



# and you too **do** likewise

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*Sr. Carmela Paloschi*

«I was sick...»

**Institutes for minors with psycho-physical ailments**

(Part IV)

**«FONDAZIONE ISTITUTO SACRA FAMIGLIA»  
AT CESANO BOSCONE (MI)**

For the city of Milan and its hinterland, Cesano Boscone<sup>1</sup> is synonymous with the «Istituto Sacra Famiglia», an establishment for patients with mental or physical disabilities and for non self-sufficient elderly persons: the institution owes its fatherhood to the parish priest, *Fr Domenico Pogliani*<sup>2</sup> and its motherhood to the *Sisters of Maria Bambina*. Since 1894 the loving and intense activity of the founder, of his successors, and the highly qualified and unre-served dedication of our sisters established the historic fabric of the «Citadel of Pain» or the «University of charity», as it was called by Card. Ildefonso Schuster, Archbishop of Milan from 1929 to 1954.

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<sup>1</sup> Cesano Boscone is located in the west of Milan, outside the city. The population is mainly engaged in agriculture but, according to the people who travel to Milan for working purposes, it is developing itself into a town. The first census of 1861 counted 654 inhabitants; a maximum curve trend in 1971 counted 21,253; in 1991 it reached the number of 26,260 inhabitants; in 2011 it amounted to 23,398. The name 'Cesano' seemingly means 'land of *Caesius*', the primitive settlers in Roman times, while 'Boscone' stands for the forests that surrounded the area (cf. Storia del Comune di Cesano Boscone).

<sup>2</sup> Beatification's cause of D. Pogliani (1838-1921) is underway; he was coadjutor of the *Duomo* of Milan from 1870 to 1883, when he was appointed parish priest of Cesano Boscone; cf. GUIDO VIGNA, *Se la carità fa storia*, Azzate (VA) 1983; FRANCESCA CONSOLINI, *Breve profilo biografico e spirituale di mons. D. Pogliani*.

## ‘Manual labourer’ of Providence

In 1892 *Fr Domenico Pogliani* who by nature was attentive to the poor and the sick, had an intuition which he submitted to the bishop of Pavia, Mgr Agostino Gaetano Riboldi: «I look forward to seek advice from you in order to have your counsel in the setting up of a charitable work... I wish to found an Institution, which would be a miniature copy of the Cottolengo in Turin. A hospice for the poor and unfortunate people of the countryside, especially of the southern areas of Lombardy; this poor area offers plentiful revenues to the rich while it remains, to a great extent, neglected and it is a valley of misery, outstanding among the most compassionate. Since I consider the education of the youth of my parish very important, I would like to ask you: is it more convenient for me to implement the up keeping of the male centre or is it better to reserve this small capital to support the Hospice of ‘Sacra Famiglia’? Is this inner voice the result of my desire or is it likely to come from the Lord?».

After discernment, on 30 August 1894 he wrote to the superior general, Mother Angela Ghezzi: «You are well informed about the hospice for the benefit of the poor living in the rural areas that Divine Providence is making due preparations; I say Divine Providence because I found myself concerned in this work almost without knowing it. In the little work done I have been involved only as a *manual labourer*. Some priests have accepted to offer their service thinking that the work is already organized, while only the roof of the building has been finished. Among the requests there is a seven year-old child having only the appearance of a human creature and is in constant danger if not looked after day and night»<sup>3</sup>.

The sisters opened the nursery school for the children of the town dwellers, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Maria Monegherio who donated the house and the ground for the building of an educational structure and, later on, she gave also another plot for the construction of the Hospice. With the consent of Mother General, the sisters welcomed the first girls in the room which was supposed

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<sup>3</sup> Corrispondenza in AGSdC; cf. M. CARRARO, A. MASCOTTI, *L’Istituto delle sante B. Capitanio e V. Gerosa*, Milano 1987, I, 323-325.

to be the chapel for the use of the community, recognizing in these girls, as Bartolomea did, the image of Jesus Christ. The charism of Fr Pogliani «*Super omnia caritas*» (charity above all) matched perfectly with the ideal of our foundress who wanted an Institute «*totally founded on charity*» (CF 1).

