



and you too **do** likewise

Sr. Carmela Paloschi

Services in seminaries

Follow me and I will make of you fishers of men (Mk 1:16)

SEMINARY OF CREMONA (1887-1954)

Cremona, city of Lombardy region, is located in the centre of the Po Valley, not far from the river Po, where a port-channel consents the landing of boats and barges transporting goods. It owes its main source of wealth both to agriculture and to the industry of nougat, silk, agricultural machinery... It boasts of the most important heritage in the world for luthier's art with over two hundred workshops of luthier's master: in 2012, UNESCO included the violin craftsmanship of Cremona among the oral and immaterial heritage of humanity. It is also the seat of a Campus of the «Catholic University of the Sacred Heart» including the faculty of Economics and Law, of agricultural, food and environmental sciences.

Important monuments: the cathedral, the eight-sided baptistery, the bell tower by Torrazzo with its astronomical clock, the violin museum and the seminary library, enriched by private donors and priests. It is rich in codes, incunabula and works by contemporary authors; above all it abounds in theological, philosophical and biblical field very useful for the seminarians to deepen their studies.

As already the bishop of Pavia and Mantua, also the bishop of Cremona, Mgr Geremia Bonomelli, on 19 August 1886 writes

to mother Teodolinda Nazari that he ‘wishes’ to have four or five sisters for the seminary. Mother consents to his request (she had given a negative response regarding the school of charity, as the parish priest of Stagno Lombardo would have provided for it) and in October she goes personally to Cremona, where together with the rector and Mgr Mainestri, parish priest of Sant’Agata in the town (the bishop was not in office), identifies the suitable place for the apartment of the religious community¹. Rather touching is Mother’s personal interest for the sisters’ lodging as well as the friendly relationship with the bishop, with whom she «hopes to be able to speak in Milan», as she could not meet him in Cremona.

In the meantime, on 22 June 1887 Fr Leone Martinelli² writes to Mother specifying the duties of the sisters: kitchen, linen-room, infirmary, and establishes that regarding the food they will be treated as the professors. Once again (on 6 August 1887), Fr Leone writes a letter to Mother in which he presents a young girl from Cremona who seems to be promising for religious life and «from whom I hope – he states – a good success»³. Besides, on behalf of the bishop he tells her that on the day of St Charles the sisters have to be in the seminary of «S. Maria della Pace». In October the bishop expresses to Mother his gratitude and dares advancing another personal request: «I am very grateful to you because you have given me the sisters for the seminary. How I wish I could have Sr. Angiolina Sangalli who is in Brignano? I encountered her in Lovere and helped her to answer her vocation, however, I respect the rules of the community». Even though the bishop is spontaneous and free in relating himself, he is discreet and respectful.

On **24 November 1887** the religious community of the seminary was formed by Sr. Angiolina Sangalli (34yrs), Sr. Giuseppa Bergonzi (43yrs), Sr. Caterina Polletti (29yrs), Sr. Antonia Tizian

¹ Letters of 19.8; 23.8; 11.10.1886, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 238/C.

² We do not know the role of Fr Leone; perhaps he was the rector of the seminary since on the card sent to Mother was printed «Palazzo vescovile - Cremona».

³ We just know the name of the girl: Giulia. cf. Lettere-Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 238/C.

(21yrs); their duties were specified in the *Norms* drawn up by mother on 26.8.1887, revised and approved by both parties with some small additions by the bishop on September 14 of the same year⁴. It is stated that the sisters will carry out their service in the linen-room, kitchen and infirmary, services which suite with their life-status and, they will also take care of the furnishings and the linen of the chapel. Here, there are two particular services which were not requested in the seminary of Pavia: the presence in the infirmary and, explicitly, the care of the chapel's furnishings. The latter immediately recalls the desire of Bartolomea:

...I cannot free my heart from the thought that Jesus requires from this new family a holy concern for the upkeep of his holy house and therefore, that he recommends that it engages itself in keeping the sacred vestments, and the church linen of the place washed, mended and ironed, with every care and diligence⁵.

The strict separation of the sisters from the seminarians is overcome with the presence of the sister in the infirmary, as a motherly figure; in an *Attachment to the Norms* the indication is punctual:

In the morning, when the seminarians are in the chapel or studying, the sisters will go in the dormitories to monitor if they are tidy and to see if there is anyone sick and to provide for the needs.

