



and you too **do** likewise

Sr. Carmela Paloschi

«I was in prison...»

Penal Institutes for «Pericolanti, Penitenti, Carcerate»

(Part IV)

«CASA FAMIGLIA», VENICE

The sense of human dignity, the right to life, to the integrity of the human person... family life and work: a place in life is a fundamental right inscribed in every human being. And yet, not all have ever been given a 'place' in a family nor in work; in fact, some or even many have been denied the right to be born or to have a name; unwed mothers may not find it easy to re-integrate in their own society. That was the situation in the early twentieth century, when the Istituto «Casa Famiglia» was opened at *S. Eufemia, Giudecca*, 669, Venice.

It was meant to be a provisional home for girls in moral danger, unwed mothers and young offenders who had served a sentence in prison and were willing to change. Before sending the Sisters, the Superior General Mother Angela Ghezzi asked for the 1909 Statute of «Pia casa di rifugio» (as it was originally called) from Signora (widow) Linda (Teodolinda) Giudica née Battaggia, who had planned it under the guidance of Mgr Francesco Paganuzzi¹; the Statute said: «The provisional Home will address all

¹ A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 641.

sorts of moral disorders. Admissions will therefore include both 'wretched' girls gone astray and young women in moral danger, provided there be hope of bringing them back to the right path, or of saving by providing them with a safe place. However none, except rare exceptions, will be allowed to stay longer than a month... A generous welcome should be given to such 'unfortunate' homeless girls gone astray or girls living in unsafe homes...».

Different arrangements were devised for married women: «They will stay as long as is needed for them to re-unite themselves to their husband, or till all formalities are carried out to make their relationship legal and acceptable before God and before the Law». From the juridical point of view, «the Home, directly depending on His Eminence Cardinal, Patriarch of Venice (then Mgr Aristide Cavallari), will be run by the Sisters of Charity of Maria Bambina, but there will be a *Procuratore* appointed by the Patriarch who will make decisions on the more difficult cases, in full agreement with the Rev. Superior. There will also be a small Committee of ladies who will collaborate with the Sisters in matters that have to do with their settling down»². The Sisters, including two Sisters and two *sorelle mandatarie* arrived in **April 1910**; the Superior was Sr. Alessandrina Scarpellini, formerly 'vice superior' at *San Gioachino* Convent. When the superior general asked if she was willing to be Superior, Sr. Alessandra, very much like St V. Gerosa answered: «...If the Lord wishes to use me for such an office, is a sign that He wants to convince everybody that He needs none in particular for carrying out His work, and the poorer the instrument he wants to use is, the more clearly will His supreme power stand out»³. The next Superior was Sr. Veronica Berera and, after that, for the next 17 years (from 1911 to 1928), the Superior of the Sisters and a real mother to the girls entrusted to their care, was Sr. Luigia Dalla Santa, who distinguished herself for her kind-ness and delicate charity⁴.

² Statute 1909, in AGSdC, 240/A.

³ Corrispondenza, Letter dated 22.5.1910, *ibidem*.

⁴ cf. A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 642.

In the beginning, admissions were few, but gradually it catered to an increasing number of girls coming from various districts of Italy. Reports in our Archives covering a number of years give information on the flow of persons cared for and speak of the continuous assistance of divine Providence sustaining the project⁵. The 1913 *Resoconto* (financial-and-moral Statement) says: «On 31 December 1912 *Casa Famiglia* has eleven (dear) girls joined by other forty-seven over the Year 1913. Eighteen of these were helped to settle down in charitable or rehabilitation centres, fourteen were placed as domestic maids in homes of the well-to-do, two were found a job in offices suited to their educational qualifications, one got married, while twelve of them, who had given proof of their moral uplift, were received in their own homes, five were dismissed, the others are still waiting to settle down... The cash on hand available at the start, in 1914, amounted to a miserable £ 25.26: this would give us every good reason for closing down the Home, but we still have a comforting hope in complete self-abandonment to the Providence of God, who knows how to inspire so many kind, well-to-do persons to co-operate generously with a Home that is so beneficial morally and in the civil sense».