In 1896 the «Sacra Famiglia was founded as a hospice for the incurable patients of the rural areas in Cesano Boscone, province of Milan<sup>4</sup>, for the care of the poor, especially the most unfortunate, such as: the chronics, idiots, blind, crippled and those who, in a way or another, were unable to earn their living», in accord with the model of the Cottolengo in Turin. At that time, having disabled or mentally handicapped persons at home was a matter of shame and therefore, they were kept hidden; they were persons in need of care and most of all they were mouths to be fed which was a burden for the poor tenant farmers who worked hard to earn their living.

The Home was called «Sacra Famiglia» because we all must consider the poor as ‘sacred’ and the main purpose was to create a family atmosphere for patients who had to leave their families or who had never had one; besides the Home was placed under the protection of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the model family of love, communion and surrender to Providence. Trust in Providence was the basic theme of Fr Pogliani who was convinced that God always provides for his children, so much so, that at the beginning of the activity he gave orders not to register the income and the expenses.

The correspondence between Fr Pogliani and Mother Ghezzi continued until **30 September 1903** when 4 sisters and 6 *mandatarie*<sup>5</sup>, all young, arrived at Sacra Famiglia (replacing the Sisters of Maria Consolatrice) dedicating themselves to the 142 patients with care and great patience. They were aware of the delicate mission entrusted to them and they did not spare themselves neither by day nor

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<sup>4</sup> Name provided on the rubber-stamp and in the letter-head of the official documents of the Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Weber Sr. Pierina (43 yrs), Battistoti Sr. Basilia (34 yrs), Crespi Sr. Ambrogina (26 yrs), Campelli Sr. Carmela (22 yrs); Maddini Maddalena (32 yrs), Mascherpa Teresa (34 yrs), Pozzi Stella (26 yrs), Redolfi Maria (24 yrs), Roncoroni Rosa (23 yrs), Sioli Giuseppina (20 yrs); cf. Stato effettivo, 31 December 1903, in AGSdC.

night<sup>6</sup>, doing two shifts and working with a spirit of sacrifice and humility. Their number increased with that of the patients and the expansion of the services: education, kitchen, laundry and accounting. They were the protagonists of the development of this apostolic work. We will look, now, at the prospect of the patients and of the sisters during 3 years of the presidency of Fr Pogliani (1896-1921)<sup>7</sup>.

<i>year</i>	1906	1912	1916
<i>patients</i>	187	368	479
<i>sisters</i>	13	22	23

It is interesting to take into consideration the distinction of sex and pathology of the patients arriving from all over Italy, from Alexandria to Venice, from Sondrio to Catania; their up-keeping was entrusted to the charity of individual persons, while now it is supported by the municipalities, congregations of charity or by dispositions of the Royal Interior Minister or of the Royal Prefecture.

<b>1906</b>	total	male	female	<b>1912</b>	t	m	f	<b>1916</b>	t	m	f
idiots	42	25	17		89	46	43		106	62	44
paralytics	20	11	9		43	21	22		63	34	29
elderly	41	26	15		63	36	27		79	44	35
epileptics	18	4	14		48	20	28		65	31	34
blind	16	14	2		20	12	8		28	18	10
rickety °	13	8	5		36	20	16		46	27	19
deaf/dumb	14	8	6		29	14	15		38	21	17
pellagrous	5	3	2		19	12	7		24	14	10
mad	18	10	8		21	11	10		30	17	13
<b>total</b>	<b>187</b>	109	78		<b>368</b>	192	176	* <b>479</b>	268	211	

° among the *rickety persons* there were some who had amputation of both legs.

\* to the above total we must add other **25** units (12 m and 13 f) refugees and war invalids; therefore, the general total of the patients was **504**.

<sup>6</sup> cf. A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia 1935, II, 521-522.

<sup>7</sup> The data set of the patients is taken from the trimester newsletters published by S. Famiglia; the data set of the sisters from the annual statistics of the Congregation.

The Workforce Statute of 1916 and 1932, states: «The Hospice demanded a modest fee to the hospitalized (£ 1 per day or 80 cent);<sup>8</sup> the patients could be either male or female including all ages, as long as their legal residence was in the local health department of one of the towns in the province of Milan, excluding the capital; due to their physical or intellectual disabilities these patients were not able to earn their living and their families had no possibilities to look after them or to provide for their nourishment. Preference was given to the idiots, the blind, the deaf-dumb, the epileptic and the maimed; in any case, the only patients excluded were the dangerous mentally ill and the patients with contagious diseases. Whenever economic means were available, also incurable patients coming from other provinces were admitted and hospitalized (Art. II)... in the Hospice assistance and supervision were carried out by the Sisters of Charity or by other religious personnel authorized by the diocesan Ordinary for this specific service (Art. XII)... within the Hospice, Catholic religious assistance was provided for the benefit of patients and personnel, on the basis of agreements established between the Administration Council and the diocesan Ordinary (Art. XIII)»<sup>9</sup>.