Regarding this question, in order to avoid frequent meetings and familiarity between the sisters and the seminarians, mother Clementina Lachmann⁶, referring to the Rule, Conventions and praxis in the other seminaries, later on makes present that the sisters should not look after the sick seminarians. The bishop (30.11.1889) asks

⁴ *Norms*, in AGSdC, 238/D.

⁵ *CF*, n. 8.

⁶ Letter of 23.11.1889, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 238/C.

her to implement this provision at the beginning of the following school year, in order not to create suspicion and disorder in the seminary community. Mother, on 16 July 1891 states again that it is not suitable for the sisters to look after the sick seminarians nor to be present at medical visits. Therefore, she also proposed to open a passageway permitting the sisters to move from the kitchen to their residence directly, without encountering the seminarians on their way to the refectory. Mother Lachmann's prudence and precaution will be codified in the *Directory*⁷:

The sisters in the seminaries are called to render to Jesus Christ, in the person of his future ministers, the same services that Mary offered to the Master and to his apostles in Bethany when they were engaged in preaching. It is with this spirit of faith and devotion that the sisters will fulfil their duties in these institutions (1).

The services ought to be limited to the kitchen, pantry, linen-room and the care of the furnishings of the church. The sisters will not look after the sick nor tidying or cleaning the areas where superiors and seminarians reside, except for the refectory, if the locality and circumstances permit the sisters to take over the cleaning without having to deal with the personnel (2).

The sisters in the seminaries will live in separate premises within the Institution. If they do not have a private chapel, they should have a gallery in the church of the seminary where they cannot be seen and can go without encountering seminarians, and possibly having also a separate door (3).

Ordinarily, they do not have to deal directly with the seminarians nor with the superiors of the seminary, except with the rector and vice-rector who will give all the orders regarding the services that the sisters carry out to the superior of the sisters. The superior herself will present to the rector the needs and the report of the regular work (4).

⁷ *Direttorio per i ministeri esterni delle suore della carità della venerabile Capitanio*, Trento, Artigianelli, 1898, chap. XV pp. 80-84. The chapter «Seminari e collegi maschili» is maintained as such in the *Direttorio delle suore della carità della beata Bartolomea Capitanio*, Milano, 1928.

If in every place the sisters must be sober and humble, how much more they ought to be in a seminary, such a prominent place of holiness. In the necessary relations at the workplaces, they must have with the superiors a great courtesy, fruit of a good education and respect motivated by the state of life. With the servants, they must avoid every confidence and orientate them with humble and meek words (5).

As for prayer, in *Norms*, n. 6, we read:

The sisters will use the private chapel, set up in their residence, to fulfil their duties of piety prescribed by the Rule. The Holy Mass for the sisters will be celebrated in the private chapel; in some cases, however, when this is not possible, they will go to the chapel of the seminarians.

The *Attachment to the Norms* adds some details about their duties:

They (the sisters) will receive the delivery of all the wholesale and retail commissions and they ought to weigh, measure and record everything as well as supervise their distribution (3).

Concerning the wholesale commissions they will keep the keys (4).

The *Directory* offers moral value to these exclusively practical details:

With the same conscience and economy-system with which one must administer the things of the poor, we ought to administer, look after and preserve the things of the seminaries. If the first is directed to nourish the suffering and needy members of Jesus Christ, this is directed to contribute to the formation of the noblest members of his mystical body, that is the priests⁸.

The sisters fulfil and live their mission with care and spirit of faith, with humility and hiddenness, with a simple and sober lifestyle.

Having settled the problem of cloistered life, in December 1891 the rector Fr Angelo Bonaiti, who did not manage to meet Mother in Milan, assures her, through a letter, that the sisters are doing an excellent service, «tireless at work, they face every hard-

⁸ *Attachment to the Norms*, Convenzioni, in AGSdC, 238/D.

ship and show love for sacrifice», and to be sure that there is no communication between them and the seminarians⁹. In 1901 the rector, appointed parish priest of San Michele, takes leave saying:

With a grateful heart I thank the rev. mother general Sr. Angela Ghezzi for the highly beneficial and providential service that I gladly received, during the various years of service as a rector, from the rev. sisters of charity. Impossible to forget so much good; I will always have a special thought for the venerated Institute at the altar¹⁰.