The ‘balance’ sheet (of inmates) for Year 1927 of «*Casa Famiglia*» is shown below:

unwed mothers	33	returned home	24
gone astray	22	were admitted in various Homes	4
in moral danger	5	at «Asilo S. Giobbe»	8
brought by the <i>Questura</i> (Police)	13	wet-nurses at Esposti/Umberto I	30
released from prison	3	found a job	6
not yet settled as on 31.12.1926	10	did not want to stay on	3
		at the Home on 31.12.1927	11
TOTAL	86	TOTAL	86

⁵ Relazioni, in AGSdC, 240/A.

Following upon this is a detailed Accountancy Statement briefly given below:

Income £ 26,932.18	Expenditure £ 26,719.45	Balance £ 212.73
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The report concludes: «If up to this day, relying on divine Providence and with the help of kind persons, we have succeeded in overcoming difficulties of every sort, we trust that needed help will never fail us and that with better prospects «Casa Famiglia» can start its eighteenth year of life»⁶.

By 1939 the number of inmates must have become considerably high judging from the current report, which said: «Last September, alarmed by the events that followed one upon another we deemed it prudent not to receive girls from other Districts; that is why the number of admissions, 127, is slightly lower than in recent years. The age of unwed mothers admitted at the Home ranges from twelve to forty. Most of them are in their twenties. Some have had jobs, but many lived in their own homes, where the lack of watchfulness on the part of their parents, added to the girls' thoughtlessness has caused them to go astray... The accounts show no deficit; the prospects for the new year are not at all bright. Prices of foodstuffs are increasingly high and we dare to place our poverty in the hands of God's Providence, trusting that, as He has done so far, God will give us not only our daily bread to give strength to the body, but also divine light that shows us the way to truth and to life». In these last words we sense the keen desire to find for each person cared for the needed assistance now and a good settling for her future.

In *Statute* 1943 the Home is called «Casa Famiglia», as it truly was for the young inmates: the home where they were made welcome after they had left the dwelling that did not ensure them a 'new life'; a family to replace, at least for a time, what they could

⁶ Resoconto economico e morale del 1927, in AGSdC, 240/A.

not form for themselves. In fact we read: «During their stay, the young women will be received with motherly love and helped in their religious and moral rehabilitation» (n. 8); on their part they must, at their entrance, agree to abide by the rules (n. 9).

Another name given to the Home was «Casa S. Pio X» because of the Pope's moral support and the gift of the altar for the chapel.

Through his Letter dated 16 November 1943 His Eminence Adeodato Giovanni Piazza, Patriarch of Venice, erected «Casa Famiglia» into a moral person with all corresponding rights, privileges and obligations; he appointed Mgr Giuseppe De Biasio, Parish Priest of *Santo Stefano* as his Delegate, and Countess Paolina Giustiniani as President. The Statute was therewith approved by the Patriarch.

In 1944 there is recorded the Agreement drawn up between Cardinal Adeodato Giovanni Piazza, Patriarch of Venice and Mother Angiolina Reali, Superior General of the Sisters of Charity of Blessed B. Capitanio, known as *Suore di Maria Bambina*; it established the duties of the Sisters and the local Superior and economic treatment in their regard. By Letter dated 10.11.1945 the President raised the Sisters' annual pay «certainly not meant as remuneration (which would be absolutely inadequate), but as a token of the Managing Committee's grateful acknowledgement of the Sisters' inestimable work of charity». And in 1948, while offering a further rise in the sisters' salary, she wrote to the superior general: «...the compensation is too low to meet actual needs. Their work is truly praiseworthy and no reward here on earth could compensate them for it. We know that our Home owes its very life to the wise charity of your spiritual daughters who do all they can with a devoted, self-sacrificing love»⁷.

⁷ Letter dated 24.3.1948, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 240/A.