The activities of the sisters were defined in the first Convention between the «Sacra Famiglia» and our Institute<sup>10</sup>: «The specific duties of the Sisters are: the care and the assistance of the poor patients and the entire direction of the Hospice; the running of the kitchen, store-room, laundry and linen room; the keeping in order and the cleaning of the various sectors, assisted by the personnel; the watching over the faithful observance of the Regulations; the

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<sup>8</sup> See the 'Conditions for acceptance'. Corrispondenza in AGSdC.

<sup>9</sup> The Workforce Statute of the Hospice «Sacra Famiglia» for the incurable of the rural areas of Milan in Cesano Boscone (province of Milan), was signed in Rome on 21 August 1916 by Tommaso di Savoia, Duke of Genoa, general lieutenant of His Majesty Vittorio Emanuele III, by the grace of God and by the will of the Nation, King of Italy, countersigned by the Minister Orlando, in AGSdC; idem Statute of 1932 signed by Vittorio Emanuele, countersigned by Mussolini.

<sup>10</sup> Convention of 20 October 1923 signed by President C. Cornaggia and Mother Vittoria Starmusch; cf. Convenzioni in AGSdC.

supervision of the moral conduct of the patients and the personnel; the sisters are authorized to admonish them and in case of insubordination they ought to contact the competent authority (Art. 2). The sisters are to be present during the medical visits of the patients, and they must give a report of the good or bad results of the treatments; besides they are to inform immediately the doctors and the priests whenever they foresee the danger of death (Art. 3)».

### **Entrepreneur of God**

The period of the great expansion of the Work is linked to the figure of *Fr Luigi Moneta* (1886-1955), director of «Sacra Famiglia» from 1919 for 36 years. He followed the example of the founder and dedicated his whole life to Christian charity; he was involved in almost 'hectic' activities with an entrepreneurial courage. His motto was: «A block every year». He established 18 new wards and opened the branches of Cocquio (1930), of Intra (1940), of Premeno (1950), of Andorra (1950) and he organized the first summer holidays.

He writes: «Christian charity, which once was expressed through mutual aid, door to door, in these times when social organization is highly developed, it must be expressed through the running of these great institutions which in the name of Christ welcome the 'poor' of the Gospel, helping them to integrate themselves as fruitful elements in social life and to make them able to move towards the ultimate end of man, that is the love of God». Therefore, his aim was the development and the human/religious care of the disabled: «There is an important portion of the work carried out here which is dedicated to the salvation of human beings who, otherwise, would not be neither considered nor valued... we give back to society several hundreds of children who have attended special or vocational schools where these youngsters had the chance to discover themselves and their abilities so that they were able to undertake a profitable employment»<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> cf. E. BRESSAN, *Un prete ambrosiano per un miracolo di carità*, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1996.

About forty girls were employed in sewing for the Institute and outsiders; there was a knitting workshop and also a shoe making workshop where the inmates prepared and repaired the shoes of all the patients; those who were not able to engage themselves in demanding jobs used to attach the tags; all these employments were carried out for third parties. The salary was given on Saturdays and in every ward the sister used to keep the register in which she noted incomes and expenses of each patient.

In 1928 Fr Luigi founded the *Pious Union of the Handmaids of Divine Providence*<sup>12</sup>, depending upon the Ordinary of the Diocese and represented by the Director of the Hospice; their superior was a sister of Maria Bambina as well as their mother mistress. They collaborated in all the activities carried out in the hospice, having a preference for the most humble and hard jobs; the blind, besides dedicating longer hours to prayer and adoration, used to knit and sing in the ‘choir’; a few of them studied music and offered their service as organists.

