



# and you too **do** likewise

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*Sr. Carmela Paloschi*

## Homes for abandoned children

*Anyone who welcomes one of these little children  
in my name, welcomes me (Mk 9:37)*

*Going through the pages of the Gospel, we discover many expressions pronounced by Jesus and, most of all, we can see His attention and approach in their defence and for their benefit. In the passage Mk 9:33-37 the Master's speech upsets the categories of the apostles (and also ours, after centuries), eager to get the first places: «If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last... He then took a little child, set him in front of them, put his arms around him, and said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me' ...». Jesus identifies himself with children who are not considered, who lack the essential, who are defenceless before those who have power over him. In the same way Jesus identifies himself with the poor, the sick, the prisoner (cf. Mt 24:34-43). And again his harsh reproach, addressed to his disciples: «Obstacles are sure to come, but alas for the one who provides them! It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone put around his neck than that he should lead astray a single one of these little ones. Watch yourselves!» (Lk 17:1-2).*

*Just 15 years after the foundation of the Institute, our sisters are present in homes for abandoned children and orphanages where they do all they can, with a mother's heart, in order to give a future to these babies who otherwise at the very moment of their birth would be destined to be deprived of it, without enjoying the warmth of a sweet glance, of a loving caress, of a tender kiss...*

## «PROVINCIAL BREFOTROFIO » - MILAN (1846-1989)

Among the collection of letters conserved in general archives – even if there are some gaps – three valuable documents attest, respectively, the request to have the presence of the sisters, the official start of the service and the definition of their commitments at «*Pia Casa Santa Caterina*» in Milan.

In a letter dated 12 June 1842, addressed to the parish priest of Lovere<sup>1</sup>, the director Dr. Andrea Buffini expresses his own desire, claimed several other times through priests, «to have some sisters of charity to act as supervisors at *Pia Casa degli Esposti*... whose presence I would be happy to have», while thanking in advance.

On 16 February 1846, after a legal-bureaucratic void concerning the negotiations between the *Opera* and don Angelo Bosio, or rather, and Sr. Vincenza Gerosa, «the administration of the *Ospedale Maggiore* and the *Luoghi Pii Uniti*, jointly with the *Pia Casa di S. Caterina*, invite your honour (no name mentioned) to the inauguration of this so much recommended new alliance between hospital compassion with the religious charity of the sisters of St Vincent (such was then our name) that will take place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of this month, at 10 a. m., in the church inside the *Pia Casa*, with a service that will be crowned with the presence of H. M. the archduchess vice queen»<sup>2</sup>.

The Conventions between *Pia Casa* and the sisters of charity of 17 February 1846, countersigned by the archbishop of Milan card. Carlo Gaetano von Gaisruck<sup>3</sup>, mainly declare that our Institute will undertake the commitment to provide four sisters, pointing out that: «This limited number, imposed by the lack of greater availability as well as the difficulties of the *Ospizio* (institution), will increase hereafter, in so far as such difficulties will cease» (n. 1)<sup>4</sup>; therefore their

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence I, in AGSdC.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem; the Vice Queen was M. Elisabetta of Austria.

<sup>3</sup> Conventions, in AGSdC.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the statistical data, at 31 December 1846, states that the community was composed by six sisters, all young: Fiorini Sr. Egidia (26 years), assistant sister, Santinelli Sr. Caterina (30 years) substitutor, Rizzini Sr. Elena (25 years), Petracchi

duties are so specified: «The sisters assume and carry out mainly the supervision upon the disciplinary service, upon the morality of the maid-servants, the hospitalized in *Casa Pia* and all the foundling inmates. The tasks are, in this sense, the most general and the most delicate» (n. 4); and just below «Each of the four sisters will particularly look after one of the many dempartments in which the establishment is divided, namely: ward for pregnant women and those in labour; ward for foundlings still living on milk; ward for weaned foundlings; kitchen, pantry, clothing room and so on» (n. 6).

Another significant autograph is the inscription, dictated by the priest in charge of S. Nazaro, don Francesco Maria Rossi, which was posted at the door of the Hospice on **18 February 1846**, when the sisters of St Vincent «were happily introduced in the establishment of St Catherine»<sup>5</sup>.

