity of heart, the joys, the troubles, the tribulations, the crosses, the lucky events, the heavenly graces, the humiliations, the glories, the defeats, the victories, the battles, in short everything that can interest this holy and pious Institute...., God is strong and Almighty and his works are impregnable”*.¹¹

Mother Odile, with this faith in the strength that comes to her from God, understands clearly, almost immediately, that she has to face three important tasks: the relationship with the Non-profit Organization

⁹ Ivi, p. 178.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 189

¹¹ Ivi, p. 187.

and with the ecclesiastical authority, the internal organization of the community.¹²

After patient consultations, the Board of Directors of the Moral Entity understood that its task was only of supervision and that the sisters had to enjoy full freedom of action in accordance with the spirit of the statute drawn up by the Foundress.

With her patience, wisdom and determination she faced the process of purification, vocational development and new foundations.

From the very beginning, Mother Odile felt the need to have her own house independent of the Saint Mary Institute. With this dream in her heart, in 1904 she bought a piece of land in Borgo Crimea and in the spring of 1906 construction work began. The house was inaugurated in June 1911, with the temporary chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel. Later this house became the driving force of the Congregation and the official seat of the novitiate.¹³

*“While life unfolded between ups and downs; between successes and failures, between consensus and resistance, a whirlwind was gathering outside the Institute, which seemed, at least for a moment, to threaten the existence of the Institute”.*¹⁴

¹² L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 31.

¹³ Ivi, pp. 34-35

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 38.

1.3. “... A great wind storm arose and threw waves into the boat. He awoke, rebuked the wind and said to the sea: ‘Be quiet, calm down!’ The wind stopped and there was a great calm ...”¹⁵

36 years had passed since 1871, the date of separation from the Daughters of Charity, but a true and formal ecclesiastical approval did not yet exist. The Daughters of Charity did not see well that the sisters of Clarac continued their apostolate without a clear distinction of dress; all this created the need to clearly see the position of the Institute of Santa Maria towards the Church. The bishops in whose dioceses the sisters worked were consulted by the Sacred Congregation. They, while appreciating its charitable service and religious lifestyle, nevertheless pointed out the lack of canonical approval.

In the autumn of 1908, Abbot Mauro Serafini made a canonical visit to the Archdiocese of Turin. On that occasion he was able to learn about the situation of the Institute of Santa Maria. After various information, two warnings came: to radically change the habit and fully accept the indications of the ecclesiastical authority.

October 15, 1909, a painful event occurred; the following text was published in the “*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*”: “... there exists in Turin a female institute called S. Maria, with dependent houses in Civitavecchia and Grottammare, whose members wear a uniform, almost perfectly identical to that of the Daughters of the Charity

¹⁵ Mc 4,37ss.

of *St. Vincent de Paul ...*”.¹⁶ The purpose of this publication was to prevent any misunderstanding with the Daughters of Charity and to declare the Institute of Mother Clarac a non-religious institution. In the sisters of the Institute there was consternation and almost panic, in fact they did not know the correspondence between the various bishops, the visitor of Turin and the Roman Congregations. It was truly a storm that could have caused the boat to sink!

On October 20, 1909 the text of the announcement of the Sacred Congregation of Religious was presented formally to the Superior General, Odile Serra.

30 October 1909, Mother Odile wrote a letter to the Archbishop, in which she pointed out her and the sisters’ innocence and their willingness to do whatever was required to receive the approval they thought they had.

The Sacred Congregation of Religious appointed Abbot Mauro Serafini as an apostolic visitor. The fruits of this visit were plentiful: first of all the definitive change of the dress, which was the subject of so many difficulties; the official name of the Congregation, “*Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary*”; the drafting of the first Constitutions and many practical suggestions about the formation of the sisters and the renovation of houses. It was the Abbot Serafini himself who proposed to the Bishop of Turin, Agostino Richelmy, the diocesan approval of the Congregation, which took place **on 20 September 1910**.

Abbot Serafini, in greeting the sisters at the end of the apostolic visit, left a memory and an invitation:

¹⁶ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 45.

*“Now before the Church you are really religious, so thank the Lord for it and try to make yourselves worthy ... make yourselves holy, if you make progress in the religious virtues God will bless your Institute ...”*¹⁷

At first, this whole process seemed negative for the Institute, but in the end it proved to be providential because it gave way to achieve diocesan approval. It actually constituted a new birth with all the fatigue, wonder and joy that each birth brings with it.



To live with greater fidelity

When Jesus is in the boat of the Congregation, even if He sleeps, the boat does not sink and reaches the port safe and sound.

If we carefully read the history of the Institute we understand that it has overcome the various initial challenges with prayer, unity, humility in accepting change and faith in the leadership of the Church.

Do we also have the attitudes of our first sisters to overcome today's difficulties? What were the ways in which the Lord guided the Congregation?

“Mother Odile, help us not to forget the ‘testament of love’ left us by the Foundress and obtain from God a clear, humble and strong gaze like yours, to continue to sail safely in the infinite sea of Christ’s love”.

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 57.

THE CONGREGATION IS LIKE THE BRANCH
WHICH JOINED WITH THE VINE, JESUS,
GIVES COPIUS FRUITS OF CHARITY

2.1. **“I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing”¹⁸**

The period 1912-1915 was a time of arrangement and organization.¹⁹

The first sisters remained rooted in the true vine which is Christ Jesus and kept alive the courage of the love of the Foundress.

On June 21, 1912, the 25th anniversary of Mother Clarac’s death was celebrated and consequently the 25th anniversary of Mother Odile’s generalate. On this occasion, Mother Odile asked Sister Luigia Aimo to write her memories of the Foundress, which she wanted to title *“Pie memories”*. In her work, the sister tells with great affection, warmth, almost vehemence, the story of Mother Clarac, so tested in life, so despised and ignored.²⁰

¹⁸ Gv 15,5.

¹⁹ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 59.

²⁰ A. VAUDAGNOTTI, *Con Cuore di Madre. Madre Odile Serra di Santa Maria, Apostola della Carità*, a cura di Domenico Agasso jr., Torino, 2011, p. 109.

In September 1912 the **I General Chapter** was celebrated at Villa Maria, with about ten sisters. This event meant a rich experience for the Congregation, which was also taking on its juridical face. General Mother Odile was elected Superior because she had shown wisdom, maturity and spirituality, and Sister Agostina Rota Vicar.

The words of Jesus *“whoever remains in me bears much fruit”*, were realized in the life of Sister Agostina Rota and Sister Giustina Valperga, the first branches, who for about 40 years remained faithful to the charism of charity and who unfortunately died precisely in this period. Sister Agostina Rota died holy **on January 24, 1913** in the house of St. Pius V. She was always close to Mother Clarac, before and after 1871. She was sweet and respectful, her tender motherhood combined with the authority of life made her a born educator, almost the moral center of the religious community. Sister Giustina Valperga died suddenly **on February 20, 1914** and left a very precious inheritance: she was *“all goodness and charity”*, to name her was to recall God’s mercy, because her heart could not tolerate someone suffering; *“... She gave everything, she forgave everything, she consoled everyone, for everyone she was ready to sacrifice herself, to give, even if she needed her life”*.²¹

²¹ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, pp. 61-64.



To live with greater fidelity

These two examples of life and others were the manure that made the branches of the Congregation grow.

Are we too willing, like these two sisters, to give everything, to forgive everything, to console everyone, to be ready to sacrifice ourselves, to give life, if necessary?

“Dear Sisters, now that you contemplate God Love with your face uncovered, obtain for us the fire of divine charity to be able to give ourselves totally in the service of the spiritually and materially poor and to be willing like you to any sacrifice in order to make our religious family grow in holiness”.

2.2. **“And nobody puts new wine in old wineskins ... New wine must be put in new wineskins”²²**

The years 1915-1918 were the years during which important events took place for the Congregation, including the third and fourth General Chapter, the assistance in field Hospital, and the opening of the first house in Calabria, in Mormanno.