The years of the war and the following ones, were really times of intense fatigue and overwork. In the bulletin of the Institute of 1939 we learn that in order to feed 1,800 persons (patients, sisters, lay people) they were daily in need of 9 tons of bread, 150 kilos of rice, 120 kilos of pasta, 250 kilos of beef, 150 kilos of cheese, 200 litres of wine and 300 litres of milk, not to mention the fruit and vegetables. The bread was baked in the Home Bakery, while the farm of the Home provided for all the rest. During the war – a sister wrote in the community diary – the hospice was a point of reference for all those who looked for a peaceful place outside Milan. Mgr Moneta opened the doors to all those who asked for

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<sup>12</sup> Initially they were girls of the Hospice with physical and/or sensorial handicap who were not accepted in other institutes, and through the experience of their own pain they felt the call to help other people who suffer. They were divided in groups of 15 members, as the mysteries of the Rosary, but in all they were 50. The name ‘Handmaids’ reminded them of the *Madonna*, the handmaid of the Lord, ‘of the Divine Providence’ totally entrusted to the Lord; cf. «Le Ancelle della Divina Provvidenza al servizio degli ospiti della Sacra Famiglia di Cesano Boscone (MI)», 2011. Now only 4 remained and they are old and in need of care.

hospitality because his deep trust in Divine Providence was unyielding<sup>13</sup>. The sisters worked 24 upon 24 hours, with admirable spirit of sacrifice and with great charity providing food also for many outsiders. Sr. Bruna Guarnerio<sup>14</sup> said that: «Even in the hardest years of the war nothing was missing and we had also in abundance. We used to prepare about six hundred food baskets everyday for the many poor and hungry people outside the hospice»; and the bombs did not touch the Institute!

From 1940 to 1945 the number of the sisters went up from 62 to 90 and the guests from 1,600 to 2,480 of which 339 war orphans who, thanks to the sisters, found a family. In 1946, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation, Mgr Moneta wrote to Card. I. Schuster, «The Board of Directors decided to celebrate this occasion with solemnity *ut videant opera vestra bona et glorificent Patrem* (Mt 5:16: so that seeing your good works they may give praise to your Father). Our Hospice is a hymn of love to DIVINE PROVIDENCE who takes delight in manifesting its wonderful works for the benefit of the poor, the sick and all the unfortunate. It would be enough to have a look at the development of the work done in half a century, to convince ourselves that ‘Providence exists’ and throwing a divine ray in the midst of so much darkness of selfishness and oppression blinding the soul of the delirious humanity».

In 1951 there was the inauguration of the block for the chronic children seriously ill «Casa Santi Innocenti» which hosted up to 500 children. Mgr Moneta insisted upon the idea of solidarity as a social duty and the need for a more genuine justice and stated

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<sup>13</sup> Towards the end of 1942 a temporary jail for persons destined for concentration camps was opened; priests taken out from fascist prisons by card. Schuster, evacuees, hospitalized at the «Ponti» Block, Milan, including the sisters, 5 sisters *Calasanziane* with 20 girls, daughters of prisoners and all those who were in need of rescue: our sisters of «casa generalizia», of the Archbishopric, of the Hospital, of «Pio Albergo Trivulzio», of «Casa di Cura Capitano» in via Quadronno, 20 cloister sisters of Maria Riparatrice and several sisters of Maria Consolatrice; cf. GUIDO VIGNA, *Se la carità fa storia*, Azzate (VA), 1983, cap. IV «Alla Sacra Famiglia non si respinge nessuno».

<sup>14</sup> Sr. Bruna Guarnerio (1913-1993) was the dispenser of Cesano Boscone from 1936 to 1955, then ad Intra from 1957 to 1989.



frankly, using severe and explicit words: «We wanted the name ‘innocent’ (for this huge block) because the poor patients are the innocent victims of a trauma and sometimes also of the faults of their ancestors. They are neglected by society as waste or debris; further more they are the price of foolish amusements, the result of injustices or victims of the lack of social services which society could have prevented or at least should provide for their assistance. These poor outcasts have to expiate many social injustices»<sup>15</sup>. These statements were expressed with extreme frankness, admonishing severely all those who are victims of their own selfishness and are indifferent towards the sufferings of others!

In our schools, hundreds of these needy children return back to life: through the report of 1953<sup>16</sup> one can see the commitment to grant to these children and young inmates a qualification according to the abilities and possibilities of each person.