On that occasion a speech was also given by the coadjutor of *Pia Casa*, don Pietro Galimberti who, after highlighting that the evangelical charity is the soul of every charism, addressing directly to the sisters, with solemn words tells them: «To you are entrusted hundreds upon hundreds derelicts. We do not ask about their origins: they are innocent. We do not care to their littleness: they are our brothers, they are children of the Church, they are members of Jesus Christ; and just because they are derelicts, besides offering an immense field of charity, they have a higher and sacred right to be relieved. Preserving life is the first one, and woe to us if, with every sort of care, do not protect them, because the blood of these innocents, not other than that of Abel, has a voice that cries out from the ground up to the highest heavens»<sup>6</sup>.

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Sr. Savina (28 years), Neri Sr. Domenica (23 years) and Zancarini Sr. Vittoria (29 years) assistants; cf. Community Statistical Data 1846, in AGSdC.

<sup>5</sup> 18 February 1846. «On the fortunate day / in which / the sisters of St Vincent de' Paul / invited by the Founder / to take care of the foundlings / by the authoritative Wise Benevolent wardens / have been introduced in this Hospice / to carry out the service of consecrated motherhood / towards these little unhappy innocents. / The personnel in charge of the establishment / fulfill their vow and the public / address praises to God and give thanks».

<sup>6</sup> cf. A. PREVEDELLO, *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1933, I, 120-122.

The work, founded by empress Maria Theresa of Hapsburg in 1780, was named «Stabilimento S. Caterina» or «Pia Casa degli esposti e delle partorienti in S. Caterina alla Ruota»<sup>7</sup> because the ancient institution, detached from the ward of the «Ospedale Maggiore», until 1866 was located in the suppressed monastery of St Catherine along the banks of the water canal, just opposite the hospital. The Milanese home for abandoned children was an open institution to all poor babies and to all pregnant women in need; the identity of the women in labour, legitimate or illegitimate, was kept strictly secret; wet nursing service was extended to all free of charge. Between 1780 and 1866, 213.649 children were given hospitality, most of them were legitimate children of poor parents. Later on the non contagious babies were sent to wet-nurses and to foster families who received a compensation and the travel allowance.

<i>Monthly salary</i>	
For the babies still living on milk .....	£ 120
For the assisted kids from 1 to 2 years .....	£ 70
For the assisted kids from 2 to 3 years .....	£ 36
For the assisted kids from 3 to 6 years .....	£ 30
For the assisted kids from 6 to 10 years .....	£ 24
For the assisted kids from 10 to 14 years .....	£ 18

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to know that, in the West, the first foundling home for babies was opened in Milan in 787 by the priest Dateo, dean of the cathedral of St Saviour, with testamentary will: «Therefore I, Dateo, state through this disposition that an orphanage for children must be opened in my house and I assert that this orphanage must be put legally under the protection of St Ambrose, that is of the *pro tempore* bishop [...]. Besides, I want that regular payments may be provided for some of the children's wet-nurses, and baptismal purification for the children. When the period of breast-feeding is over, the little ones must remain in the orphanage until they are seven, giving them an adequate education with all the necessary means; the orphanage must provide for them food, clothing and shoes». cf. M. T. FIORIO, *Le chiese di Milano*, Milano, Electa, 1985, 230.  
*Ruota* (wheel): the instrument of the martyrdom of St Catherine of Alexandria, not the *tornillo*, a place where the babies were put which, however, was soon opened.

***Travel allowance.** When entrusting a child to a foster family according to an ordered delivery or requested for an ascertained disease, the compensation will be:*

- a. the actual expenditure of the railway ticket, tram or car for the foster family and the pupil;*
- b. allowance of 50 cents per each kilometre of the path along the normal route from the municipality of the residence of the foster family to the nearest train station, tram or car, and vice versa, for journeys not longer than three kilometres; and 1 lira (Italian coin) for the routes further than three kilometres;*
- c. a fixed daily allowance of 3 liras for the routes, calculated from the municipality of residence, to Milan, up to 35 kilometres; and 5 liras for longer journeys, the refund of the city tram included in daily allowance mentioned<sup>8</sup>.*

The sisters were constituted as a community depending directly from Sr. Teresa Bosio, superior of the hospital «Ciceri» who was the reference person for the apostolic works in the city of Milan; later on, in 1895 they were incorporated in the religious province of Milan after the subdivision of Italy in provinces.