In the summer of 1915 the **III General Chapter** was celebrated in the House of Good Counsel. The need for a change was felt in the air, which was considered

²² Lc 5,37-38

a normal phenomenon, given that since 1887 Mother Odile carried the weight of the government. This feeling was not a lack of trust and respect for her person and for her actions. In the end, however, the Capitulars decided to re-elect her Superior General. After the Chapter, the commitment to take up the biography of the Foundress again emerged, for which Sister Teresa Porta and Sister Luigia Aimo met the people who had known Sister Clarac to collect her precious testimonies.

World War I was a time of storm for everyone.

In the autumn of 1915, the medical officer, Dr. Goffredo Barabaschi, asked for a group of sisters for the direction and service of the field hospital no. 202, in the Castelfranco Veneto area. The service was accepted because it was a service of charity, love for the Fatherland and also an explicit recommendation made by Mother Clarac in her will. Among the first five sisters sent was Sister Emidia Bianchi, Superior, who was later elected Mother General. The service of our sisters in this field Hospital was a strong experience; one can understand from the letter that Sister Matilde wrote to Mother General: *“From morning to evening, I am always around, washing these poor, wounded soldiers, cutting nails, bringing food, giving medicines, comforting them as much as I can so that they can trust in God, this is the daily work, I never occupy the chair, but always happy to be able to help these brothers of ours”*,²³ this was the rhythm of all the sisters. This experience, which lasted two years, served to measure the physical and moral

²³ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 70.

strength of the Sisters of the Congregation, to form them in a strong, austere and essential style of service, a style that has always distinguished our religious family.

On July 5, 1918, the house in *Mormanno* in the Diocese of *Cassano all'Jonio* was opened. This was an important experience because it was like going abroad, very far from the Mother House and also entering a different culture. When in 1917, Mother Odile and Sister Teresa Porta went to Rome to participate in the canonization of Giuseppe Cottolengo, they went to the Pope in audience, from whom they received encouragement and the exhortation “*to go prepared to make many sacrifices for God*” and go “*always forward with courage in the Lord*”.²⁴ In Mormanno the sisters had an enthusiastic and generous choral welcome. Their presence and witness was truly a seed of grace.

On May 27, 1917, Pope Benedict XV promulgated Canon Law which required the temporariness of Major Superiors. Sister Odile was Superior General since 1887, she had reached the maximum canonical limit. The experiences lived during the war had forced the sisters to take on new, personal and heavy responsibilities, at the same time the conviction emerged that they had assimilated the spirit of the Foundress and of the Congregation. It was certainly a phenomenon of growth and maturity, a different way of remaining faithful to the origins, but also open to the future. Every newness, in fact, brings suffering and storm, but with faith in the presence of Jesus one is not afraid of new situations.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 76.

In September 1918, in the **IV General Chapter**, Sister Maria Bo, was elected Mother General Sister Emidia Bianchi First Councilor and Vicar. All the other members were also new. The rotation, wanted by canonical legislation, was lived with serenity and without controversy.

From 1871 to 1918 47 years passed in which the transmission and assimilation of the charism given by God to Mother Clarac and the structuring and consolidation by Mother Odile took place.



To live with greater fidelity

Up to this point of the history, the Congregation had lived around two figures: Mother Clarac and Mother Odile, comparable to the old but good wine of the Gospel, and had assimilated their spirit, wisdom and style.

Are we also willing to be new wineskins for a new wine?

Do we cultivate openness to change and trust in the ability of the sisters?

“Lord, we thank you for giving the Congregation these two shining example and the courage to put new wine in new wineskins, thus welcoming the new times of the Congregation and grant us the gift of serving, without being protagonist, with humility and simplicity in the Church, field hospital”.

2.3. **“If the grain of wheat fallen to the ground does not die, it remains alone; if it dies, it produces a lot of fruit”²⁵**

That from 1919 to 1930 was a period marked by the expansion of our Congregation to the central-southern islands of Italy.

The three years of generalate of Mother Maria Bo, spiritual daughter of Sister Odile, constituted a short period of providential transition. We remember her as a woman of humble and discreet courage and capable of creating mediations between the inevitable tensions.

The total dedication to God and neighbor of Mother Maria Bo and our sisters can be considered as the seed that fell to the ground and dies and bears much fruit. From 1918 to 1946 (a period that includes 3 generalates: that of Mother Maria Bo, that of Mother Emidia Bianchi and that of Mother Teresa Porta) the Congregation was consolidated and organized internally and externally and had a rich diffusion. In fact, it appears that 42 houses were opened in these 28 years: this is a sign of vitality, growth and expansion. The sisters settled in very different cultural areas that required adaptability and a different way of thinking and living. The orientation for the Congregation was clear: the preferential choice for the little ones, for orphans, for the youth, for the elderly and the sick ... it is also significant that 32 houses have opened in the central-southern islands. It was a pastoral choice that made them prefer the path of more difficult

²⁵ Gv 12,24.

and less gratifying services. Collaboration in the parish pastoral was a constant choice of the Congregation.

Two important events marked this part of history: the orphanage and the Sanctuary of Good Council, in Via Curtatone 17, in Turin. Already Sister Agostina dreamed of establishing an orphanage, even Mother Odile wished to welcome, especially after the Second World War, the orphans of war, but their desire took time to be realized.

In July 1919 the first orphans arrived and gradually their number increased. It was truly a need of the moment to welcome them, giving them a home and a family that would accompany their growth with love. It was a work of exquisite charity.

On 18 July 1920 the first stone of the Sanctuary dedicated to Our Lady of Good Council was laid. Even Pope Benedict X, on March 15, 1920, sent his blessing with these words: *“Appreciating the thought of erecting a Shrine in Turin in honor of Our Lady of Good Counsel, with an attached boarding school for war orphans ... we bless the benefactors and especially the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary”*.²⁶ The sanctuary was inaugurated from **10 to 15 June 1922**. These were days of celebration especially for the sisters.

On February 28, 1921, in the **V General Chapter**, Sister Emidia Bianchi was elected Superior General. Her generalate lasted from 1921 to 1930. She was a strong, upright, strong-willed, outspoken, outgoing and sensitive woman with different service experiences. Her

²⁶ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, p. 87.

election was lived with trepidation. The tradition was represented by Sister Odile and the innovation by Sister Emidia. Slowly the Congregation began to breathe with both lungs and found within itself the urge to express all the richness of tradition and all the vitality of the new wine.

It was an experience of grace and fidelity to an ideal of life that enriched the Congregation and made it less and less tied to a person.

The Congregation had opened 12 houses and there were 82 sisters: 57 professed, 16 novices, 6 postulants and aspirants.

Life continued with its daily rhythm, with its difficulties, with the alternation of superiors and sisters, with the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the religious life of Mother Odile.

In 1927 the sisters were authorized to admit the juniors to perpetual vows after a six-year period of temporary vows.

On June 16, 1930, in the **VI General Chapter**, Sister Teresa Porta was elected Superior General, who was then reconfirmed until 1946. With this Chapter, the Congregation closed 11 difficult years, due to painful events, such as the resignation of Sister Emidia Bianchi from Superior General for health reasons and the death of her assistant Mother Maria Bo on April 13, 1930. The Congregation in this period needed a reorganization to achieve greater communion.

Sister Teresa Porta found a young and dynamic Congregation, capable of courageous initiatives that required many sacrifices. Overall, the Congregation

appeared united, obedient, faithful and mature, there were small tensions, but nothing to worry about. Mother Teresa, like Mother Odile, wanted to maintain the spirituality and style of her origins even at the cost of paying in person.

Immediately after her appointment, Sister Odile took her aside and recommended: *“Always look up there, to God alone, without caring about anything else, without letting yourself be drawn either to the right or to the left”*.²⁷ It was a high road that the wisdom of experience always indicates.

On August 25, 1932, Sister Odile returned her beautiful soul to God. She remained beautiful, serene and smiling. That same evening the coffin was taken to the Shrine. All the Turin newspapers made the announcement. With her went a long and glorious history of the Congregation.

2.4. “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which, as soon as it is sown, grows and becomes greater than all ...”²⁸

From the beginning of her Superiorate, Mother Teresa Porta had clear lines that were to guide the government of the Congregation: organizational autonomy, religious formation, greater discipline, greater clarity in competences and responsibilities.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 95.