<b><i>Kindergarten</i></b>	for normal children from 3 to 6
<b><i>Special school</i></b>	9 classes for slow witted and physically abnormal children; the teaching was entrusted to lay teachers and to a sister
<b><i>Primary school</i></b>	10 classes (5 male and 5 female) for normal kids, orphans or in need of protection and care; the male section was entrusted to the sisters; in the female section there were two sisters and two lay teachers
<b><i>Professional training school</i></b>	Industrial male school: three courses with two sections; the lessons were given by lay teachers and diocesan priests
<b><i>Popular evening school</i></b>	for male youth engaged in apprenticeship and girls who did not attend primary school; the teaching was entrusted to lay personnel with the assistance of a sister in the female section

<sup>15</sup> L. MONETA, «I piccoli cronici», in *Bollettino*, April 1950.

<sup>16</sup> Community reports, in AGSdC.

The sisters reserved also a warm and generous availability towards all the persons visiting the hospice, as it is highlighted by the parish priest of Civate Camuno (BS)<sup>17</sup> who in October 1953 accompanied a child: «We were welcomed in the best way by persons devoted to charity, for whom a smile is never missing and doing good has become a necessity of life. Sr. Giovannina Damioli leads us to visit the various departments where human miseries found a shelter, care and comfort. The characteristic feature encountered in the hospice is a calm and edifying serenity... all guests are kept tidy, well cared for, living in rooms full of light and air, where the motherly kindness of the sister spreads like a blaze of evangelical peace... Where do these 70 sisters find strength and perseverance in such a place where they consume their lives in such a way that would horrify ladies and youth fond of the world?... When Sr. Giovannina takes me to visit the beautiful churches where people come to pray... my questions found the answer [...] In taking leave I asked her what she mostly desired, and her answer was: that I may die on my field work among my dear demented patients and that... I might see many vocations flourishing. [...] That is the kingdom of charity... that is the Gospel in action... that is the kingdom of God».

In 1954 Mgr Moneta wrote in his spiritual testament: «...I thank God... for having devoted me to charity within the hospice of Cesano Boscone... my responsibilities before God and before my neighbour are many and serious... I am grateful to the reverend sisters of Maria Bambina for their great work, help and compassion that they have used with me in all these years in the hospice; I do not hesitate to affirm that this is the most beautiful work that they have in their hands and wish that the persons leading the Congregation may consider it a predilection. The hospice is the temple of the charity of Jesus Christ where one should learn to know and love the Lord and to give value of one's own sufferings...». And so it was for our religious Institute and for the sisters who still offer their service there, despite the great process of re-dimensioning.

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<sup>17</sup> cf. «Una visita a Cesano Boscone - Il villaggio del dolore e della carità». *La voce del Pastore*, XI 1953, Pubblicazioni in AGSdC.

### **Charity manager**

After the sudden death of Mgr Moneta (6 March 1955), *Mgr Piero Rampi* who succeeded him – first as director until 1977 and then as president for the next eleven years – was formed at the school and the examples of Card. Giovanni Battista Montini<sup>18</sup>. He introduced an advanced administrative organization, promoted screening for the patients so as to identify typologies and needs, settled the inmates according to their different pathologies and particular requirements, nevertheless always faithful to the principle of his predecessors: accepting all the persons who knocked at the door of «Sacra Famiglia» if they were effectively in need of help. In fifty years the number of the inmates increased from 300 to 3,500, as one can observe in the following general chart indicating the number of the different categories of guests in 1958.

<b>800</b>	chronic <i>elderly persons</i> in need of assistance, or inpatients in the hospital section
<b>1.250</b>	<i>minors</i> with serious psycho-physical ailments
<b>450</b>	<i>pupils</i> of the schools for normal children (kindergarten, primary, professional training)
<b>600</b>	<i>pupils</i> of special and differential schools
<b>400</b>	<i>apprentices</i> in job training workshops (printing, bookbinding, shoe-making, carpentry, mechanics, construction of metal furnishings for hygiene-sanitary purposes, tailoring, knitwear, plumbers, electricians, mattress makers, shatter-proof statue making)

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<sup>18</sup> cf. VITTORIA FOLLI, «L'Ospizio S. Famiglia per incurabili fondato dai sacerdoti D. Pogliani e L. Moneta», in *Prete ambrosiani a servizio dei poveri*, Milano, NED, 1981.

The notion of assistance remained relatively unchanged for the elderly and the mentally ill, while the instruction section became a leading educational and rehabilitation centre for subnormal cases, thanks to modern psycho-pedagogy that provided, for the disadvantaged, many resources properly applied by specialized teams acting for the benefit of each individual. Dr. Pier Angelo Morlotti stated that in team work, the sisters «were very attentive to ensure that the human insights and the daily observations, carried out through examinations, had to work alongside with the mental responsive abilities of their brain power and of the character. Before proceeding with the medical examination and the mental responsive abilities, each sister in charge of the ward had to give a personal report of each patient, and only after such a report the team carried on with the general organic and neurologic visit»<sup>19</sup>.