Besides the 1846 general Conventions, the sisters were in possession of a manual, dating back to 1833: «Duties of the ‘sister in charge and her assistant’ in the room of the breast or bottle feeding at *Pia Casa di S. Caterina alla Ruota*»<sup>9</sup>.

In the letter dated 24 February 1847, prot. n. 417, it is stated that «The head office is aware of the fine diligence of the rev. sisters regarding the surveillance of the wet-nursing room so that the

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<sup>8</sup> Regulation 1924, 47.

<sup>9</sup> From the head office of the «Ospedale Maggiore e Uniti», Milan, 18 January 1833 - Conventions, in AGSdC.

health disciplines may be observed»; in 1849 a sister is put in charge of collecting the babies at the wheel, their personal effects and the recognition 'signs' of the personal identity «with that scrupulous attention that these related offices deserve»<sup>10</sup>.

The superior Sr. Egidia Fiorini in ratifying the text states: «The sisters willingly fulfil their duties, following the superior's invitation, considering that the instructions were essential and easily executed». On 24 January 1850 «special warnings» are pointed out: in case of illness, the resident doctor must be called immediately; if the life is in danger, the Holy Baptism must be conferred; to each 'child' – an affectionate and respectful name – should be promptly put around the neck with the identification medal and the code number; in the isolation room strangers had to be excluded, and they had to prevent, at any time, noisy conversations disturbing the tranquillity of the place<sup>11</sup>.

But the beginnings are never easy and soon difficulties arise between the sisters and the head office regarding the maternity ward: from September to November 1850 a frequent correspondence<sup>12</sup> between the superior of «Ciceri» and the head office of «Pia Casa S. Caterina» underlines the seriousness of the problem whereby the superior Sr. Teresa Bosio states that, if after the experience of five years and with sound reasons, «the sisters have not fully reached the expected results», she will come to the conclusion to end their service by the end of the year.

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<sup>10</sup> The *tornillo* or *wheel* consented to leave the foundlings without being seen; the ringing of a bell informed the person responsible to collect the baby; a loop-hole in the wall served to put the donations; on the wheel they used to put also jewels, documents or any other distinctive sign; the 'wheel' system in Italy was established in 1923 and re-introduced in 1952. Nowadays the Italian law foresees the right for women to give birth in an anonymous way, to be assisted in hospital without being persued if decided not to recognize the child. From 6 December 2006 in Rome, at the hospital «Policlinico Casilino», there is a child defense called «Do not abandon him, entrust him to us».

<sup>11</sup> Correspondence I, 1842-1870: letters of 26.12.1849 and of 24.1.1850, in AGSdC.

<sup>12</sup> Correspondence I, letters of 1850: 4.9; 12.9; 20.9; 21.9; 22.9; 9.10; 12.11; 13.11; 14.11, in AGSdC.

Despite the appeal and repeated petitions of the College of conservatives of the *Ospedale Maggiore*, the sisters leave the ward.

In 1851 the sisters are put in charge of the linen room and the pantry, with the relative instructions for the exercise of such duties and the official consignment act<sup>13</sup>. On 7 May 1852 the epistolary chapter re-opens to re-admit the sisters in the maternity ward; Sr. Teresa Bosio, prudently, wants to know ahead the norms regarding the tasks entrusted to them. After an extraordinary meeting at the College of the conservatives where Sr. Teresa Bosio was unable to attend but she delegated Sr. Ignazia Verzi and Sr. Domenica Neri who signed the minutes, on 21 September 1853, the «Norms for the sisters of charity in the maternity ward» were drawn up.

They offer their care and keep watch over the healthy and sick pregnant women, the newly mothers, the midwifery students, the personnel engaged in humble services and any person coming into the department. Regarding the non-observances of the inmates the sisters are to provide «with charitable admonitions», while for the serious cases they ought to inform the professor. They should keep them engaged in works well-suited to their state, «leading them with charity and patience to accomplish their duties with sentiments of piety and religion». The text concludes: «These norms do not intend assigning definite duties to the sisters». The services rendered should rather be suggested by their hearts and by the spirit of good that animates them»<sup>14</sup>.

According to the contents and the spirit which permeates the text one can perceive that the trustful relationship between the *Opera Pia* and the Congregation return to life.

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<sup>13</sup> Accounting Office, Milan 5 March 1851; 9 April 1851, Correspondence I, in AGSdC.

<sup>14</sup> Norms for the rev. sisters of charity of the department for pregnant women, Conventions, in AGSdC.