²⁸ Mc, 4,30-32

On May 3, 1931, Mother Teresa sent the Pope a petition to obtain the “*Decretum Laudis*”, attaching the testimonial letters of the Dioceses, a historical outline of the Congregation, news about the Institute, a copy of the diocesan approval and a copy of the Constitutions. All the bishops expressed their appreciation and admiration for the sisters and their true religious spirit, for their humble, charitable and attentive service to the needs of the people. In particular, the Bishop of Rossano expressed himself thus: The Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria “*have a truly complete spiritual, moral and cultural formation. They have a solidity of admirable virtue, humility and charity above all appear in them inborn with the prudence, the sweetness, the delicacy of the good manners. They have inherited all the charm of St. Vincent of Paul ...*”.²⁹

On February 14, 1934, the provisional pontifical approval of the Congregation and the Constitutions was obtained, for a period of seven years. **On May 1, 1941**, definitive approval was obtained and it was proposed to add the name “*Dette del Buon Consiglio*”³⁰ to the name of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary.

On 10 December 1934, the Italian state recognized the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary as a Religious Institute with legal personality.

After the pontifical approval, the Congregation had the right to have a Cardinal Protector, the first was Cardinal Michele Lega. The appointment of the

²⁹ L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, pp. 99-100.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 103.

Cardinal Protector was the end of a difficult period, of a long agony that was now resolved in a moment of solemn welcome in the bosom of the Church, with all the external signs of benevolence, approval and encouragement.

Later the Cardinal Protectors were Pietro Boetto and Maurilio Fossati. In the newspaper “*L’Italia*” of **June 6, 1964**, the news was published that the Pope had abolished the institution of cardinalate protectories. The decision was aimed at leaving adequate autonomy to the Major Superiors of Religious Societies.



To live with greater fidelity

At this point, the Congregation can be compared to the mustard seed, the smallest of the seeds, but as soon as it is sown it grows and becomes bigger and bigger in the vast field of the Church.

Am I aware that when I answer yes to God I am building my story and that of my Religious Family?

“Lord, grant us to collaborate with love in your plan of love and to become aware that your plans to be realized go through many trials and that it is precisely the trials that strengthen and make it flourish”.

SECOND PERIOD

* 1940-2000 *

3

“GO ALL OVER THE WORLD AND PREACH
THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE”³¹

3.1. The charism of charity sown in other lands

On February 5, 1940, five missionary sisters left Turin: Sister Anselma Parisotto, Superior, Sister Carolina Cornalia, Sister Enrica Porta, Sister Addolorata Ganzer and Sister Adalgisa Garbin, accompanied by Mother Teresa Porta.

On their departure, Sister Anselma composed a missionary hymn. Here are some verses:

*“Heralds of Christ, sisters, let’s leave ...
The bridegroom calls us to hard battle ...*

*The thirst of Christ, of the bitter agony
Let’s quench we, the Sisters of Saint Mary ...*

*Onward, o squad, a star guides you
Mary, your Mother, in every storm ...”*³²

³¹ Mc,16,15-20

³² L. DA FARA, *Le Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, pp. 112-113.

On February 21, 1940, after 16 days of journey, with several stops, they arrived in Gimma (Ethiopia) accompanied by the “*Consolata Missionaries*”. The Vicar Apostolic Mons. Luigi Santa welcomed them, with words of encouragement and advice without hiding the sacrifices they would have to endure. Above all, he recommended charity with the sick and union among them, ensuring his paternal support.

Our sisters rendered their service in the various departments of the hospital: surgery, medicine, kitchen, and wardrobe. They lived the consecrated life with much commitment, fidelity to prayer and fraternal communion.

In March 1941, British troops occupied Gimma and our sisters were also taken prisoner. The hospital changed from Italian to English, but our sisters continued to carry out their work as before. Communication with the Mother General was very difficult.

On January 20, 1942, it began the journey back to their homeland. The various events told in the diary of Sister Enrica Porta. On February 13th there is a note: “*Two years ago in this day we were on the high seas all in African poetry ... today poetry has disappeared. We travel into the unknown, we don't know how long ...*”³³

The second journey was long, adventurous, tiring, almost a walk into the unknown, with continuous searches, for which the sisters were gradually deprived of even the necessary. What was most painful was the exhausting and uncertain wait; almost a cry of pain was

³³ Ivi, p. 121.

written in the diary: “... they told us that they will take away something more, but now nothing scares us anymore, we have thrown everything away”.³⁴

On January 6, 1943, after many adventures, they arrived in Brindisi, where they received a warm welcome and, after a panicky rush to catch the train, they arrived in Rome on January 7.

On January 12, 1943, they were in special audience with the Pope, together with all the repatriated missionaries. It was a solemn and moving meeting. On the 17th they left Monteporzio for Turin and on the 18th they reached the Mother House at San Pio V, where they kissed the tomb of the Venerated Foundress.

The missionary experience in Africa and the return as prisoners of war had taught the five sisters many things: “... they had learned that not everything that is thought necessary is really necessary. But they had also learned that serving is a daily achievement... that giving oneself is more important than giving... that pettiness cannot become a measure of life. In a word, if the missionary adventure had extinguished dreams and illusions, it had matured personality and conscience”.³⁵

The period 1940-1945 was a painful, difficult and uncertain time for everyone.

Mother Teresa Porta had to face many difficulties caused by the Second World War: bombing, displacement of sisters, novices and even the orphans entrusted to them.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 124.

³⁵ Ivi, p.127

On January 30, 1944, the “*Gina Mazza*” Institute in Monteporzio Catone was converted into a German field hospital. The sisters offered to assist the wounded. It was a dramatic experience for the sisters: dressings, amputations, deaths, blood ... but the war did not stop life, so **on 23 August** 3 postulants were admitted to take the habit and 11 novices to profession.

On 25 April 1945 the war was about to end, the partisans went down to Turin and the liberation began. Freedom day was celebrated on May 1st. The life of the Congregation also recovered, slowly and laboriously.

From 18 to 26 September 1946, the **XI General Chapter** was celebrated and Sister Lidia Avale was elected Superior General. A period will now begin for the Congregation that will see many things simplify, others shorten, and others expand. This period will have the “Second Vatican Council” as its central event.



To live with greater fidelity

The first missionary experience in Africa was like a test for our sisters but since they were deeply motivated for this mission, they knew how to overcome everything with courage and faith.

Today, we live in a digital world where the enemy is invisible, what are our battle weapons?

“Sisters, now that you are with God, intercede because we too learn like you that serving is a daily conquest ... that

giving oneself is more important than giving ... pettiness cannot become the measure of our life”.

3.2. The Congregation spreads and qualifies itself

Sister Lidia Avalle, elected as Superior General, brought a breath of youth to the government of the Congregation. She was a sweet and welcoming person with a delicate character, but at the same time firm. She made the most of her time and talents for the growth of the Congregation, which she led for 18 years with a deep maternal sense, wisdom and a big heart.

In 1949 the Congregation opened to mission ad Gentes in Canada and Argentina. At the same time, other houses were opened in Italy, providing hospital service and parish collaboration an important point for the apostolate of the Congregation.

On January 15, 1947, Pius XII received Mother Lidia and Sister Teresa Porta in special audience. The Pope, after having listened to the presentation of the Foundress and the desire to begin the diocesan information process of beatification, encouraged them so that everything would conform to God's plan.

From 13 April to 8 May 1947, the Sisters went to France to search for documents relating to Mother Clarac. The diocesan process ended **on July 30, 1952**. **On December 20, 1962**, after ten years, the “*positio*” printed for the introduction of the cause of the Servant of God, was delivered to the General Promoter of the Faith. Only **on January 26, 1981**, by decree of the

Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, confirmed by Pope John Paul II, the introduction of the Cause of Beatification of Sister Clarac was decided.

On November 21, 1960 the Ascetic Directory was delivered: it was a grace that stimulated a renewal of life.

During this period, it began the aspirantate and in **1963** the Juniorate, appointing the junior teacher and planning training courses for them.



To live with greater fidelity

The Congregation had to face the consequences of the post-war period. It was a difficult period, but rich of fruits: vocations, the opening of other communities in Italy and the mission in Canada and Argentina.

