

ISTITUTO PIA SOCIETÀ
FIGLIE DI S. PAOLO
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Dearest Sisters,

It is with deep emotion that I communicate to you that at o'clock in the evening, in the infirmary of our house "Divine Providence" in Rome, the Queen of Apostles introduced into the reign of heaven our sister

CONTI IDA Sr MARIA IRENE
born in Bore (Piacenza) on Aprile 15, 1913

This sister's long Pauline experience is truly marvelous; she passed over to the other shore at the age of 101. The Lord was able to accomplish great things in her smallness, ever since her entrance into the Congregation so many years ago. Sr. Irene is in fact the last sister to die of the original group from Susa. Let us listen to her words:

"On October 16, 1922, my father accompanied me to Susa, to the Daughters of St. Paul. I was only nine years old. My mother had died just a few months previously. Since I was still a child, with five brothers and a little sister who had just been born, my father thought to place me in a boarding school where I could study and receive a good education. When we arrived in Susa, we met Maestra Thecla as she was going to the bookcenter. Since she had already been informed of our arrival, my father presented me to her. Maestra Thecla looked at me with great surprise and then said to my father: "But you exchanged daughters on me." My father did not understand her meaning, but soon the misunderstanding was clarified. This is what had happened: the request for my acceptance had been presented by my uncle who was a priest in a town called "Seven Sisters" (Settesorelle), and so it was thought that I belonged to a family with *seven sisters* and that I was nineteen years old.

"Once the situation was made clear, Maestra Thecla expressed her regret, and told my father that she could not accept me because I was too young. But my father then explained that my mother had just died, and he was afraid that I might become a child of the streets. Maestra Thecla was moved when she saw how preoccupied my father was because I no longer had a mother. She said to my father that, while waiting for the approval of Signor Teologo (Primo Maestro), she would accept me and would be my mother. And so it was; and from that day forward, Maestra Thecla took care of me and truly became my mother...."

Sr. M. Irene lived her novitiate in Alba and made her first profession on November 30, 1932. Then she was transferred to Rome where she dedicated herself to the apostolate of bookbinding for the next fourteen years. Soon afterwards the Lord revealed her missionary vocation. This is how she recounted it:

"In 1945, at the end of the war, the departures for the missions started up again. The Pauline priests were already in Japan and they wished to have the presence of the Daughters of St. Paul. With great enthusiasm, Fr. Paolo Marcellino spoke about Japan to the Daughters in Rome, and he told them about the good to be done, and the open field of apostolate there. On January 1, 1947, Prima Maestra proposed that the community spend a day of prayer for Japan. At its conclusion, she announced the names of the first four sisters chosen to go there.

"On May 22, we left for the United States since communication with Japan had not yet been re-established, due to the war. We waited for nine months in Staten Island, while we dedicated ourselves to 'propaganda.' In the meantime, Maestra Thecla bought us a house in Tokyo, and upon our arrival we found our nest ready. On January 14, 1948, we headed toward San Francisco and from there embarked for Manila where we arrived on February 11. While on board the ship, we received the news of Maestro Giaccardo's death; he had blessed us before we left, and had assured us of his prayers. Even in the Philippines we had to wait another six months. Why? Only the Lord knows the reason.

"On July 27, 1948, we boarded a ship that went from Manila directly to Japan. We arrived on August 6, the day of the Transfiguration and the feast of Jesus Master! Our joy was great when we saw

our own little house, Japanese style, with two floors, and with paper walls (or dividers) that were attached to a type of sliding frame. Everything was arranged so tastefully....”

Sr. M. Irene lived in Tokyo from 1948 to 1968 without interruption, always involved in duties of responsibility: local superior, novice formator, and from 1957 to 1968, provincial superior. And precisely during her term as superior, she had the opportunity of opening the Pauline apostolate in another nation, namely, Korea. She herself had the joy of accompanying the first Pauline missionaries to that country.

In 1968, she was called to Sydney, Australia, where she exercised the service of local superior and delegate.

After a three-year pause in Italy, where she was bursar of the generalate community, she again went to Boston as a provincial councilor.

In 1978, she was ready for a new mission: the opening of the house of Hong Kong and then she transferred to Taipei to exercise the service of delegate superior, local superior and councilor of the delegation.

Sr. M. Irene left us this witness of her missionary life: “Thinking back on the time spent in the missions, particularly in Japan but also in Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia, this conviction has remained in my heart—it was the Lord who wanted our Congregation in the Orient, and he guided it through difficulties of various kinds by using us weak and incapable instruments. I myself have experienced how true these words are: ‘Do not fear....’ I have personally experienced that when we entrust everything to the Lord with confidence, holding him to his word, he smoothes out every difficulty.”

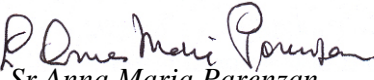
In 1983, Sr. M. Irene was inserted into the communities of the Italian province. First in Alessandria as superior, then in the provincial house of Via Vivanti, and afterwards in the house “Divine Master” where she dedicated herself for a long time serving at the switchboard and answering the door. Since 2011, she was in the infirmary of the house “Divine Providence.” Here she was always attentive, always present and ready to share in the life of the Congregation, always concerned about the sisters of the communities of the Orient that she had founded. Whenever these sisters visited Italy, it was always a great feast for Sr. M. Irene and she sought every opportunity to meet them, encourage them in the good, and share the joys and trials of the missions.

Dearest Sr. M. Irene, your smallness and humility allowed the nations of Japan, Korea, Australia, Taiwan and Hong Kong to grow, as well as other nations that witnessed your smile, your goodness and your self-giving. Maestra Thecla was truly enlightened when she accepted you so young and small.... You always remained small of stature, but you became great in the eyes of God.

Thank you for this testament that you left us in writing, which in turn can be handed on to future generations of Paulines: “Always have my gaze and thoughts turned to the Lord, to Jesus my highest good, my all! Place in him all my trust, my security, and in every need confide in him with unlimited confidence. ‘Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.’ This is what Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra did, and this is what I too was able to do, and it went well for me.”

Sr. M. Irene, we entrust to your maternal care our young Paulines of today, especially our young people of *immense Asia* which you always carried in your heart, and for whom you offered your life, day after day. And we entrust to you the entire Congregation so that it may face today’s challenges with bold faith, while experiencing the joy of offering to everyone the consolation of God.

With affection.


Sr Anna Maria Parenzan
Superior general

Roma, 1 May 2014.