The regulations of the midwifery school attended by day students and boarders, approved by a royal decree, were edited in Turin on 14 August 1862<sup>15</sup>. Regarding the midwifery students the sisters are in charge of their regular, disciplined, moral behaviour and studies; a sister teacher must help them to practice «reading and writing, besides acquiring religious knowledge».

In the first decade there are no names of the inmates, while the presence of the sisters is statistically recorded.

1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854	1855
6	8	9	7	7	7	8	9	9	9

The average number of the sisters is 8/9 with the following specific duties: superior, nurse, in charge of the linen room, cook, dispenser, operator at the midwifery department, operator at the wet-nursing room, teacher. From 1862 to 1870 there are no recorded documents, but through history we know that in **1866** at the «Pia Casa di S. Caterina», although keeping the same registered address, was succeeded by «*The provincial hospice of foundlings and women in labour in the city of Milan*» and the territorial competence is extended to the province of Lodi.

The province reserves the orphanages in Milan to the illegitimate children of destitute parents and poor non married mothers; after the closing of the ‘wheel’ on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1868, the admission is effected through the consignment office by means of a birth certificate or a written document by the municipal authorities for the few foundlings left in a public place. The new Organic Regulations of 1870, handwritten, fixed up to receive illegitimate children «outcast or abandoned by the parents» and «derelicts» (legitimate children of departed parents or prisoners) under seven years old; the Congregation of charity provided for the foundlings from the age of seven to fifteen years. The assistance to women in labour was

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<sup>15</sup> Royal decree approving the Regulations for the mid-wife school of *S. Caterina* in Milan, edited in Turin on 14 August 1862 with the consent of his majesty the minister of Public Instruction, Carlo Matteucci, in AGSdC.



reserved to non married mothers and «absolutely wretched», exceptions were made only in cases of emergency, «for security reasons regarding the woman and the fetus».

Having examined the document, in particular Title XXIV regarding the tasks of the supervisors, the sisters sign the Regulations, after stating that «self dedication in works of charity and public assistance being the aim of the Institute and alien from every private interest, [...] they were satisfied with the ongoing treatments and renounce to any increase in their emoluments»<sup>16</sup>. The chapter regarding the ‘supervisors’ is very clear and explains in detail the duties of the chief-supervisor, namely the superior: she must ensure order, serenity and morality in the establishment and to indicate to all the aright life-style; she has to safeguard secrecy, see to the observance of the time-table and encourage the foundling girls to work; besides, she must provide primary instructions, supervise the work in the kitchen, pantry and linen room; visit the sections also during the night to make sure that everything is in order, quiet and that assistance is carried out; she must do her utmost to guarantee the identity of the foundlings; she must make sure that the children concerned are to be presented to the foster mothers so that they can choose; inform the head office about the foundling girls who make good use of the instructions.

Also the duties reserved to the sisters as supervisors are very clear: they depend upon the chief-supervisor and direct the functions of the servants and the nurses, every morning they must give to the bursar’s office the number of the inmates in the various sections of the Hospice, they must be present during the distribution of the food in every section and in the refectories, they must look after the wet-nursing room, they must accompany the wet-nurses

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<sup>16</sup> Organic Regulations approved by the provincial council in the extraordinary session of March 1870 - Title XXIV. Letter of 20.11.1870 to the honourable head office of the provincial Hospice of the foundling and of the women in labour in Milan, signed by: chief supervisor Sr. Metilde Velasca, vice chief supervisor Sr. Giulia Bogani, supervisors: Sr. Candida Cocquio, Sr. Orsola Cottoni, Sr. Clementina Griffanti, Sr. Valeria Ortoani, Sr. Felicita Fedrigo, Sr. Nazarena Coppa, Sr. Annunciata Ganna, Sr. Emmanuele Beltrami; Regulations, in AGSdC.

and the servants for a walk and to notify the deaths that occur in the sections assigned to them.

Meanwhile, the province improves the domestic organization: the control system of foster-mothers and children are more frequent; «instruction and good bringing up rewards are established, one part is to be given to the foster family and the other to the minors: *«as a further reward for the good custody of the pupils as well as to assure that the education imparted to them may be continued also beyond the time of the fulfilment of the obligation of primary education; it has been established that an award of 150 liras is to be distributed in this way: 100 liras to the foster family and 50 liras to the pupil, when the latter, at the age of 14 years, proves to have an adequate instruction according to the modalities established by the Deputation»*<sup>17</sup>; above all this is an attempt to encourage the parents to recognise their children.