Do we consider difficult moments as moments of growth? And if so, why?

“Lord, teach us to enter into the scandal of the Cross to experience your resurrection”.

3.3. The Canadian mission

In mid-March 1948, the Marist brothers of Canada asked for the collaboration of 20 sisters for their works. The sisters asked to wait a year to get ready. All were convinced that this request was a grace and a blessing, but at the same time, it required difficult choices: managerial and spiritual. It was a moment when the Foundress was invoked to ask for her missionary spirit.

The first sisters destined for Canada were: Sister Rita Faustini, Sister Anselma Parisotto, Sister Filomena Pinna, Sister Adelina Laurito, Sister Olga Fabi, Sister Rita Di Stefano, Sister Emanuela Mura, Sister Battistina Vitale, Sister Robertina Soru and Sister Flaminia Puggioni. They left **on 10 September 1949** for Le Havre and **on Saturday 10 September** at 22.20 they embarked on the steamship “*Samaria*” for Canada. It was a departure into the night, touching, but full of hope. The second group of sisters left Turin **on August 13, 1951**.

The sisters began their Canadian life in humble and simple service to the Marist Brothers, but they carried in their hearts the dream of realizing their own mission. For this reason, after five years in the service of the Brothers’ works, they settled in Montreal and **in 1954** they bought two small houses, one for the future novitiate and the other for an hostel. For the novitiate there was already a Canadian postulant, a graduate teacher of good spirit: “*Janine Beaulac*”. They were similar to a sapling that would become a large tree with many branches.

From 1954 the initiatives and projects were continuously carried on:

École Marie-Clarac

In 1954, wishing to continue the work of education and evangelization of children and young people, the sisters opened a kindergarten: “*École Marie-Clarac*”.

Over the years, the pupils increased to the point that primary and secondary school could no longer coexist.

In 1998, the Congregation bought the “*Campus Claudette-Mackay-Lassonde*” to build the Secondary School, officially inaugurated **in 2001**.

Today the “*École Marie-Clarac*” welcomes more than 1,300 students, offering them and their families human and Christian values, family spirit, mutual help, respect and the joy of living.

Camp Mère Clarac

In 1957, “*Camp Mère Clarac*” was founded by Mother Anselme Marie Parisotto, whose mission was to bring children and young people closer to nature, a source of beauty and inspiration, to make them aware of their environment, their Creator and of their life values.

With their state-of-the-art programs, they offer qualified activities in horse riding, archery, athletics, rock climbing, karate and other activities such as swimming, rowing, games, pony rides, hiking and campfires.

Classified as “Holiday Center” since 2003, it received the 4-star rating, the best awarded by the Ministry of Tourism of Québec.

Since the summer of 2007, “*Camp Mère Clarac*” has been accredited and certified by the “*Fédération équestre du Québec*”.

Marie-Clarac Hospital

In September 1965, the “*Marie-Clarac Hospital*” was opened in Montreal-North, the first work of the Congregation in the field of health services.

In 1985 the hospital became a hospital specializing in physical rehabilitation.

In 2011, the “*Hôpital Marie-Clarac Foundation*” launched an important fundraising campaign to allow the construction of a pavilion connected to the current establishment, in order to offer palliative care and other essential services.

In November 2014, the new “*Mère Anselme*” pavilion was inaugurated, which initially had only 18 beds and has now increased due to constant requests.

In 2015 the hospital celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation.

Over the years, “*l’Hôpital Marie-Clarac*” has developed solid skills in rehabilitation, post-acute care and palliative care. Its mission is based on respect and dignity of life and on the commitment to provide personalized care and services.

The Angelica Residence

In 1967, the “*Angelica Residence*” was built, and welcomed its first residents on **27 December 1968**.

“*Angelica Residence*” is a private care and reception center whose mission is to offer, on a temporary or permanent basis, all the services that the elderly need, offering a serene environment and personalized help.

In March 1997 the “*Angelica Day Center*” was opened, with the aim of welcoming the elderly of the surroundings to offer programs and daily activities of a preventive, therapeutic or rehabilitative nature.

The Residence Les Cascades

In 1972 the “*Les Cascades Residence*” was opened. It is a private facility whose mission is offer to elderly residents a living environment. The focus is on human and spiritual accompaniment.

The Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria were able to carry out all these works with the collaboration and support of the government of Québec. It was a new style: involve and be involved in the public structure with the advantages but also with the due controls. For the sisters this model of management was and is still now a stimulus to evangelical witness in the lay world and to the animation of the administration of the works.

With the help of Divine Providence and the planning skills of the sisters, it was possible to create a wide educational and a complex welfare. To those who asked how such a development had been possible, Mother Anselma replied: “*But what is there to be surprised about? If God out of nothing has created the whole world, couldn't He out of nothing of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary give them this gift?*” And she repeated: “*There is nothing of ours, everything is His work*”.³⁶

3.4. The argentina mission

In 1947 the “*Consolata Missionaries*” started a mission in Argentina, in Laferrere, near Buenos Aires,

³⁶ Ivi. pp. 175-176

which needed sisters. They asked the Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria for help.

On 29 July 1949, after a long negotiation, the first group of sisters composed of Sister Enrica Porta, Sister Giacomina Sella, Sister Immacolatina Sessini, Sister Consiglia Filomema, Sister Efisia Usai, Sister Erminia Presta, accompanied by Mother General Sister Lidia Avalle and the Secretary Sister Domenica Lucchi, left for “Genova” and on July 30th at 4 pm they embarked on the steamer. They arrived in Argentina on August 26.

The six sisters began their apostolate in the “*Penna*” hospital, living in a small house adjacent to the hospital. They were in charge of the spiritual assistance of the sick. They remained there until **March 4, 1970**. Around 1955 a small house with surrounding land was purchased in order to have a first house owned by the Congregation where they could start a social welfare work: nursery school and women’s workshop.

Madre Clarac Educational Complex

On June 1, 1957, the Mother Maria Luisa Clarac’s work began in Laferrere, with a cutting and sewing course and a nursery school. Over the years, the sisters undertook to build the school “brick by brick”, overcoming all difficulties, with the impulse of Sister Giacomina and with the help and collaboration of students, families and teachers. Classes began in classrooms without doors and windows, but, with the

strong collaboration of all, in 1959 the first classrooms for elementary school were built.

The school progressed with ever increasing, and always insufficient constructions, due to the extraordinary flow of thousands of pupils from all classes, until it became a large educational complex.

On April 1, 1982, the upper level began and in 1984, the first class graduated.

The sisters did not receive great help from the government, but they could only rely on their sacrifices, in fact Sister Enrica Porta wrote in the chronicle: *“All our sacrifices are offered to God, for the salvation of all these souls entrusted by Him to our care”*.³⁷

Community “Santa María” (Altos de Laferrere)

In 1975, the sisters opened a nursery school in via Santa Rosa. The community was established in 1977 by Sister Immacolatina Sessini, as Superior, Sister Domitilla Pedace, Sister Ilaria Montisci and Sister Maria Grazia Cossu, and began the work with two hundred and fifty children between three and six years of age.

From its beginnings until today, the priority of this school is the integral education of children and the accompaniment of families. Many sisters have contributed with their examples of dedication and charity to this work, whose goal has always been the same: the love of God and dedication in caring for the little ones and their families.

³⁷ Ivi, p. 188.

On 29 July 1979 Sister Teresia Drammissino and Sister Raffaella Murgia arrived from Italy. They easily integrated into Argentine culture and gave impetus to many initiatives both in the educational and missionary fields. They opened the mission in Bolivia and the last community in Puerto Belgrano.

Together they arrived in Argentina and together they returned to the Father's house, after a short time: **October 23 and November 12, 2018.**

Clarac Santa María Community (Saladas)

In 1987, the first Argentine mission began in Corrientes and a second one in 1995, this time with the idea of opening a community in that province. Later the sisters were able to buy a house where they settled in 1996.

In 1997 Sister Domitilla Pedace, Sister Cristina Cardia and Sister Ana Maria Melis gave birth to the "María Luisa Clarac" nursery school, to respond to the needs of the place, and immediately inserted themselves in the parish to collaborate in the evangelization and in the catechesis.