Later on, the need of other services emerged: in 1901 the new rector, Fr Tranquillo Guarneri, informed Mother that, beside the laundry of the seminary, the sisters are to provide the service also for the laundry of the students; therefore, another sister and three *mandatarie* sisters were at once needed; Mother agrees. Once more, in 1909 the rector asks Mother for another *mandataria* to take care of the cleaning and the preparation of the seminarians' refectory¹¹, without increasing the expenditure, as the seminary is undergoing financial constraints, and he guarantees absolute respect for the norm of separating the sisters from the seminarians; he concludes:

I gladly take this opportunity to let you know that we all admire your daughters' work and we do not find words to praise their zeal, their industriousness and their sacrifices for the good of this community.

The councillor Sr. Rosina Negrisoni, on behalf of Mother, replies that both the sisters and the *mandatarie* are diminishing, however one of the sisters already present in the seminary can also fulfil this duty¹². Once again, on 25 November 1910, the rector thanks Mother for

the enormous gift done to the seminary (perhaps it is an offer...) and he continues: Along with the many obligations of gratitude that bind us to you and to your good daughters for all they do for us, we shall also add this and pray for you.

⁹ Letter of 17 December 1891, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 238/C.

¹⁰ Letter of 4 November 1901, ib.

¹¹ Letter of 4 October 1909, ib.

¹² Letter of 13 October 1909, ib.

From June 1915 to November 1918 the seminary was transformed into a military reserve hospital; some sisters moved to «Palazzo Sfondrati Quaini» to continue their service to the seminarians and the others, with the addition of some other sisters, assisted and comforted the wounded soldiers during the war who arrived in large numbers: the first were 500, thereafter, the number of patients reached several thousands. When they recovered their health, they used to leave the huge premises of the seminary and the good sisters with gratitude. In those years, life dictated history pages of suffering, fraternal charity and patriotic love. The medical colonel, director of the seminary-hospital in Cremona, before departing in 1919, interpreting the feelings of all the soldiers, expressed his profound gratitude to the sisters

*for the work accomplished in humility and silence, fulfilling the evangelical precept of love without calculating any material interests*¹³.

After the war, seminarians and sisters resume their normal life back at home. Regarding the correspondence between the bishop and the superior general there is a gap of ten years during this period. In 1915 Mgr Giovanni Cazzani becomes the bishop of Cremona and in 1919, in Milan, mother Angela Ghezzi succeeds mother Vittoria Starmusch.

On 13 January 1928 Mother sends an updated Agreement to the bishop, in which she sets out that the superior ought to have the faculty to employ some lay personnel for the extraordinary work of the linen-room (art. III) and that the annual allowance for each sister and *mandataria* should be £ 250 (art. IV). From this moment onwards the life of the religious community can be reconstructed, with fragments of statistical data or short publications¹⁴.

On 12 September 1932 the effigy of Maria Bambina is crowned with a silver diadem donated by Lieutenant Umberto of the Marquis Foti, La-Pierre of Gioiosa Ionica, wounded in 1916 and cured,

¹³ cf. PREVEDELLO M. A., *L'Istituto delle suore di carità*, Venezia, 1935, II, 113-114; Venezia, 1936, III, 82.

¹⁴ cf. Relazioni, Cronaca della comunità, in AGSdC, 238/D.

together with his brother Rodolfo, in the seminary-hospital¹⁵. In May 1933, united with the whole Institute, the sisters celebrated the beatification of Gerosa; during the Mass the rector delivered a speech and in the evening there was a concert in the *oratorio*.

In 1935, the bishop was very sorry because of the change of the superior Sr. Carmela Gerosa who was ill. Mother Antonietta Sterni assured him that she would be adequately replaced with an insightful and attentive person to the problems of the seminary.

In 1937 there is the opening of Villa Candolino (Valbrona - Como) which is about 500 meters above sea level, in a valley rich in slopes, woods and waters, where the sisters had to face hardships and sacrifices to make the summer stay for the seminarians less uncomfortable.