From 1871, after the *promemoria*, sent to the rev. superior general, with the timetable of the working days and holidays of the community (sisters and hospitalized) at St Catherine, until 1887 there was another blank in correspondence, while we have the printed text of the «*Regulations and discipline of the staff at the provincial Brefotrofio in Milan*»<sup>18</sup> in 1902; it is divided into two large, distinct sections and their contents, almost unchanged, recoup most of the Regulations of 1924 (last statutory document that we possess)<sup>19</sup> including 242 items. The chapter dealing about the *supervisors* is reserved to the sisters. The appendix regarding *the clothes to be used* by the children<sup>20</sup> is rather curious but non superfluous; it is interesting to compare their clothes, with that of our children today.

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<sup>17</sup> Regulation 1924, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Organic and disciplinary regulations of the provincial *Brefotrofio* of Milan approved by the provincial council with the deliberation of 26 February 1902 made enforceable by the R. Prefecture of Milan with a visa of 2 April 1902, n. 7211 - La Poligrafica - Milano, Regulations, in AGSdC.

<sup>19</sup> Province of Milan - Regulations of the provincial *Brefotrofio* of Milan approved with deliberation on 27 March and 14 December 1924 of the provincial Deputation - Stabilimento Grafico Reggiani, Regulations, in AGSdC.

<sup>20</sup> Regulation 1924, pp. 47-50, in AGSdC.

<b><i>I category</i></b> <b><i>1 year - for all seasons</i></b>	<b>n.</b>	<b><i>II category</i></b> <b><i>1-4 years - summer</i></b>	<b>n.</b>	<b><i>winter</i></b>	<b>n.</b>
<i>camisoles</i>	4	<i>cotton robe</i>	4	<i>cotton robe</i>	4
<i>bonnets</i>	2	<i>cotton petticoat</i>	1	<i>woollen petticoat</i>	1
<i>little jackets</i>	2	<i>coloured garment</i>	1	<i>woollen coloured garment</i>	1
<i>moleskin blankets 70x75</i>	2	<i>straw hat</i>	1	<i>cloak with a hood</i>	1
<i>woollen blankets 70x100</i>	2	<i>cotton underpants</i>	2	<i>underpants of flannel</i>	1
<i>nappies 75x85</i>	4	<i>cotton socks - pairs</i>	2	<i>cotton socks - pairs</i>	2
<i>cotton bands long m. 3</i>	3	<i>aprons</i>	1	<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1
<i>silver necklace for the medal of inscription</i>	1	<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1		

<b><i>III category Male - from 4<sup>th</sup> year</i></b>			
<b><i>summer</i></b>	<b>n.</b>	<b><i>winter</i></b>	<b>n.</b>
<i>cotton shirts</i>	2	<i>cotton shirts</i>	2
<i>cotton underpants - pairs</i>	2	<i>flannel underpants</i>	2
<i>cotton socks - pairs</i>	2	<i>cotton socks</i>	2
<i>cotton sweater</i>	2	<i>woollen sweater</i>	2
<i>cotton trousers - pairs</i>	1	<i>woollen trousers</i>	1
<i>cotton jacket</i>	1	<i>woollen jacket</i>	1
<i>cotton waistcoat</i>	1	<i>woollen waistcoat</i>	1
<i>handkerchiefs</i>	4	<i>handkerchiefs</i>	4
<i>hats</i>	1	<i>hats</i>	1
<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1	<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1

<b><i>IV category Female - from 4<sup>th</sup> year</i></b>			
<b><i>summer</i></b>	<b>n.</b>	<b><i>winter</i></b>	<b>n.</b>
<i>cotton blouses</i>	2	<i>cotton blouses</i>	2
<i>cotton underpants</i>	2	<i>flannel underpants</i>	2
<i>cotton socks</i>	2	<i>cotton socks</i>	2
<i>cotton petticoat</i>	1	<i>woollen petticoat</i>	1
<i>coloured vest frock</i>	1	<i>coloured woollen frock</i>	1
<i>apron</i>	1	<i>apron</i>	1
<i>cotton veil</i>	1	<i>woollen scarf</i>	1
<i>handkerchiefs</i>	4	<i>handkerchiefs</i>	4
<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1	<i>shoes - pairs</i>	1

Foster families used to give back the children at the age of 4 years; later on it has been postponed to 6 years and then to 7 years. After the return, there was a period dedicated to basic and religious instruction and to professional training, carried out by domestic teachers for the girls and for the boys or *Colombini* contract teachers were appointed: weavers and shoemakers. After completing the course the males were assigned to the shops of the city, while the girls or *Colombine*<sup>21</sup>, after the age of twelve, were sent to work in private homes of nobles and craftsmen or, before marriage or joining a convent, were engaged in ribbon manufacturing, embroidery, sewing and in hospital services.