The *Minutes of the Meeting* (1955), held after the repairs done on the building in 1950, point out: «The Home has received and put up 147 pregnant women; number attended upon: an average of 9,245 per day; care free of charge given to 25 young mothers; number attended upon: an average of 1,391 per day... the inmates are not all from Venice; some come from other places: Vicenza, Trieste, Udine, Treviso, Verona and Trento...»⁸.

Among the rules on the behaviour of the inmates we note: «Newcomers will diligently attend to devotion and work, responding to the Sisters' care with obedience and respect and giving an edifying example to one another. They will be silent about their previous adventures and avoid relating to their companions about the painful life-situations they have passed through». Moreover: «Should anyone fail to respond to the rehabilitation work expected of her, the President of the Managing Committee, after consulting Mother Superior, will dismiss her»⁹.

The Sisters stayed at «Casa Famiglia» till **13 July 1956**, caring for the young women and working for their human and social welfare. With dedicated love they offered real support, showed them sincere esteem and boundless trust; they encouraged them to regain and develop their best resources so that they might soon return home or, at least, be able to re-integrate into the social structures they had been cut off from.

On 15 June 1957 Miss Emilia Nordio, a tireless collaborator, wrote to Mother Costantina Baldinucci: «...the grief and amazement I felt when, on 13 July last year the Sisters of Saint Capitano left our Establishment after forty-six years of dedicated service for the benefit of unfortunate young women, do not exempt me from the duty to express my gratitude for what you have given us nor from the devotion we owe the Institute at the head of which you, Mother, have been placed a few months ago»¹⁰.

⁸ cf. «Il Gazzettino» 19.1.1955, in AGSdC, 240/B.

⁹ Regolamento of 1943, nn 8.15, ibidem.

¹⁰ Corrispondenza, ibidem.

«PIA UNIONE PROVVIDENZA», TRENTO

In the Archives of the Generalate of our Institute we find the 1904 *Statute* for «Pia Unione di Nostra Signora», Trento¹¹; it speaks of «its purpose to offer means for growth in holiness of its members through the practice of the works of mercy towards the needy. It is divided into two sectors:

- a. *Visitation of Our Lady Sector*. Its members visited needy families in their own homes, especially those with someone sick, about to give birth to a baby, or for some ‘moral’ reason.
- b. *Immaculate Conception Sector*. Members, under the protection of Mary and of St Ignatius, did their best to rehabilitate girls gone astray and others in moral danger, by placing them in proper Institutes» (Art. 2).

This Association was founded in May 1902 by Maria Rohr de Gatter and her group of friends. Their spiritual guide and financial helper was Mgr Celestino Endrici, two years later Bishop of Trento. In the 1909 *Statute* the Association was named «Pia Unione Provvidenza», and so it was in fact, because it was founded on free donations made to it by founders, patrons and benefactors.

Its field of work, obviously «as far as funds available could go, was defined as given below:

- receiving forsaken babies and placing them in proper institutes or with respectable families;
- rescuing little children from danger and bad example, from harmful situations that jeopardized their future;
- watching over them to prevent them from being ill-treated, forsaken or under-nourished;
- saving young girls from all sorts of danger, in time, by placing them in safe hands or, if needed, in suitable Institutes;
- helping girls in moral danger to find the right path;
- rehabilitating young women gone astray;
- giving a helping hand to the various needs of helpless women deprived of support.

¹¹ Signed on 17 February by the *vicario capitolare* Fred Oberhauser and on 26 February by Lieutenant Meusburger, in AGSdC.