The sisters did their best to promote in each department, entrusted to them, a real family atmosphere, because they were well aware that living in a peaceful environment was the best therapy for their patients. Moreover, they devoted themselves to providing jobs for the less gifted, because they were conscious that it was for them a balancing element. In fact, the days were so long for these patients who could not have high expectations from the future.

We owe the successes of the cutting, sewing, tailoring and knit-wear classes to the tireless work of the sisters; one sister attended to the distribution of the work and discipline in the mattress workshop; another, very energetic and wise sister, was also able to persuade the doubtful guests to believe that the printing and bookbinding labs were for them a possible employment resource.

Each year, after long or short periods, several dozens of young men and women left the Institute and, whenever possible, they were helped to find a first accommodation<sup>20</sup>.

The sisters adapted themselves to the psycho-pedagogical innovations, always inspired by the deep conscience of their service

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<sup>19</sup> cf. op. cit. VIGNA GUIDO, *Se la carità fa storia*.

<sup>20</sup> cf. «Un'opera che onora Milano, La Sacra Famiglia di Cesano Boscone», *Italia Moderna*, gennaio-febbraio 1959, Pubblicazioni in AGSdC.

of charity. Times were definitely changing and the Convention of 1923 was to be updated: Mother C. Baldinucci in 1959 applied for a new one and in 1961 it entered into force<sup>21</sup>. The new Convention classified precisely the ambits and roles of the sisters: «The sisters are in charge of the following services at the ‘Sacra Famiglia’:

- In the assistance section for patients suffering from serious and hopeless mental deficiencies, both male and female: the sisters are to take care and assist directly the hospitalized settled in wards suitable to their needs, supported by the lay personnel employed by the institution, according to the directions given by the Management Board and the various medical/educational teams;
- in the home for the aged and in the hospital section: the care and assistance of the patients following the indications of the Health Management, according to the system in use within the ordinary hospitals and in hospitals for chronics;
- in the section for scholastic re-education: the educational activities and health care, either through teaching or other specific educational activities which facilitate to attain good results;
- in the field of professional training: instruction activities especially in the female laboratories, and in the general educational activities in order to cooperate in the education of the children entrusted to them, in accordance with the Managing Board and of the medical/pedagogic teams;
- in the general services: administration, sacristy, linen-room, pharmacy, laundry, storeroom, kitchen, etc., supported by the domestic lay personnel».

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<sup>21</sup> cf. Convention between the ‘O. P. Ospizio Sacra Famiglia’ of Cesano Boscone represented by the comm. dott. Arturo Aletti, and the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Saints B. Capitanio and V. Gerosa in Milan, represented by the Superior General Mother C. Baldinucci, 1959, *Convenzioni* in AGSdC.

It is to be underlined that the lay staff, working alongside with the sisters, became larger in number and that the activities of the sisters were carried out «according to the directions of the Managing Board». Besides the role of medical/pedagogical team worked effectively indicating exactly what to be done.

The successive presidents, Mgr Attilio Nicora (from 1977 to 1989) and Mgr Enrico Colombo (from 1989 to 2011) pursued the same organizational line.<sup>22</sup>

A special plan for each patient was to be worked out, paying attention to the whole situation of the person; in order to work out these plans different experts worked in synergy in order to seek the welfare of the persons and to develop their autonomy.

In the mid-70s there was a consistent ‘secular turn’.

### **The service of charity and intercession**

The following diagram shows the progressive decrease of the sisters: there were no more resources available to maintain unchanged their number or to replace the elderly ones. The five years scanning printout, from 1964 to 2009, is clear and talks by itself.

<i>Year</i>	1964	1969	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
<i>Sisters</i>	<b>68</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>

The sisters did not have the professional preparation required by the new services which from the scientific point of view were open to study and research work and to update continually in health-educational-assistance methodologies. Consequently, the sisters, who had so far looked after the inmates and the house, without a fixed time-table, without rest or holidays, had to adapt themselves to the new situation: some were hired as employees (16 nurses in 1974), those over 55 years entered into social Convention, those

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<sup>22</sup> Now the «Sacra Famiglia» is presided over by Don Vincenzo Barbante.

over 70 could remain as quiescent. In fact, the Convention of 1961, n. 8 states: «The Hospice ought to maintain for lifetime the Rev. Sisters who have offered their assistance at the Hospice for a considerable period, who due to age retirement or physical disabilities, are to be considered quiescent».

