

«In the Sign of Unity»

recalls its fifty years

Short historical excursus

In our Institute care towards sisters' human-spiritual growth as well as their professional qualification has always constituted one of the prime formative objectives. Among the many means used to pursue such a goal there is the attention to dissemination of publications; one of them is the *Periodical*.

The first edition of the Institute's own periodical dates back to 1948, *Ascendere*. It was published up to 1969 and was intended for both laity and sisters; its field of interest was very wide and diversified (from Pope's word to the life of Bartolomea and Vincenza, of the Institute to reviews... graphology, crossword puzzles) and its typographical format was very lively enriched with photos and colours. Very soon, it was made up to date with the norms and laws of the social communication with the authorization of the competent Court of Milan (28-VIII-1948, n 364) and the enrolment of the sister-in-charge in the register of journalists.

In 1956 it was complemented by monthly *Supplemento ad Ascendere* (4-8 pages), reserved for sisters, with formative-informative content on the history and the apostolic works of our religious family, more austere in its graphic presentation.

In March-April **1970**, after the XIX special general chapter (February 1969 - January 1970) the first issue of the periodical **In the Sign of Unity** was published in Italian. The translation in English, begun in 1978, was done in the Interprovincial Center at Bangalore (India - Mangalore province) up to 2006; from 2007 it is the task of an *équipe* that works at Milan, in the Generalate.

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With the letter of 19 March 1970 mother A. Campanile presents the periodical explaining its nature, its title and its goal:

«In the Sign of Unity» is the new organ of formation-information that the general council offers to the Institute in this very delicate phase of the special chapter – that of the implementation of the decree – with the intention of maintaining alive and open the dialogue with all and to promote that spiritual-apostolic animation which, among the duties of the governance, is the most important and difficult one. The periodical is meant only for the sisters and takes up, with a new form and layout, the purposes of the «supplemento ad Ascendere».

The title «In the Sign of Unity» recalls the idea that has strongly dominated the chapter members in the concluding days of the chapter works; the idea that became prayer, I would say, the passion of all at the moment of our departure, and that summarizes my pastoral programme: Unity in charity, our 'communio' in Christ. The design of the cover page represents, in fact, the ear of corn that, becomes bread, in the Eucharistic agape is transformed into the body of Christ because we, who nourish ourselves in the same banquet, «are formed in him into one body».

The voice of the periodical will educate us by and by to this communion of charity, that Bartolomea, moved by the Spirit, wanted to be the specific characteristic mark of her Institute... On its purpose: to take care of the ongoing formation of the sisters and to inform, with abundant and variety of information material, on the life and the growth of the Institute in Italy and outside... the periodical could be a bond between the periphery and the centre... an useful means to inculcate in us the awareness of being Institute, that is of feeling on the vital plane that we form a big family, that has a common charism, common ideals and problems, in spite of the different working situations and socio-cultural conditions of the milieu in which we fulfil our apostolic service...

Its publication is **bimonthly**. In 2002 the general council, in reference to the n. 25 of the *Acts of the XXIV general chapter, We make the best use of the means of information on the Institute already available*, prepared a questionnaire to evaluate among the sisters the use and utility of the *Periodical*. From the analysis and attentive reading of 4,740 questionnaires (the sisters were 5,377) it resulted that:

- the periodical is read by 98% of the sisters,
- the major interest is for *Mother's letter, spirituality of the Institute, Our life, Fond memories*,
- it is good that it continues, giving importance to articles on formation and widening information to all the contexts in which we are and work;
- there is desire to know also the socio-political situation, the challenges and problems of the times,
- there is a proposal for a more attractive cover page, with photos that documents the visits of Mother and the new services.
- *Critical notes*:
 - . the information reaches late,
 - . the interval of the periodical could be four-month period.

In the consultative assembly (May 2002) the usefulness of the periodical is confirmed for the ongoing formation and for increasing the sense of belonging to one family.

From **2003** the ***periodical*** is published ***thrice a year***, with better graphics and also with an insertion of photos on Mother's canonical visits, that documents the various juridical realities of the Institute, or on particular events up to 2014/1.

The cover page, which is the visiting ticket with which every periodical presents itself, has underwent modifications on the graphic presentation level, that I would say are significant, because they tell of creativity, updating, symbolic value that refer back to the contents opening out to a wide horizon, of socio-ecclesial nature and of a certain importance with respect to the quality of the topics.