The Project put no limits to its activity with regard to place or age» (Art. 2,3). On 1st **March 1914** the inner organization of the Project was entrusted to the care of the Sisters of Maria Bambina¹²; on 24 May there was the official inauguration of the first dwelling of the «Pia Unione» in via Rosmini, 39 and the President Maria Rohr, received the medal of honour Award sent by Pope Pius X¹³ in acknowledgement of the praiseworthy *Donne Cattoliche* (Catholic Women). In her speech at the function, the president pointed out that the Project was «the only one of its kind in our Trentino District». She reported that in twelve years' time (1902-1914) the Home had helped 947 girls including: 234 under ten years of age, 228 aged ten to twelve, 205 aged twelve to fifteen, 280 aged fifteen and above. She then spoke of the aims and method followed at the Home, which she dared to call 'Casa Famiglia': «Our programme is simple. As much as possible to save young girls... to procure for them a calm, peaceful life; to create around them a warm, friendly atmosphere, so that their young hearts may be receptive to what is genuine and sincere; much human understanding in face of their defects and shortcomings, and yet sweet firmness as well. Helping them in building up a virtuous life, shunning what is evil of their own accord, not out of fear of punishment but because evil is ugly in itself and harmful in its consequences. Encouraging a sound, intelligent piety that should adorn a woman and keep her faithful to her duty and skilled in housecraft so that, on leaving this Home, every young girl may be prepared to handle any work needed in managing an honest family»¹⁴.

Next came the Talk of the Chaplain, don Tomaso Boninsegna. While tracing the eventful life of the Home over the past years he mentioned that in March 1906 it was named «Pia Unione Provvidenza», yet keeping itself under the protection of Mary Immaculate.

¹² Three Sisters and a *sorella mandataria*: Zatelli Sr. Giuseppina, Augeli Sr. Massimina, Pedrotti Sr. Tomasina, Erba Lucia.

¹³ cf. A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 783-784.

¹⁴ Inauguration of «Casa Pia Unione Provvidenza» in Trento, 21 may 1914, Tipografia Editrice Comitato Diocesano, Trento, 1914, pp. 4-5, in AGSdC.

With regard to objectives achieved he affirmed: «If we consider results obtained we have good reason to express heartfelt thanks to God. As many as nine girls who for three years received rehabilitation help at the Home, have joined the ‘Maddalene’ of Monza, Cremona and the Institute of *Cottolengo* of Turin. Three more girls had their religious Vestition with the Sisters of Charity. Many others are by now excellent wives and mothers of a family, while others are doing very well in their service as maids»¹⁵.

Greatly comforted by such encouraging information, the Sisters carried out with loving care their apostolic mission among girls in moral danger – a type so dear to Bartolomea. Their commitments were specified in the 1914 *Convenzione*¹⁶ drawn up between the Managing Committee of «Pia Unione Provvidenza» and the Sisters of Charity of Venerable B. Capitanio: «The Sisters will have the charge of the inner running of the Home; education, religious and moral instruction and invigilation of the girls; they will train them in housecraft and needlework which may be useful in certain families (n. 2). The *sorella mandataria*, in charge of the kitchen and housework, will be helped by girls who will take turns as drawn up by the Superior for work in the kitchen and about the house (n. 3). The Sisters will carry out the above-mentioned duties with the understanding that they be free during times assigned to the observance of the religious practices proper to their Congregation (n. 4)».

The cheerful, safe environment which the presence of the Sisters had created was soon disturbed by the events of World War I. From 1915 to 1920 the Home was forced to discontinue its activity and was used for military purposes. The girls were sent back home or admitted in other Homes.

On its re-opening on 6 April 1920, the Home received girls in moral danger, orphaned or illegitimate, and girls ill-treated by parents due to poverty or moral degradation (two were born of

¹⁵ Ibidem, pp. 8,15.

¹⁶ Agreement signed on 11 November 1914 by Mother M. Angela Ghezzi and by the President Maria Rohr, countersigned on 22 January 1915 by Vicar General Mgr Lodovico Echelli, *ibidem*.

mothers addicted to drink; one of these had 11 illegitimate children, two mothers had committed murder...). There were four Sisters living with them, including a *sorella mandataria*¹⁷. In November 1920 the Institute was honoured by a visit of Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Elizabeth of Baviera: she showed concern for the girls and expressed full satisfaction with the directors of the Home.

On 8 December 1933 Maria Rohr president and foundress died, deeply admired and mourned by all.