After 1887 correspondence is fairly regular, and often requesting to have more sisters; in 1896 the director D. Gallarmi asks for three sisters for the sanatorium of Vimercate and shortly after he asks for another with the task of imparting lessons to the hospitalized kids<sup>22</sup>. In some circumstances we read that the sisters had high acknowledgments, such as when the director D. Gallarmi in asking mother T. Nazari to have a sister for the *breffio* he states: «the most complete satisfaction for the zealous and caring work done by the sisters at this Hospice, who compete for charity and cleverness in accomplishing their duties»<sup>23</sup>; and when the special commissioner, Prof. Luigi Spolverini, extends his condolences over the death of Sr. Teresa Romanelli «who worked intelligently and industriously for nearly two decades [...]. She who carried out in humility and devotion, such a high mission of social welfare qualified herself because in addition to the compensation of the afterlife, she is worthy of human gratitude»<sup>24</sup>. The following year Sr. Leopoldina Bosisio dies; she had courageously cooperated to introduce modern stan-

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<sup>21</sup> *Colombini* and *colombe*: so the Milanese foundlings were called, with reference to the coat-of-arms of the *Ospedale Maggiore* or «Ca' Granda», that is the dove (in Italian *colomba*); the 'children of the hospital' often received the surname of *Colombo*.

<sup>22</sup> Correspondence II, letters of 15 and 18 October 1896; 2 and 13 May 1901, in AGSdC.

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence II, letter of 16 June 1887, in AGSdC.

<sup>24</sup> Correspondence II, letter of 8 August 1928, in AGSdC.

dards in the institution and, as an expert in psychology was able to understand the innermost secrets and to alleviate the pain without hurting the wounds of the young mothers; the commissioner of the province, Sileno Fabbri, sends a telegram to the Generalate: «Most vivid condolences valiant death venerable sister Leopoldina Bosisio shining example of religious, civil social virtues»<sup>25</sup>.

The provincial Hospice which had become a *Brefotrofio* in 1903, after the segregation of the maternity ward, in 1911 was transferred into the premises in viale Piceno, 60, in 1927 it was changed into the *Provincial Institute for the protection and care of children (IPPAI), Milan*, and in 1932, it is transferred to via Macedonio Melloni, 52.

Compared to the *Brefotrofio*, the IPPAI assumes ever more the connotation of a hospital: the traditional sectors remain and are improved – breastfeeding for newborns and infants, isolation for infectious, isolation ward for observation – while the three infirmaries (wet-nurses, breastfed, weaned babies) are divided into wards (surgery, oculist, otolaryngology); in 1945 was opened a department equipped with thermostatic cradles for premature babies; the assistance to illegitimate or unrecognised children, or recognized only by the mother, is improved and extended to all until the age of fourteen.

In 1932 the managing director, Marco Bonetta, asks to have two sisters for the pre-mature babies at the provincial kindergarten, maternity department (IPPAIM) and a sister for the preventorium of Cannobio, dependening upon the superior of the *Brefotrofio*. In the same year started the child-welfare school which, in 1956, was replaced by the boarding school for children's supervisors, directed like the previous one, by one of our sisters<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Correspondence II, telegramme of 8 February 1929, in AGSdC.

<sup>26</sup> cf. the record card in the general segretariate.

In November 1933, the community goes through another difficult moment due to a widespread suspicion of secularization regarding the apostolic work; the superior general, mother A. Sterni, writes directly to the president of the province of Milan, Mr. Jenner Mataloni, in clear and explicit terms: «...for some time my sisters engaged at the *brefotrofio* live in an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust that hurts them a lot, without understanding the reason of such unpleasant situation...»; the president removes every suspicion by declaring that it is a domestic procedure of ordinary administration, namely the drafting of «an outline of the regulations for a better discipline and efficiency of the staff»<sup>27</sup>.