The Conventions of 1974<sup>23</sup> adds: «The sisters will offer their service for 48 hours per week, distributed over six days; they will have a day off a week and a month off per year for their holidays (Art. 4). The Administration will provide the payment, according to law, for the social security contributions, health insurance and indemnity against accidents at work (Art. 9)». Mother Angelamaria Campanile, responding to the letter of 28 March in which Mgr Rampi presents the new conventions, wrote: «I am very grateful for the consideration you reserve for the sisters who have worked for many years at the ‘Sacra Famiglia’ and that they have been included in the new restructuring plan as quiescents, with the possibility of offering extra-professional services. [...] I hope that our Congregation will continue this presence and activity for many years in the future».<sup>24</sup>

For the sisters, however, it was the time to expropriate themselves and renounce their positions; it was a time of silence and prayer. But beyond the reduction of the quantity and quality of their duties and responsibilities, the style and dedication of the sisters remained the same: what qualified them was not their role, but the total availability to help the disabled, the sick and the lonely whom they considered brothers and sons. They conformed them-

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<sup>23</sup> cf. Convention between the «Istituto Sacra Famiglia» of Cesano Boscone and the Sisters of Charity of Saints B. Capitanio and V. Gerosa, signed by Superior General Sr. Angelamaria Campanile and by the President sen. avv. Mario Dosi in 1974, *Convenzioni in AGSdC*.

<sup>24</sup> cf. Letter of 24 April 1974, *Corrispondenza in AGSdC*.

selves with the new needs and systems, without ever missing to offer affection, to listen to the patients, and to give a caress or a maternal attention with great concern as a sign of love and closeness to each and every patient. Celestina Milani, in commenting the social documentary «La mamma bianca»<sup>25</sup> (The white mother), realized in the Children's Department, said: «Their (of the children) dead and void eyes simply watch. No light of intelligence. They move, however, lively and vigorously and with their loyal smile seek for a caress from 'mamma bianca' who believes in them, because she discovered their soul, a soul revealing the will of God, a soul redeemed by the blood of Christ. Some persons looked at them with compassion, wondering whether it was worthwhile spending their lives for their sake. They did not perceive the cross concealed within their veils».

The sisters in charge of the linen room were keen in seeing their inmates properly dressed; the sisters in charge of the girls' education helped them in their basic needs encouraging them to commit themselves to doing their normal things; the sister in charge of the store room spent the day in the midst of fabric rolls, boxes and registers of the loaded and unloaded materials; the sisters in charge of the kitchen and dining halls did their best to satisfy the tastes of their patients. In 1997 the Official Body was transformed from an IPAB (Public institution for assistance and charitable work) into a NPO (Non-Profit Organization) that is Christian-based Foundation. Very often, the «Sacra Famiglia» had to re-examine its activities and to innovate itself in order to answer to the needs of the time and to abide by the new regional and national rules, without giving up to its 'mission', in fidelity to the founder:

- taking care of the persons bearing mental and physical disabilities and the non self-sufficient elderly persons,
- promoting the social integration of the inmates,
- developing the skills of the operators,

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<sup>25</sup> N. TADDEI, *La mamma bianca*, is a documentary presented at the «10<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Documentaries and Short Films», Venice, 2-12 July 1959; cf. scheda in AGSdC.



- perceiving and responding to the needs of inmates with love, intelligence and creativity,
- offering support to the families and a service to the whole society.

From 2004 the sisters dedicate themselves to religious assistance, even in the «Casa di Cura Ambrosiana» (Nursing Home)<sup>26</sup>; their approach is friendly and attentive to each person; very often, they are the «memory bank» storing the life-experience heritage of the disabled inmates: they know exactly what the inmates are fond of, what frightens them and the persons they dearly love and the events that they would always remember willingly and those they would like to forget.

The president, Mgr Enrico Colombo, in his letter to Mother C. Kersbamer,<sup>27</sup> states: «The type of presence requested to the sisters has certainly changed. They are no longer the basic and chief elements, but they are an important symbol of service, dedication, charity, brotherhood and of an explicit style; of course, without disregarding the many concrete deeds and the daily efforts the Sisters of Maria Bambina live and support in the Institution».