From the end of the War till 1937, the Home catered to 344 young girls. Of these, 26 got married, 13 joined the Convent, 5 found jobs in various shops, 189 earn their living as wardrobe keepers, maids, nursemaids or domestic servants...¹⁸.

Girls admitted at age 6 to 14, go to the State Elementary School, accompanied by a Sister. When their compulsory education age is over, they join the Needlework Classes run by a qualified Sister and learn cutting-out, darning, embroidery, knitting... for which they also take commissions. At the same time they give a hand about the house, at the kitchen and laundry, taking it in turns and always under the direction of the Sisters. The Sisters also give theoretical lessons in domestic science for a few hours a week, while two lay-teachers, active members of the Association, hold classes on good manners and every fortnight instruct them on dangers that they might face when they leave «Pia Unione Provvidenza» for good. With Renzo Tramaglino¹⁹ we could say: «God's Providence is at work there!». Several times, in fact, there have been found, in the letter-box, envelopes containing money donated by anonymous benefactors.

We don't come across awards of merit made to the Sisters, but we can very well have an idea of the charity shown by them in the words said by the lawyer, Sir Giulio Savorana, in occasion of the

¹⁷ Pedrotti Sr. Tomasina, Casagrande Sr. Leonina, Biasi Sr. Raffaella, Zenoniani Sr. Giulia, Orler Caterina, cf. Statistiche annuali, in AGSdC.

¹⁸ *Meeting of «Pia Unione Provvidenza»*, 9 May 1937, pp 11ff, from «Vita Trentina», Scuola Tipografica Principesco-Arcivescovile, Artigianelli Trento, 1937-XV, ibidem.

¹⁹ cf. A. MANZONI, *I promessi sposi*, Venezia, 1940, chapter 17.

General Meeting of 1937 at which a good number of them were present: «...the charity of preserving and restoring human life is clearly shown by the teachers at *Famiglia Home*, which cares for young girls in moral danger and for those already gone astray...; charity's eyes are wide open, whereas those of justice are shut; ...while man's justice condemns, charity always redeems and restores life to persons by giving them back to the society which had considered them lost for ever».

In his closing words he expressed his hope that the girls who come out from «Pia Unione Provvidenza» «...even those known to none, daughters of the unknown, of thieves, of murderers, of adulterous mothers, will go into the world, with heads held high, marked by Christian forgiveness; and where they may form new families and lead good, honest lives in the work and of the work, ennobled and redeemed a second time»²⁰.

On 26 April 1942, in Pius XI Hall at via Borsieri, Trento, in occasion of the 40th anniversary of «Pia Unione Provvidenza»²¹, «don Giovanni Susat spoke of the Sisters' loving service: «The life-pattern resumed after the War is cheerful, as in any House of God. Charity reigns supreme, making of those girls so many sisters to one another. Watching over them all is a motherly spirit that is always caring and loving, eager to remove the dross the world had left on them, and to procure for them the comforting benefits of a good education. Their whole personality is developed and enriched: mind, heart, hands, hidden energy released and made to flower in adolescent years. Devotional practice, school-work, needlework and domestic science, physical education: everything is cultivated with a good sense of judgment, in the aim of giving the young girls a formation that will place them honourably on the road towards the state-in-life that God, in His Providence, has designed for them».

In 1940, due to World War II, the Home moved to Sarche (Trento District) in a building of the Bishop's property, where it remained **till the end of 1945**.

²⁰ cf. op. cit. Adunanza generale, 1937, in AGSdC, p. 8.

²¹ *Provvida sventura e luce di carità*, pp. 20-21, quaderno manoscritto, ibidem.

Back Home, the Project fell into line with educational institutions and social welfare Centres (in 1954 there was the inauguration of the new building in via Milano, 43) and later on, in 1970, it was converted into a Hostel for High School and University Students, till 2002.