Community of Pontevedra: Quinta San José

In 1987 the "*San José*" farm, located in the Municipality of Pontevedra, was purchased.

It was a place where the sisters found a space to stay in contact with nature and enjoy moments of rest

to strengthen their missionary spirit. It is a center for retreats, training and sharing days, vocational meetings and spiritual exercises, as well as for camps with students and families from the school and the parish.

On November 7, 2003, the “*Quinta San José*” was inaugurated as a formation house, with Sister Loredana Quinzi, formator, and on the **21st** the first Bolivian aspirants arrived, thanks to the vocation ministry that Father Hugo Saravia made for our Congregation.

The Formation House collaborates with the Parish of the Immaculate Conception to carry out the apostolate in the chapels near our home.

Community of Puerto Belgrano

In Puerto Belgrano there is the military base of the Argentine army in which there is a naval hospital that mainly takes care of the families of the military and is also open to local people. Near the hospital is located the house for the religious, who offer spiritual accompaniment to the sick.

In 2008 the Franciscan Sisters left the hospital. Father Francisco Rostom, who knew and participated in our Clarac Missionary Group, wanted the Daughters of Mother Clarac to exercise their apostolate in this hospital.

On 22 February 2013, a meeting took place with the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of “Bahía Blanca”. **On March 8, 2013**, the collaboration agreement between the Congregation and the hospital was signed.

On 10 May 2013 the House of the Sisters was opened and blessed. The first community was formed by Sister Maria de los Angeles Gonzalez (Superior), Sister Maria Itatí Oviedo, Sister Maria Laura Justiniano Costas.

God opened a new door; a new mission to bear witness to the mercy of Jesus to the sick, to infuse them with faith, hope and charity, accompanying them in the fatigue of sickness and pain.

To live with greater fidelity

Our sisters have always trusted in Divine Providence and with their talents they have managed to give life to works of charity that continue to bear witness to God's infinite love for all.

To the people who asked how such a development of charitable works had been possible, Mother Anselma replied: *"But what is there to be surprised about? There is nothing of ours, everything is His work"*, and Sister Enrica Porta wrote: *"All our sacrifices are offered to God, for the salvation of all these souls entrusted by Him to our care"*.

And we, today, what do we think and what do we respond to those who ask us such questions?

"Lord, increase our faith in your Divine Providence just when we seem to lose hope."

Thank you Lord that you have always guided us in every mission undertaken by giving us Mary as our guide and support.

Thank you, Mother Clarac, for your living and active presence in the Church today through your daughters !!!".

CALLS TO RENEWAL
AND ADAPTATION UNDER
THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
AND THE GUIDE OF THE CHURCH

Perfectae Caritatis at n. 2 affirms: *“The renewal of religious life entails the continuous return to the sources of every form of Christian life and the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and at the same time the adaptation of the institutes themselves to the changed conditions of the times”*.

4.1. The Congregation responds to the invitation for renewal and adaptation that the Church asks of consecrated life.

In 1964 the General Chapter took place and had a particular importance in the life of the Congregation because it opened the way to the innovations of the *“Second Vatican Council”*. Many proposals were made for the growth of the Congregation, some of them were dividing the Congregation into provinces, changing the habits, starting the study to move from the non-profit organization to the Congregation, reduction of activities and a new missionary awareness. Sister Consolata Betassa was elected Superior General, since she had a long educational experience. Thanks to her interest, the *“Latour Institute”* in Moncalieri welcomed up to one hundred and fifty children who received the

warmth of a family, school education and support in the stages of their growth.

On May 22, 1965, in the “*USMI assembly*”, some general guidelines of renewal were defined: as the formation of the sisters should be, namely biblical, moral and missionary; the practical criteria of adaptation must be based on the primacy of the spiritual life; each Institute must have its own place in the Church.

On September 12, 1967, a visible sign of the “*Second Vatican Council*” arrived: the new habit for all the sisters of the Congregation.

4.2. **The special General Chapter**

On 23 August 1969 the most important sign of the response of the Congregation to the indications of the Council was the **Special General Chapter**, which Mother General, Sister Consolata Betassa announced.

The delegated sisters were divided into four commissions:

1. Religious life
2. Apostolic life
3. The government
4. Formation

On September 27, 1969, the first session of the chapter ended. The work carried out was ordered by a post-capitular commission, which had the task of reviewing the work done on the four schemes and preparing the text of the new Constitutions and the

new Directory, to be presented in the second session before the elective General Chapter.

4.3. XV General Chapter

On 7 September 1970 the **XV General Chapter** elected Sister Cesarina Franco as Superior General. Mother Cesarina had a far-sighted vision, acute intelligence and cultural and religious preparation, which she placed at the service of the Congregation. She led the renewal and adaptation required by the Second Vatican Council in a balanced way. A great commitment was due to restructure many works according to the changing needs of the times and to open others in different areas. The mission in Canada and Argentina also developed further. In 1983, it extended the mission in Mexico City-Iztapalapa: evangelization and kindergarten.

Admirable was her sensitivity to the poor that she helped with a great charity and she was magnanimous for the needs of the Church.

The post-capitular commission of the Special General Chapter, of which she was a member, prepared the text of the Constitutions ad *experimentum*, under the guidance of Father Provera, Father of the Mission. The text was elaborated and then enriched by the Salesian Fr Luigi Castano. Mother Cesarina followed the whole process of the new constitutions carefully and diligently.

On March 24, 1984, she obtained final approval.

4.4. XVIII General Chapter

On 25 August 1985, the XVIII General Chapter elected Sister Maria Taliano, Superior General. She was an understanding, meek and communicative woman; she knew how to be a mother to all the sisters, even if at the same time she was endowed with a lot of firmness. Her style of relating to everyone was always exhortative and capable of making even the most onerous obedience acceptable.

On March 22, 1986, she obtained the approval of the Directory.

On 21 June 1986 she announced the centenary commemorating the death of the Foundress. All the communities, from Canada to Argentina, from Mexico to Italy, were mobilized in a holy competition of programs aimed at highlighting the moral-spiritual stature of our Mother and making her message known and spread.

In memory of this event, a “Unique Number” was created, entitled “*Maria Luigia Clarac, the courage of love*”. It presents the central figure of the Servant of God and the first sisters: Sister Agostina Rota, “*the most faithful*”, Sister Odile Serra, “*the Mother of Good Counsel*”, Sister Teresa Porta, “*the glorifier*”, as well as the historical context of the Congregation and its development in 116 years and the expansion beyond the Atlantic Ocean.³⁸

³⁸ Cfr. *Maria Luigia Clarac, il coraggio dell'amore. Nel Centenario della morte: Moncalieri 1887 – Torino 1987*, Numero unico per il Centenario della morte di madre Maria Luisa Clarac, Suppl. al n. 6/1987 de “*La Buona Parola*”, Pinerolo, 1987.

She had the chapel in Via San Pio V restored and a permanent exhibition-museum set up in the gallery where writings and objects belonging to the Foundress were placed.

She endeavored to have another biography of the Foundress “*Maria Luigia Clarac*” written by the writer Lorenzo da Fara and by the same author “*The Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria. The history and the spirit*”. She entrusted Father Antonino Rosso with the publication of the book: “*Spirituality of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary*”.

4.5. **The works of charity continue to develop in Italy**

From 1969 to 1982 in Italy, the Congregation opened new houses and restructured others for the service of the elderly, the new poor of society, and continued the educational service with kindergartens and elementary schools. Everything starts from an inner desire and, in order to become factual, it must go through different phases and overcome various obstacles.

Here some services in chronological order:

- **1969**, “*Maria Clarac Residence*” for the elderly in Monteporzio Catone;
- **1971**, Institute “*Buon Consiglio*” Nursery and Elementary School, replacing the Women’s Welfare Institute, Turin;
- **1972**, Retirement home for the sisters of the Congregation to replace the male welfare

educational Institute, closed in 1971, in Villa Maria, Turin;

- **1977**, Kindergarten and parish collaboration in San Gavino Monreale;
- **1981**, “Residenza Santa Maria”, for the elderly, in Quartu Sant’Elena, Sardinia.