Regarding the ‘style’, the director Angelo Daldosso<sup>28</sup> in his historical commemoration, on the occasion of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our presence at ‘Casa Famiglia’, highlights the following features:

- *tenderness of heart*: a kind of an overall motherhood, because all, guests and operators, have their own needs;

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<sup>26</sup> It was opened in 1968, for the health care of handicapped patients who would have hardly get a place at the public hospitals; today it offers 130 beds for hospitalization and 12 for day hospital and day surgery, diagnostic labs and a service for outpatients open to all.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Letter of 9 January 1991, prot. 03/91, Corrispondenza in AGSdC.

<sup>28</sup> cf. *Historical memory: 90 years' presence of the Sisters of Maria Bambina in the Institute «Sacra Famiglia» of Cesano Boscone (1903-1993)*, in AGSdC.

- *choice of the last*, especially those who would never recompense with words of gratitude;
- *strength*: the inner force that unites them, that is: the strength of giving, doing and praying, the strength of helping and loving, the strength of counselling and reproof, the strength of receiving and educating; they are strong women in hoping, in concreteness, in persuading and in accepting the solitude of incomprehension;
- *savings*: not as an end in itself, but as an insight to prevent and to foresee the real needs at the right moment so that the gift would be real; how much creativity! The awareness that everything is a gift of providence increases the value of things...
- *detachment*: serving without counting; detachment from the power of attraction of the things managed which is an interior challenge: living within the situations and remaining free;
- *service of charity*: to serve others for free, to offer one's own life, one's own youth, one's own maturity, one's own old age to those in need... therefore, charity means joy, because they encounter Christ in the person of the poor; it is acceptance, availability, patience, forgiveness, trust, hope;
- *community* is a life-style, being with the most poor; it is a responsibility, a relationship, a motherly apprehension and a predilection.

Undoubtedly, this profile is an expression of kindness and esteem on behalf of the director towards the Sisters of Maria Bambina, but it is also a praiseworthy memory of many sisters who have lived in the main branch of the «Sacra Famiglia» and/or in the subordinate ones<sup>29</sup> for many years, some also for their whole life. Through their life they have written, with an indelible ink,

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<sup>29</sup> Cocquio Trevisago (1930-2009) centro di riabilitazione per bimbi problematici; Intra Verbania (1940-1991) per anziani non autosufficienti; Andora (1950-1976) colonia marina permanente per minorati psicofisici; Premeno (1950-1975) colonia montana permanente per bambini normali gracili; Regoledo di Perledo (1958-2011) colonia permanente per bambini anormali; cf. Relazione del 24 settembre 1958 e fascicoli in AGSdC.

pages of charity, solidarity, sacrifice and concrete gestures day after day. In fact, today, many lay people who wish to give meaning for their own work and to find out the truth about their being, continue the journey along the path traced by the sisters.

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In 2013, the «Sacra Famiglia» Foundation estimates 1,950 employees, 840 volunteers and manages other fifteen blocks, in three regions: *Lombardy* (Cesano Boscone, Fagnano di Gaggiano, Buccinasco, Abbiategrasso, Albairate, Settimo Milanese, Inzago, Lecco, Regoledo di Perledo, Cocquio Trevisago, Varese, Castronno), *Piedmon* (Verbania), *Liguria* (Andora, Pietra Ligure); the daily average number of guests is 1,900<sup>30</sup>, from fragile minors to Alzheimer patients. It is a family helping other families taking care of fragile persons by offering them: residential services, day care centres, outpatient and home care... The centrality of the person and its identity is the principle that qualifies the way of being and working in all its facilities.

Among the various services and voluntary work, deserves to be mentioned «I giorni del fuoco»<sup>31</sup>, a weekly summer school, to which some students attending our schools take part; the encounter of two ‘different lives’ improves or renews the sense of living.

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<sup>30</sup> cf. Foundation of «Sacra Famiglia Onlus», from 1896 the family that helps other families, in AGSdC; *Avvenire*, 16 giugno 2015, Cronaca di Milano I - «Sacra Famiglia da 119 anni al servizio dei più deboli».

<sup>31</sup> cf. *Avvenire*, 18 maggio 2014, Speciale Cesano Boscone.