«CASA DELLA DIVINA PROVVIDENZA», VICENZA

It is the third Home for young women gone astray or in moral danger, that is named after God's Providence, and there are at least two good reasons for it. To begin with, it is truly providential for girls in unsafe life-situations, or who want to start a new life, to be received at the Home free of charge and be lovingly treated in it. Besides, it is the Providence that through the generosity of honest benefactors guarantees means of subsistence at this charitable institution as well. In fact, in 1944, in occasion of its silver jubilee celebrations, Bishop Carlo Zinato called it «Oasis of Love».

On **10 August 1918** Sr. Giuseppina Pellegrini and Sr. Severina Boldi turned up at the flat in via S. Marco, 27, Vicenza, rented by «Protezione della Giovane». Mother A. Ghezzi had sent them to run the Home saying simply: «Do not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick» (*Mt* 12:20; cf. *Is* 42:3); wise, prophetic words, a real compendium of a good method of rehabilitation, animated by trust and hope. The beginnings were hard. The house had no furniture, tables or beds. There was not even money to buy bread... the Sisters slept on the floor and had their meals at the cheap public 'kitchen'. But they were not disheartened and remembered Gerosa's words: «We should not demand miracles from God, but be sure that if there is need for it, Our Lord will perform miracles too»²².

Very soon the Home became too small to meet requests that kept coming. In Via San Domenico, 26 dating back to 1624, there was a convent of cloistered Capuchin nuns which had been aban-

²² Processi II, 277; cf. L. I. MAZZA, Vita della ven. suor M. Vincenza Gerosa, Modena, 1910, 315.

done in 1810 following upon Napoleon's Decree of suppression of convents. After the Committee of «Protezione della Giovane» had repaired the building, readjusting it a bit but preserving the convent structure, it was let out to Maria Fogazzaro, younger daughter of the novelist Antonio Fogazzaro (1842-1911), and in November 1921 the Sisters moved into it.

«Soccorsetto» (as it was then called) was renamed «Casa della Divina Provvidenza» with the aim of rehabilitating minors, who increased more and more in number in those post-War years. They were taken off the roads, from the pavement, from damaged homes²³.

Then again divine Providence arrived in time: our religious Congregation purchased the building and made it decidedly habitable and functional, while more and more girls were received day by day. Young women gone astray or in moral danger were received with no limits set to age or social status though all of them belonged to the working class. Several times the Sisters were urged to have State Recognition Status for the Home but, knowing that a self-governing body unhindered by formalities and bureaucratic red-tape, was more free to take in as many girls as the place could hold, with a preference for minors and those exposed to the greatest danger, they declined to do so, firmly trusting in God's Providence, who can do without men's calculations²⁴.

The Institute's objective was «to provide a home without delay to girls and women in distress who, whatever be their age and status or the place they come from or their religious faith, are for some reason or other in urgent need of shelter. They will be given a warm welcome with Christian generosity and an infinite sense of love, giving without asking anything in return and helping them settle down»²⁵. The little ones will be sent to school and all the others will join courses in Craft held at the Home: knick-knacks in felt cloth or ceramic, darning and embroidery, sewing and knitting.

²³ A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1936, III, 782-786.

²⁴ cf. op. cit. 987-788.

²⁵ *La «Casa della Divina Provvidenza» nel XXV dalla fondazione*, Vicenza, Officina tipografica vicentina, 1944-XXII, 9, in AGSdC.

In December 1934 the Central Council of «Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia» conferred the Silver Medal Award to Sr. Giuseppina Pellegrini, superior, in acknowledgement of her achievement as Foundress and Directress of «Pia Casa della Provvidenza» in Vicenza: «with a deep, intuitive understanding of the needs of the city and District of Vicenza, she has brought into life, in 1918, the Charitable Institution she cares for, with the mite of the generous rather than the support and contribution of Public Bodies»²⁶.