October 1942 is a common period of difficulties and fears due to the continuous air raids and the frequent alarms of the air raid warnings. The administration decides to evacuate to Mombello (about 20 Km from Milan); the transport will be on stretchers for the newly mothers and hand carriers for the babies who aroused pity and wonder in all the persons met on the way. But also here, by day and by night, inmates and staff had to look for refuge to find safety and «the chaplain with a bucket of water and a ladle in case there was need to administer baptism to the newly born».

The return to Milan, where four sisters had remained, takes place from August to September 1945 and, as soon as it was possible, they celebrated a thanksgiving service to Maria Bambina for her special protection<sup>28</sup>. The ration book office of the city, was destroyed by the raids and it was transferred to the Institute while the only free ward was given to the «Order of the Knights of Malta» which was used as a hospital for the wounded.

Little by little the activity resumes regularity and efficiency up to reaching normal position and the sisters received words of admiration and praise.

The director of the Institute, Dr. Piero Brusa, on 12 July 1949 informs the high commissioner for hygiene and public health

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<sup>27</sup> Correspondence II, letter of mother A. Sterni of 20 November 1933 and of the dean of the province of Milan of 30 November 1933, in AGSdC.

<sup>28</sup> Documentation, anonymous report. Institute IPPAI and Istitute, p. 4, in AGSdC.

regarding the successful achievement of the examinations of the course for child-welfare personnel; Sr. Umile Pesenti, directress of the school is a member of the commission. The director, in thanking mother A. Reali for participating in the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his service, says: «You know well how great is my devotion towards the rev. sisters who bear much of the burden in the assistance of our mothers and children, and my gratitude! [...] I beg you to convey my respects to the provincial superior and to all the sisters who, under her high maternal direction carry out tasks so human and valuable»<sup>29</sup>.

On 27 August 1954 the president, lawyer Adrio Casati, communicates: «The administration with deep regret accepted the decision to withdraw the small community present at the Infants preventorium of Cannobio [...]. On this occasion I am pleased to manifest my deepest gratitude, on behalf of the administration for the tireless and enlightened work carried out for many years by the sisters of this honourable Order for the good functioning of the Institute and for the religious and moral promotion of the female staff there employed...». And the following year (9 February 1955), on the occasion of the change of the superior, he says: «I pay tribute to the good superior who in humility, managed with tireless devotion, patience, determination, to lavish her rare and exquisite qualities of intelligence and love for the benefit of our young patients. I am sure that Sr. Umile, even in the new destination awaiting her, will continue her very humane efforts with religious spirit, so strong and vibrant in her which allows her to work, up to sacrifice, for the benefit and relief of the poor, the underprivileged and the suffering»<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Correspondence II, letter of 20 December 1953, in AGSdC.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

In this period the number of children assisted by the Institute has increased as we can see in the table below relating to the years 1943-1951 and 1972-1980<sup>31</sup>.

1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951
<b>430</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>590</b>
1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
<b>658</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>684</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>408</b>

And, for the five years 1976-1980, it is also possible to read in the statistical survey the distribution of the inmates, in the three main sectors, according to their own needs and characteristics<sup>32</sup>.

	<b>1976</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>1978</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>1980</b>
<b><i>Maternity ward &amp; gynecology</i></b>					
1 <sup>st</sup> floor	36	36	36	36	—
2 <sup>nd</sup> floor	35	35	35	35	—
3 <sup>rd</sup> gynecology floor	45	45	45	45	70
3 <sup>rd</sup> maternity floor	32	32	32	32	66
<b><i>Paediatrics</i></b>					
Newborn department	120	120	120	120	70
Perinatal pathologies	50	50	40	40	40
Breast-fed pathologies	40	40	40	40	16
Paediatric pathologies	40	40	40	40	65
Weaning infirmary	20	20	20	20	18
Healthy breast-fed	60	60	60	60	32
Family groups	20	20	20	20	16
Observations	20	20	20	20	16
<b><i>Unmarried mothers</i></b> (V. Plebisciti)	36	36	36	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>554</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>408</b>

<sup>31</sup> cf. Register of apostolic works, in AGSdC.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Annual Statistics, in AGSdC.



The presence of the sisters increases little by little and in 1965 it reaches the number of 36, then it decreases considerably and rapidly, as the table below illustrates per decades<sup>33</sup>, while the qualified lay professional personnel increases.