Generally the periodical opens with *Mother's letter* on the *Note on the programme*, followed by regular features: *to deepen the guide-*

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lines of formation, other contributions for formation, the socio-educational work of former times, fond memories, our life at the Centre, in the provinces (anniversaries, ridimensionamento/process of 're-planning', experiences), our aim to meet.

The four-month periodical is supplemented by *monthly Paper, News/Information*, for a prompt communication of news that is of common interest. In n. 1, September 2003, mother Piercarla Mauri presents it and justifies it in this manner:

*This 'paper' – unassuming in its print-covering and intended as **supplementary to our review** which will still be published three times a year – springs from our wish **to provide faster information**. But that is not the only purpose. Deep down, going to the very roots of this 'novelty' is our desire to offer to our family, which is becoming even more international in character and in territory, a concrete means towards keeping alive among us the **sense of belonging to the Institute** and **communion among all its members**. We know from experience, in fact, that the transmission of news helps us to know one another better and this will in turn stimulate us to share in the joys and hardships of one another and then to present them to the Lord in our prayer and also get involved in a more concrete solidarity.*

In my encounters with you, I have always met with a keen interest in whatever is happening in the Institute and this seems to me a splendid sign of the grace of unity which – rooted in our common following of the Redeemer – is strengthened all the more when we make our own what other sisters live, suffer and hope for.

As regards its content: *a text for reflection on the first page (in reality Pope's word); our life: activities of superior general and her council, programme of the canonical visits of Mother, celebrations of provincial chapters, initiation to novitiate/professions, openings/closures of apostolic works or communities, solidarity fund,*

news coming from various apostolic works of the Institute's communities, our departed sisters.

Its composition takes place on computer in the Editing office and it is sent via email to each province or the delegation that later sends it to the communities.

The size of the information goes from a minimum of 9 to maximum of 18 pages; obviously it depends on the contribution that comes from the provinces, in fact, from individual communities, that confers to the 'Paper' an international character, which is the physiognomy of the Institute.

During the general chapters, the publication of both the *Periodical* and the *News* is suspended; directly from the place where the chapter takes place 5/6 pamphlets are published with the title **Information** with the *Chronicle of works*.

It should be remembered that the **Special issue** of the periodical, reserved to the general chapters (starting from XXII GC, 1987), communicates in a complete manner the report of the superior general of the situation and life of the Institute as one Family, the resource persons' talks of biblical, charismatic, pastoral, social character... in that manner letting every sister to participate and become jointly responsible of this «event of communion and fraternity in which all the members of the Institute are represented» (Cs 96).

Same thing happens also for the **general consultative assembly**, celebrated in the middle of every mandate of the superior general that ascertains the continuity of guideline between one general chapter and the next and which concludes with a message or a letter to the sisters of the Institute.

Special issues also document the **special celebrations of the Institute**: *150th year of Foundation* (1982), *50th year of the canonization of the Saints* (2000), *bicentenary of Bartolomea's birth* (2007), *100 years of the miracle of M. Bambina*, *200 years of St Vincenza's birth*, and special events: *International course for formators*, *Convention of pastoral care of vocations*...

Collaborators alternate at various levels: merit of quality-communication and the gratitude of all the readers goes to them. Among the readers are above all sisters, and those who have special bonds with our religious family, in particular many priests.

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Hence, the periodical continues in time to be an expression of Institute's care for all its members with the opportunity to availing rich and useful material of formation, information and updating, in line with the spiritual-apostolic growth of the Institute, to which each general chapter summarized in the decisions and in the final programmatic document serve as indicators.

At the conclusion of this brief historical *excursus*, I desire to recall what the president of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella had said, in his meeting with a delegation of *Osservatorio Permanente Giovani Editori* (to the young editors - 2015):

The innovative technologies offer great opportunities, but I don't believe that they will do away with the former means of communication. Reading will always be irreplaceable... every study-activity includes labour; labour is needed also in comparing and discussing with others, with different opinions... freedom is achieved together with others, is attained with a sense of responsibility, assuming the reasons of others;

moreover, pope Francis (2015, *year of the consecrated life*):

Formation is a journey, difficult and fruitful, never finished... study, sensitivity and experience are necessary... it is needed to cultivate thought, form judgements, and train ourselves to wisdom of looking and to the quality of the sentiments in the style of Christ.

Certainly the reading on paper is more difficult than the reading on the monitor or of listening to a talk, but is more efficacious because it permits re-reading, reflection, comparison with other texts, confrontation and dialogue with other persons, and above all with one's own life.

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