In an anonymous report dated 16 May 1946, which must have been written by a Sister-teacher, we read: «Girls in moral danger are accomodated absolutely separate from women gone astray. They are kept at the Home till they gave a moral assurance that they are able to face the dangers and seduction of the world without falling into it... We have seen how formerly girls kept in themselves something sound and healthy even though they had been in close contact with vice; they had religious faith; they did not turn a deaf ear to reminders of God's presence, and so we could, with God's help, time and patience rehabilitate a situation of moral danger or of waywardness; we found it possible to make them understand that a thoughtless behaviour would end up in disaster, even in actual fact and sooner or later they were persuaded to change their ways and their desire to improve was there to see... Today, in the aftermath of World War II, everything has been damaged...»²⁷.

The girls are first split into two or more groups or Classes:

1. *St Gerosa Class* (from 25 to 30 minors), who have already had experience of vice; many were brought here by the Police;
2. *St Theresa Class* (50-60 minors of a mixed type) removed from morally deprived families;
3. *St Capitanio Class*, which receives all minors placed here by families to let them finish their schooling; they have already been helped to settle down and are learning skills in weaving, knitting, embroidery...;

²⁶ cf. A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle Suore di carità*, Venezia, 1936, III, 789-790.

²⁷ Relazioni, in AGSdC.

4. *Santa Bambina Class*, which looks after about 50 to 60 babies coming from poor, morally deprived families²⁸.

During the summer holidays the Home had at its disposal a small country-house at Priabona²⁹.

Efforts at rehabilitating work have certainly had good results: over the Year 1944 more than three thousand girls have been attended to, with an average of 230 per day; about two-thirds of these are married, others work for an honest living as working girls, nurses or maids. About twenty have joined a convent, only a low percentage have failed to respond³⁰.

The Prospectus allows girls who have been at the Home to re-enter if they are still helpless. One of these re-entered five times. In the end she got married and had four children. Her husband is a cobbler and the Sister, who have to look after a numerous ‘family’ (more than 200 girls) provide her with work once a week.

The best, concrete acknowledgement of the Sisters’ presence, so loving and discreet, patient and respectful, above all always trusting and sustained by hope, are undoubtedly the testimonials of lives re-built and made whole such as can be gathered from the documents recorded and preserved by Sr. Severina Boldi in the last report for 1951. A few of so many are given below:³¹

– A girl has a relationship with a young man coming from a good family. On the birth of the baby, her brother and mother drive

²⁸ cf. M. G. DANIELI, *Cenni storici su «Casa provvidenza»*, 29 November 2004, in AGSdC.

²⁹ It belongs to the territory of Monte di Malo (253 m) situated between the valley of Agno and the plain of Schio and Thiene.

³⁰ cf. *La «Casa della Divina Provvidenza» nel xxv dalla fondazione*, Officina tipografica vicentina, 1944-XXII; Sr. Severina Boldi, *questionario* dated 1951, n. 8, in AGSdC.

³¹ Ibidem, Recorded documents.

her away and threaten her boyfriend. She seeks shelter at the Home, where she behaves very well. She is allowed to meet her boyfriend who, after obtaining his degree, marries her; they are living happily with their child and other five children they have had.

- A girl who has settled down safely writes: «Very soon I have had an experience of the cruelty of men, but I would never have believed that, side by side, with so much wickedness and ugliness of some there could be so much kindness and sweetness by others. In this house I began to believe in the goodness of religion and now I am horrified by my past behaviour».
- Lucia was only 13 when she was betrayed by a soldier. In their sorrow and hoping she would be helped to make a fresh start, her family – a respectable one – entrusted her to our care. The girl responded very well. She was reconciled to her family and they called her back home. Her child died aged two years and Lucia is a source of comfort and joy to her family.
- Her mother, a thoughtless woman, neglected her daughter, who could have ended up badly had it not been for some kind persons who spoke to us about the case. We received her and she did very well. She got married to a lawyer on 25 August 1951.

One can still rise after a fall!

In the years after the War, «Casa Provvidenza», duly repaired and extended has undergone a gradual transformation (orphanage, students' hostel, emergency centre, elderly ladies' resthome, immigrants' centre), always in keeping with the initial charism of attending to the poorest and weakest, and always alert to the changes in society so as to meet the needs of the times.