To live with greater fidelity

“Since the following of Christ as taught by the Gospel is the fundamental norm of religious life, this norm must be considered by all institutes as their supreme rule”. (PC 2a)

Is the Gospel the supreme rule of our life?

“Lord Jesus we ask your forgiveness for when we have not followed the logic of the Gospel, send your Spirit upon us to become the ‘Fifth Gospel’ ”.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IMPELS US

“Give thanks to the Lord for being good!”³⁹

The Congregation was attentive to the signs of the Spirit that gradually came to give substance to the missionary expansion. The first desire was the evangelization then witness Christ, and finally give the Congregation a more international attitude.

5.1. Mexico (1983)

The Mission in Mexico under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe

On 8 October 1981, as we read in the chronicles of the provincial archives, Mother Anselma Parisotto, invited by Father Francisco Leal, a priest of the Order of San Benedetto del Lago in Québec, visited Mexico for the first time with the aim of exploring that land. From her first visit, Mother Anselma placed the future mission under the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

On October 15, 1983, Sister Elizabeth Mayer, Sister Vitalia Melas and Sister Erminia Presta, accompanied by Mother Anselma, settled in Mexico City in a house located in via Sud 81, n. 223, Unidad Modelo Iztapalapa,

³⁹ Sal 117.

with the aim of collaborating in the Christian formation of children, young people, families, as well as the care of the elderly.

In February 1984, the sisters moved from the first rented house to the new house they bought in José Pilar Ruiz 135, Fracc. Colonial Iztapalapa. **On November 12, 1984**, in front of the first, a second house was purchased for the future novitiate.

On August 26, 1984, the sisters went to visit the vocation group of Nanchital, Diocese of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz for the first time. The first vocations emerged from this group. On March 25, 1985 three young people began the postulancy.

In 1987 Mother Anselma sought a ground for the construction of a school, where children and young people had a large and pleasant space to learn and were fundamentally formed in the love for Christ. On April 13, 1987 it was bought the land for the construction of the "*Instituto Canadiense Clarac*".

On 1 September 1990, the "*Instituto Canadiense Clarac*" opened its doors to welcome the little ones from the nursery and primary school. Over the years, the secondary and preparatory structures were added. The mission of the institute is "To form souls for life through a complete education and living the Gospel values".

On March 16, 1991 the house of Xochimilco was inaugurated, but only on March 25 took place the blessing of the house and the visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The chronicle reports: *“Mother Anselma is very happy to be in Mexico. She is amazed to see the work in Xochimilco, with such a large and beautiful house. The chapel looks magnificent, as does its internal garden, with its Italian-style lamps and its fountain in the center. Deo gratias!”*⁴⁰

From 2002 to 2019, the sisters were called to collaborate with the *“Comunidad Fraterna por una Vida Mejor”*, a day center for the elderly in Comala, State of Colima. It was a charitable service for poor and lonely elderly people, to give them support, physical rehabilitation, a welcoming and fraternal environment. In addition, the sisters participated in vocational promotion activities and temporary missions during Holy Week.

5.2. Boston USA (1992)

Place to learn the international language

Mother Anselma, who had the gift of projecting herself into the future, understood the need to have a home in Boston to prepare the sisters in all areas, including in learning the English language, since it was becoming an increasingly international language.

In the fall of 1992, a house was purchased at Wren Street 58, in Boston, to accommodate the sisters who wanted to learn English at the *“Boston school of Modern*

⁴⁰ *Cronache della Provincia Canadese. Viaggio numero 21.*

Languages". In 2000, "*Mère Clarac Daycare*" started to meet the needs of the working families, accommodate children under three years of age. Currently, the sisters actively collaborate in the parish ministry and periodically follow the group of "Clarac Associates", with moments of reflection on the Word of God, of prayer and of fraternal sharing.

5.3. **India (1992)**

The courage to dare is the fruit of love for Christ

The desire to start a mission in India was in the hearts of many sisters. God's Providence made them encounter Fr Stefano, a priest of the Diocese of Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu India, who was studying in Rome, put Mother Maria Taliano and her Secretary Mother Cesarina Franco in contact with Mons. Peter Remigius, Bishop of Kumbakonam Tamil Nadu. Sr Costantina Aiperto and Sr Luigilda De Santis prepared the ground first and in July 1992 the Councilor Sr Myriam Sida.

On 25 August 1992, Sr Rosaria Nicoletti and Sr Gabrielle Riopel arrived in Kumbakonam, where the Bishop had given the Betany Home as the house of the aspirants, under the guidance of Don Stanislaus, who, at that time, was Rector of the Seminary and Sr Sebastina belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters Missionaries of Mary Immaculate.

From 1992 to 2021, the India Mission, which began with three sisters of three different nationalities: Italian,

Canadian, Mexican (Sister Francisca Cruz Cuéllar) and 10 aspirants, gradually developed. The initial mission was to prepare the first indigenous sisters and then begin the first services with them: parish ministry, socio-charitable and educational services.

Here is the list of works in chronological order:

5 September 1995: Inauguration of “*Santa Maria Illam*”, house of the aspirants and of the community and later of the novitiate.

On November 5, 1995, the “*Mother Clarac Center*” was inaugurated, located in Kuppangulam street among the poor people whose main activity was and is building bricks by day labor. The center initially included several services: “*Day Creche*” for the children of these families, an after-school service for children who would not have done their homework at home and a small dispensary for first aid. Listening to the needs of the people, we gradually passed from kindergarten, elementary, middle school and to the ninth and tenth, first two years of high school.

On 25 May 1999, the “*Sacred Heart Dispensary*” was inaugurated in Alambadi Mettur, a work dedicated to the memory of Don Pietro, brother priest of Mother Maria Taliano. The dispensary provided medical assistance to neighboring villages and in addition the sisters did catechesis in two villages, as well as educational service in the school of the Diocese.

On August 22, 2001, the “*Maria Angelica Home*” was opened for the formation of aspirants and pastoral service.

On September 6, 2001, the India Mission was canonically erected as a Delegation established in Santa Maria Illam, Kumbakonam.

On January 25, 2005, the “*St Xavier Illam*” house was opened in a rural village, Govindanallur, belonging to the Diocese of Thanjavour. The sisters began teaching in the diocesan school by dedicating themselves to the Christian formation of families, children and young people.

On 27 August 2006, the official opening of the “*Mother of Good Counsel Hostel*” in Erayur, in the Diocese of Kumbakonam, took place. The hostel welcomes, elementary and middle school children orphaned, semi-orphaned, poor, gypsy to take care of their human, spiritual and scholastic formation.

On August 25, 2008, an agreement was signed between the Claretians and the Sisters of Charity of Santa Maria to work collaboratively in caring for abandoned babies and poor and lonely elderly people. The structure called “*Mercy Home*” belongs to the Claretians.

In June 2009, after many negotiations, we began to collaborate with the Claretians of the Bangalore Province, in Nellajerla, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in the School and in the evangelization of the villages belonging to the Parish. Kindergarden started in 2013. The school and house where the community lives is property of the Claretians.

On 1 June 2012, the “*Cecilia Block*” Audiological Center was blessed. The building was sponsored by Andrea Codebò and built on the land belonging to the “*Mother Clarac Matriculation School*”. The name

“*Cecilia block*” refers to Codebò’s daughter, Cecilia, who was born deaf and dumb, but thanks to cochlear surgery and speech therapy, she can now hear and speak very well. Deaf and dumb children are welcomed here, but also children with other various disabilities.

On 10 May 2012, the educational and pastoral service to the Santhal tribe in Bishrail, in the state of West Bengal, began in collaboration with the Claretians. However, after some time, due to logistical difficulties caused by to the distance, it was better to move the sisters away.

Angelica Grace Home (2016)

Over the years, Indian society has experienced a shift from its traditional culture of care for the elderly at home; since the children live overseas or far away, the number of lonely elderly people increased. We also became aware of the concern of the children, unable to care for their elderly parents due to their work needs. This is how the idea of AGH began to take shape in our hearts.

Thus a home for the elderly was built, adjacent to the aspirantate located in Trichy, Tamil Nadu, and was called “*Angelica Grace Home*” to honor the memory of the Foundress and benefactress of the work, Miss Grazia Madau.