1940-1945 are still years of war: in the seminary, life is carried out almost regularly, despite the frequent air raid warnings that force superiors, sisters and seminarians to spend entire nights in shelters. In December 1942 the Germans requisitioned one hundred complete beds; the sisters wanted to know where they were taking them so that they may get them back and give them to the seminarians instead of the blankets more or less in good condition. Towards the end of May 1943, due to the continuous bombardments and for major security reasons, the seminarians returned to their families and the theologians were hosted by the sisters of the Sacred Heart in the city until January 1944. In March 1944 the seminarians were hosted by the Barnabite fathers, and the sisters of the seminary provided food and linen-room service. In mid-June 1945 the Germans, who had taken possession of the city on 8 September 1943, requisitioned the seminary, where about 600 elderly people were transferred from the «Ospizio Soldi» until September. When Mgr Giovanni Cazzani's maid passes away, he asks and obtains Mother's permission¹⁶ to bring the elderly *mandataria*, Rachel, to the bishop's palace, until he would find another person; he also

¹⁵ cf. *Sorrisoni e Vagiti di Maria ss. Bambina*, gennaio 1921, Pubblicazioni, in AGSdC, 238/D.

¹⁶ Letters of 18.6 and 1.7.1954, Corrispondenza, in AGSdC, 238/C.

informs Mother that air raid warnings were repeated several times a day, but with no incursions.

Shortly afterwards several prisoners, headed to Germany, pass through Cremona and they entrust to good persons their suitcases and family addresses; the sisters, with the support of Fr Luciano Zanolini, an active chaplain in the conflict between partisans and fascists, do their best to give them food packages. On 20 October 1945, after a thorough, general disinfection, the seminarians return to the seminary and begin the school year regularly. In 1946 some sisters had to go again to Villa Candolino (CO) to serve the bishop, his family members and some seminary professors. In 1950, for the canonization of Bartolomea and Vincenza a solemn Mass was celebrated in the seminary with a speech for the occasion and a great concert where remarkable people and the city colleges were present.

On 15 March 1953, the new bishop Mgr Danio Bolognini entered into the diocese; on 23 March he met about 300 priests and, after Easter, the seminarians and their mothers in the seminary. On 24 April, he came to know that Mother had the intention to withdraw the sisters – without knowing the reasons – the bishop asked her to postpone the date and to inform him if there were serious reasons regarding this decision; on 2 May the bishop passed Mother's letter to the rector in which, contrary to the previous resolution, Mother confirmed the temporary presence of the sisters in the seminary. Fr Virginio Dondeo wrote to her:

I trust so much in the Lord's help for the prayers of all the religious of your Institute that I had the opportunity to know and esteem in the years of my priesthood. I carry in my heart a very dear memory of their sound spirituality and I thank you for leaving them at the service of the seminary.

However, on 7 July of the following year, the rector Fr Luigi Brioni received from the provincial superior of Brescia, Sr. Gesuina Chieribicco¹⁷ the news that by 1st September 1954 the sisters would

¹⁷ Letter of 7.7.1954, ib.

leave the seminary; with regret, but very sincerely he thanked her and «expresses the sentiments of the heartfelt gratitude for the zeal, the spirit of sacrifice, the love that the sisters had for the seminary where they have served for so many years» and prayed that the presence of the simulacrum of Maria Bambina which will remain in the small chapel, might remind them of the spirit of the sisters of charity. The bishop also thanked, invoked the Lord's blessing on the Institute and many vocations¹⁸.

On **10 September 1954**, after 67 years of service, carried out with motherly love in the simple and humble work (kitchen, linen-room, laundry, scullery, barnyard) the sisters are serene and ready for the new apostolic obedience.