1910	1915	1925	1935	1945	1955	1965	1975	1985	1988	1989
9	13	11	28	35	35	36	23	5	4	4

In 1945 the sisters carry out the following services: superior, in charge of the pantry (2), in the infirmary (16), in the linen room (4), in the kitchen (6), in the boarding school for nurses (2), in the office staff (1), pharmacy (1), registration office (2).

1950 is a 'holy year' also for the provincial Institution: the whole community prepares itself, especially the young mothers; for some of them it becomes the year of the great return and forgiveness; with enthusiasm they have celebrated the feast of the canonization of our blessed Bartolomea and Vincenza, as well as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of religious life of Sr. Rachele Moretti, in charge of the kitchen<sup>34</sup>.

In July 1973, the provincial superior, Sr. Marianna Abondio, at the conclusion of the canonical visit, reports: «Thanks to the experience that the sisters have acquired, though not all have professional qualifications corresponding to the role carried out; moreover the physiognomy of the Institution requires, before anything else including professional training, uncommon humane qualities of tactfulness, understanding, availability; the sisters are much appreciated by the administration, the inmates and the hospitalized»,

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<sup>33</sup> cf. Annual community statistical data, in AGSdC.

<sup>34</sup> cf. Report 'Holy Year 1950', Documentation, in AGSdC.

but a year later (November 1974) she adds: «from the apostolic view, the work is definitely evangelical, especially at the *brefio*, so it deserves to be supported. However the sisters are not qualified, while the laywomen are and accept their cooperation only if they submit themselves».

Sr. Giovanna Manzoni, new provincial superior of Milan, in the report of the canonical visit of March 1979 confirms that the work at the *brefio* is extremely in keeping with time and our charism, because the children assisted come from distressed families due to violence, adultery, drugs and the sister becomes a moral and comforting support for the small ones as well as for the adults. The school for children's supervisors is based on sound pedagogy and challenging programmes, but the community, formed by 16 members whose average age is 61 years, is going through a difficult situation at an operational level, in a context of a strong evolutionary acceleration from the educational and social points of view. So in August 1980 she submits to mother the request to suppress the community which, however, through the intervention of bishop, Carlo Maria Martini, continues the service depending lawfully on the provincial superior from 1980 to 1982 and from 1982 to 1989 on the superior of «Casa di Cura Capitanio - ward Sacro Cuore».

On **31 December 1989** the intense and loving activity of the sisters at the IPPAI of Milan for the abandoned children come to an end<sup>35</sup>. However Sr. Giuseppina Cozzi, directress of the school for children's vigilance, and Sr. Martina Corradi, teacher at the nursing school, maintain their role; Mgr Virginio Rovera, episcopal vicar for religious life, communicates to the provincial superior Sr. Alessandra Gritti: «I esteem the decision and accept it with gratitude for all the sisters who have devoted their energies and hoping that the religious presence, although reduced, can always be fruitful».

The two sisters remain active in their office until 1996<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence II, letters from September 1980 to 31 December 1989, in AGSdC.

<sup>36</sup> Correspondence II, letter of 27 December 1989, in AGSdC.

Silence, which by law and much more for respect, has wrapped the mystery of many creatures, orphans and single mothers, has also sealed the maternal dedication, sometimes painful but always serene of many sisters, for long days and long years of mission in the orphanage of Milan.

The only, valuable direct testimony, imbued with true and deep joy, is that of 8 September 2006; it reports how things happened, not without fear of infringing the modesty and privacy of Giuseppina Cozzi and of Sr. Martina Corradi: *«We are two sisters of the community of S. Angelo Lodigiano, home for the aged; we were invited by don Mario Monti and by the administrators of the province of Milan to attend the ceremony of the patron of the chapel dedicated to Maria Bambina in Viale Piceno, 60 in Milan, where we carried out our activity for 40 years. For the last 10 years we have been in the rest home as volunteers for religious assistance. It was a great joy for us!*

*We remember with pleasure the time spent there; we saw again many beloved persons; it was like a breath of youth full of joy and great emotion that made us relive the period of our religious life that has matured us and has given us the joy to understand the human person, the greatest work of the Creator, in all the stages of life: childhood, youth, adult and, now, old». This moving memory came to an end: «...There were many, many nurses who were trained in our school».*