On November 19, 2016, the structure inaugurated to welcome everyone, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, because the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary consider

all brothers and sisters, as children of one Father, God. Today, productivity and efficiency seem define the value of a person. Through the care of senior citizen, the AGH Organization supports the intrinsic value of people who deserves to be appreciated and loved, regardless of their age or degree of autonomy.

During the Indian mission, the various activities started by putting as crucial point the necessity to be close to the people in the villages, the urgency of the evangelization of families, school education and service to the poorest: abandoned children and disabled people and the elderly, who are another kind of poor.



To live with greater fidelity

The desire to plant the seed of the charism of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary in other cultures became more and more intense and urgent since it grows into deeper awareness that the Charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and as such, it is universal, not destined only to the place of origin.

Do we have the desire to dare so that Christ may be known, loved and served?

“Holy Spirit, blow on us, as on the apostles, whom you brought out of the cenacle to go into the whole world. Never allow our lamp to go out”.

THIRD PERIOD

* 2000-2021 *

6

OPEN THE DOORS TO CHRIST IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

6.1. Chile (2001)

Openness to the needs of the territory

In 1999, Sister Élizabeth Mayer and Mother Pierre Anne Mandato made their first exploratory trip to Chile.

On the second trip, in January 2001, Mother Pierre Anne, Sister Elizabeth and Sister Marie-Hélène Sirois, after a trip to Bogotá, visited the parish of the Assumption of Mary in Achupallas, in the Diocese of Valparaíso. The parish priest and the vicar were very happy with the proposal to have a religious community to collaborate in the parish apostolate.

On July 16, 2001, Sister Elizabeth Mayer and Sister Gabriela Betanzos Rodríguez arrived and settled in a small wooden house, which contained only the necessary for living, offered by the Parish of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Achupallas. The parish is located in a popular sector, where the socio-economic situation is precarious, so a “*Comedor*” opened to help poor families.

On March 24, 2004, a house was purchased located in Via Villa California, 19 in Sta Julia, Viña del Mar, destined to become the headquarters of the future community.

On 1 December 2009, the home for the elderly “*Residencia Mère Clarac*” inaugurated, with Mother Clarac and Saint Anna as protectors. The mission of the Residence is to offer the elderly a welcoming living environment and they take care of their physical, social and spiritual needs

At the pastoral level, the community collaborates with the parish.

6.2. Ecuador (2002)

Promote the Catholic School

In 2008, the Canadian Province bought a house, called: “*Mother Odile House*” for the residence of the first sisters: Sr Elizabeth Mayer, Sr M. Daniela Gomez Gonzalez and Sister Marie Pascale Delangis.

In 2010, another house was bought: “*Saint Vincent de Paul*” to welcome poor children and elderly people, to feed them and to offer them educational activities.

On September 12, 2002, the “*Marie-Clarac school*” opened its doors in a rented building in San Isidoro del Inca, Quito, under the responsibility of three sisters. On 18 December of the same year, the Ministry of Education granted the authorization to operate the nursery and primary school. Given the strong demand

for Catholic education in Ecuador, the locals soon became too small.

On 19 October 2004, the construction of the elementary school started and **on 29 November 2005**, and it inaugurated with the name of “*Colegio Marie Clarac*”. It gradually became a school with all levels of education before the university.

The mission of the “*Colegio Marie Clarac*” is the integral development, on a physical, psychological, human and spiritual level, to form responsible adults; its aim is trying to instill human and evangelical values in children, young people and preparing them academically.

As the example of Mother Clarac, we try to make Jesus known, loved and served, in the school, in the parish and in the poor neighborhoods, while trying to be joyful witnesses of the Gospel.

6.3. XXI General Chapter

On August 18, 2003, in the **XXI General Chapter**, Sister Myriam Sida was elected as Superior General.

Equipped with an active and creative intelligence and good leadership, she was immediately able to give a new vision to the style of the government. Sister Myriam decided to participate actively in the Regional USMI to obtain a richer and more current vision of Consecrated Life and open to the challenges of today’s society.

She spared no energy and effort to visit local communities in Italy and abroad very often, to animate

and guide the sisters to fully live religious consecration and help them in solving the most emerging practical problems. In fact, during his first six years, new communities opened in Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and France (Auch).

In Chapter XXI, she proposed dedicating time for reflection between one General Chapter and another: the Interchapter. The initiative turned out to be fruitful and healthy for the life of the Congregation for which the Interchapter has now become a norm. In July 2006, the Interchapter proposed starting a reflection on the charismatic identity of the Congregation.

Another important milestone for the Congregation was the revision of the 1984 Constitutions in the light of Church documents. The revised Constitutions, under the guidance of the Claretian Canonist Father Aitor Jiménez, were approved in the XXIII Chapter of 2015 and then **on May 3, 2016** by the Congregation for Consecrated Life.

6.4. **Peru (2004)**

Support for the victims of the earthquake

Tacna is a small town in southern Peru, almost on the border with Chile. In 2003, three explorations took place before settling there.

On February 3, 2004, the Provincial Mother Pierre-Anne Mandato and other sisters met the Bishop in Moquega, Mgr. Hugo Garaycoa Hawkins, who introduced them to Father Jesus, parish priest of the

parish of San Juan Bautista, who presented them the situation after 2001 earthquake.

In February 2005, the “*Comedor*” inaugurated to welcome and feed poor children. A room had the aim to welcome the elderly by occupying them with some activities and at the same time giving them food.

On 1 May 2006, the “*Sagrada Familia*” house for the community was blessed. In 2009, the nursery school was built.

Our mission in Peru is to help people who have material and spiritual needs. Through parish and social pastoral care, we want to witness the love of God with concrete actions. With the nursery school, we want to contribute to the integral education of children.

Love for the poor and for the little ones was the hallmark of our Foundress and we want to continue in her footsteps too.

6.5. Colombia (2008)

Courage to face the harsh reality

Given the political situation of the country, the continuous internal armed struggles and especially the drug trafficking, our Congregation remained at a certain distance from Colombia. However, the insistence and invitations of some priests pushed us to overcome these problems.

In 2001, Sister Elizabeth Mayer went for the first time to Villavicencio, a three hours town far from the

country's capital. During her short stay, she noticed the presence of many young people who wanted to know more about Jesus and to dedicate their lives to Him. In the following years, Mother Pierre Anne continued to visit Colombia, looking for a favorable place to establish the first community.

On July 23 and 24, 2007, Mother Pierre Anne and Sr. Elizabeth Mayer visited Cali (Colombia), where they met a group of girls who wished to find a guidance in their journey of faith. In September of the same year, these girls moved to a house rented by the Congregation in "*El Saladito*". On September 16, Sister Daniela Gómez and Sister María de Jesús Robledo, together with these girls, began to live a fraternal life of prayer and apostolic experience.

On February 28, 2008, the "Santa Maria" house in Medellín was purchased.

Our main mission in Colombia consists in making Christ known and promoting vocations to consecrated life. The Marie Clarac School of Faith is also active, where young people and families are accompanied for moments of catechesis, prayer and community sharing.

6.6. **Bolivia (2011)**

Community: "Nuestra Señora del Buen Consejo"

Initially Father Hugo Saravia, Bolivian, resident in Argentina, as a seminarian was part of the Gru.Mi.C (Clarac missionary group). Ordained a priest, he

returned to his homeland. The Archbishop assigned him to Quillacollo, in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Urcupiña. From that place, he invited our sisters to go to Bolivia.

On January 6, 2011, trusting in God and in his Providence, the Sisters María Paz Molina with the juniors Sister Maria Itati Oviedo and Sister Maria Roxana Castellón Pinola, accompanied by Sister María de los Ángeles Gonzales, arrived in the city of Quillacollo, belonging to the Archbishopric of Cochabamba. They receive a warm welcome by the priestly team of the Parish of San Ildefonso - Sanctuary of Urcupina.

On March 20, 2013, the formal contract was signed between the Sisters of Charity of Saint Mary and the Archbishop of Cochabamba Mgr. Tito Solari Capellari, to carry out the following activities:

- Social Pastoral Care-Caritas of the parish.
- Liturgical animation and care of the sacristy of the Shrine of the Virgin of Urcupiña
- Youth-Vocation Ministry.