In the school year 1953-1954 the seminary community reaches its maximum number, while in the religious community there have been 7 sisters and 6 *mandatarie* as stated in the statistics of the last decade 1944-1953¹⁹.

the community of the seminary

1944	1945	1946	1947	1948
250+10 superiors	208+10sup+8serv.	200+11sup+8serv.	200+12sup+10serv.	190+12sup+9serv.
1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
180+12sup+9serv.	195+14sup+10serv.	120+12sup+9serv.	220+14sup+9serv.	230+15sup+7serv.

the religious community

1944	1945	1946	1947	1948
8sisters+6 <i>mandatarie</i>	8sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>
1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
7sisters+6 <i>mandatarie</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>	7sisters+6 <i>mand.</i>

Some testimonies underline the spirit of sacrifice and prayer; their service to the community of the seminary was characterised by serenity and cordiality which rendered it noble and efficacious. The parish priest of Vicobellignano (Casalmaggiore - CR), Fr Emilio

¹⁸ Letter of 18.10.1954, ib.

¹⁹ cf Registro Opere e Stato Effettivo annuale dell'Istituto, in AGSdC.

Beltrami, writes about *sorella Annetta Sala*:

I had known the good religious since the years of the seminary in Cremona, as a student, and then as vice-rector. She was a truly and exemplary community member, so much so that the archbishop Mgr Cazzani willingly entertained himself with those sisters and he used to repeat to us seminarians how much they were 'rich in God'. Sister Annetta started her service in the seminary as soon as she finished the novitiate and she remained there all her life (1904-1954). Simple, woman of prayer, of sacrifice... The humble duty entrusted to her moulded within her the religious soul that is the spirit of oblation. For all her life she worked in the kitchen garden of the seminary and in the scullery. She was never ill-tempered, on the contrary she was always serene; she used to speak to us seminarians like a good grandmother (communication between the sisters and the seminarians was no longer forbidden). As vice-rector, I used to tease her, telling her that heaven is not like the seminary kitchen garden and that it was not reachable by simple gardeners... she used to smile and disappear among the high beans of the big kitchen garden...»²⁰.

And *sorella Stella Boselli*, who was in the seminary from 1911 to 1954, is so remembered by suor Giuseppina Ripamonti:

The name (Stella) suited her. She was dear and serene even in the midst of difficulties and intense sacrifices that the seminary's kitchen work entailed... always showing concern to satisfy the demands of the moment. Her characteristic mark was: spirit of sacrifice, prayer and cordiality with the sisters and seminarians²¹.

Regarding *Sr. Augusta Zanini*, in the obituary written by the community of Erbusco, where she was from 1960 to 1965, we read that

after her religious vestition, on 20 January 1917, she was appointed to the seminary of Cremona as a kitchen assistant, cellar-keeper and other related duties for 37 years; she worked with great spirit of faith, seeing Christ in the priests and seminarians. It is not

²⁰ cf. *Sorrisi e vagiti di Maria ss. Bambina*, febbraio 1973.

²¹ See personal folder, In memoria, in AGSdC.

possible to say how much he suffered when the community had to withdraw and she had to leave.

In memory of **Sr. Emerita Riva**, who died in Castegnato on 13 November 1982, Sr. Lucia Francesca Bettoni wrote:

She did not have important duties, yet, in all those who used to approach she left a sign of her goodness which has really rendered her 'emerita'. The priests of the seminary of Cremona - where she remained for 28 years: 1926-1954 - remember her like this: calm and shy by nature, always ready and, above all, always very attentive to their needs. Thanks to her shrewdness and delicacy she was able to understand and make up for all that was missing. Silent, serene, a woman of prayer who used to help wherever it was necessary and she did it willingly and in intimate union with the Lord.

In the obituary we read that **Sr. Angela Marzetti**

was in charge of the linen-room of the seminary of Cremona (1929-1954); she looked after the linen of the superiors and seminarians and, since she was a fine embroiderer, she cared for the sacred vestments. Observant of the Holy Rule, she spoke little and only if asked for, but she used to pray a lot. She never retreated when faced with sacrifice, on the contrary she was always the first to give a helping hand where it was necessary. Of course, in Paradise she will enjoy the reward she deserved for having worked so hard for the future ministers of the Lord²².

For us, today, it is a moral duty of gratitude, as well as of fidelity to history, to conserve the memory and to keep alive the memory of our sisters: they are family biographies, medallions of the genealogical tree of our Institute. For many years (from 25 to 50), some sisters have been real evangelical witnesses of an active and hidden charity in favour of the seminarians and professors of the seminary, as Jesus says: «Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them... do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you» (Mt 6:1.3-4).

²² See personal folder, Necrologio, in AGSdC.