The community actively collaborated in the aforementioned activities, as well as in the neighborhood missions with novenas, catechesis and accompanying the Missionary Childhood and Adolescence groups.

In 2015, after four years of service in the Shrine of Cochabamba, the community looked for another place and another way to manifest the Charism of Mother Clarac in Bolivia. Therefore, the sisters María Paz Molina, María Patricia Cervetto and María Maile Córdoba entered the parish of Saint Mary of the

Way, on the outskirts of Cochabamba, with the aim of accompanying rural communities in faith, visiting families in the area and accompanying young people.

6.7. France (2014)

Auch - Birthplace of our Foundress

Auch is the birthplace of our Foundress Maria Luisa Angelica Clarac. The desire to have a community in Auch was in the hearts of so many sisters, since the time of Mother Teresa Porta, because she went there many times to look for documents for the cause of beatification.

In September 1976, Mother Anselma Parisotto together with Sister Anna Maria Marolo visited Auch, leaving a picture of Mother Clarac in the hall of the Episcopate and strived to have a street dedicated to Mother Clarac: *“Allee Marie Clarac”*.

On May 17, 2011 the Mother General, Sister Myriam Sida and the Provincial Mother Pieranna Mandato, visited Auch to seek historical information about Mother Clarac and on that occasion, the Bishop Mgr Maurice Gardes invited them and asked them for news about the life and progress of the process of beatification of the Blessed Mother.

From 16 to 22 March 2013 they returned to Auch another time for further researches. With these visits the desire and the project of having a community in the land of our beloved Foundress finally accomplished.

All the procedures had the aim to obtain the Bishop's permission to establish a community in his Diocese.

The Bishop, after a period of discernment, proposed to have a house in the suburbs where many immigrants live, to be a sign of God among the people and to dedicate themselves only to evangelization. The apostolate of the sisters is to visit people who live alone, to do catechesis in the parish, to carry out youth ministry, the formation of catechists and planning of catechesis at the parish and diocesan level.

With the help of Madame Colette, they rented and furnished an apartment, located on the seventh floor, in Longement 27 Tour A, Rue Abel Gardey. Living in an apartment, inserted among the people is also a testimony of proximity and sharing.

On February 20, 2014 the first sisters: Sr Cecile Goudreau, Sr Alessandra Solano Peláez and Sr Josephine Aboorvaraj, accompanied by Mother Myriam Sida, went to Auch and Madame Colette welcomed them.

On February 25, Mgr Andre Maigne, Episcopal Vicar, celebrated the first mass in the small chapel. In addition to the three sisters, Mother Myriam Sida, Mother Pieranna Mandato, Mother Maria Taliano, Sister Marie José Marcoux and other local people were present.

On February 26, all the sisters went to Lourdes to entrust the new mission to Mary.

Mother Clarac is now alive in her homeland through her daughters who wish to continue her work of evangelization and charity.

6.8. XXIII General Chapter

On August 18, 2015, in the **XXIII General Chapter**, Sister Rosaria Nicoletti was elected Superior General.

In his final message to the Chapter Assembly, she expressed herself: *“I wish to place myself at the service of every Sister of Charity of Saint Mary with humility, simplicity and charity and listen to their desires, dreams, ideas, but also their pains, sufferings and anxieties ... I am aware of to be like David with only five stones but, I believe that with the power of God and the collaboration of all, nothing is impossible.*

Each of us is invited to return to our communities carrying in our hearts the experience of the Chapter that unity and communion are always possible when we are animated by the Charity of Christ”.

Her main objective: to accept the people entrusted to her by the goodness of God “as they are” to guide them to “as” they are called to be. The sisters are the true treasure of the Congregation, they will carry on the fire of the charism and try to incarnate it in concrete situations.

She chose three keywords for her authority service: *graduality - bridge building - always be first.*

Graduality: taking into account the roots of our history to fully live the present and build a future of hope.

Building bridges: taking care of the quality of relationships that must always be based on respect, deep listening to people, kindness, compassion, discernment, wisdom ...

To be the first to take the initiative to act for the only reason that God loves us first and does not wait for our response in order to love us.



To live with greater fidelity

The last works of our history were born at the beginning of the third millennium, just when Pope John Paul II invited the Church *“to shove off into the deep”* and to have the same enthusiasm that was typical of the first Christians. To continue our history, we too need to have the faith, the spirit of sacrifice and the enthusiasm of our first sisters.

What resonance does this invitation from the Pope have in our hearts *“to shove off into the deep”*?

“Holy Spirit, who poured out your fire of love at Pentecost, may today encourage us to start again, supported by the hope “that does not disappoint”. Allow us to move forward with hope!”

HISTORY BECOMES CHRONICLE

At this point of the 150-year history of the Congregation, we arrive to the contemporary period, and we are all protagonists.

It is impossible to recount all the events of these 150 years. We have tried to focus on those that have decisively marked the development of our history: the origins, the organization of the Congregation based on fidelity to the origins and openness to the future, legal recognition, expansion into Italy, the first missionary experience, the mission in other lands and some contemporary events.

The intent of this historical narrative is not just the quotation of events, but consists in trying to discover the fundamental motivation, the spirit and the courage to dare them. The reflections, questions and prayers, written at the end of a historical period, want to recognize first the actions of God and then involve us personally, because this concerns our history: each one has lived and lives a part of it.

If we say that history becomes chronicle it is good to highlight some more recent events, such as:

- In the healthcare sector, the 50th anniversary of the Marie Clarac Hospital, celebrated in 2015;
- In the educational and missionary field: the 25th anniversary of the “*Instituto Canadiense Clarac*” in Mexico, **in 2015** and the 25th anniversary of the Mission in India **in 2017**;

- In the juridical field, the approval of the Constitutions **on 3 May 2016** is a sign of our desire for spiritual and charismatic renewal to continue living our consecrated life with greater fidelity.
- The blessing of the chapel, the nursery school and the temporary residence of the Santa Maria Institute, in “*Via Pio V*” in Turin, which took place **on June 18, 2016**. This is an important event for us, because the house of Mother Clarac, after four years of construction and six years of closure, it has opened its doors again.
- The celebration of the bicentenary of the birth (1817-2017) of our Foundress experienced as a return to our roots and with the desire to feel her living presence in our life and in our works of charity and a favorable time to deepen her spirituality with the manuscript known as “Dear Memory”.
- The slogan was: ***“In us, she live”***.
- The 50th anniversary of the Good Council Institute is imminent, **in 2021**.

All these events say that the charism of the Congregation is alive, growing, developing over time and at the same time spurring us to respond with creative fidelity.

The purpose of this narrative is also to remain in touch with our roots and to believe that if God has worked in the past He will continue to do so with us today.

The Celebration of the **XXIV General Chapter** (in August 2021), is a sign that history continues and is attentive to the signs of God.

This event can be divided in two parts: the first as the closing of a 150-year stage (1871- 2021) and the second as a springboard for a greater testimony of love in a world of continuous and rapid transformation.

On May 3, 2021, our history turns 150 years old. Now, together with God, we are the protagonists of this story and we are called to live the present with passion to build a future of love and hope.

God calls us to continue this adventure of love, to always keep the fire of the charism burning: *“to proclaim and witness the unconditional and compassionate love of the Father, revealed in the Cross of Christ and learned through Mary’s example”*.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Costituzioni delle Suore di Carità di Santa Maria*, 2016, art. 2.

Prayer

Good Father,
We praise and thank you.
Like Mary, together we sing our magnificat,
for all the graces, the joys, the sufferings and the
challenges lived in these 150 years of foundation.

Grant us the gift of discernment,
to discover together your love project for us
in order to respond faithfully to your Fidelity.

Instill in us a passionate love for Christ,
to continue believing, like Mother Clarac,
in the power of His Crucified Love.

Holy Spirit, make us free and courageous women,
capable of “*setting out into the deep*” into the ocean
of the world with piercing eyes and a big heart to be
joyful witnesses of Your Mercy. Amen



DUC IN ALTUM!



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