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Dearest Sisters,

We received the news that at 1:32 a.m. last night (local time), God the Father visited the Nakai Fujishiro-En assisted living center in Nakai-machi (Kanagawa Prefecture), Japan, to call to himself another fervent Japanese FSP apostle:

KANEZAKI HARU – SR. MARIA SERENA
born in Nigata (Tokyo), Japan on 27 February 1932

Sr. M. Serena entered the Congregation in the community of Tokyo on 21 August 1958, following in the footsteps of her older sister, Sr. M. Arcangela. She underwent her initial formation and made her novitiate in Tokyo, concluding this stage of her Pauline journey with her first profession on 30 June 1962. During her Juniorate, Sr. M. Serena worked in the Tokyo book center, and immediately after her perpetual profession, made on the Feast of the Apostle Paul in 1967, she was sent as a missionary to Taiwan—a time when that Delegation was living a moment of great hope thanks to the entrance of its first Taiwanese vocation.

In 1969, Sr. M. Serena collaborated with the foundation of the community of Macau, which had been greatly desired by the local bishop and by our sisters of Taiwan, because the city was a point of meeting and harmonious co-existence among different cultures, especially the Chinese and Western ones. For Sr. M. Serena, this was the beginning of a great missionary adventure that would last, except for a few parentheses, for about twenty-five years.

From the very beginning, together with the other sisters of that small, multicultural community at the gates of China, she zealously took educational and religious formation texts to schools and government offices. She also organized biblical exhibits that helped to make the whole diocese aware of the specific mission of the Daughters of St. Paul, which was seen as a beacon of light in that border region.

But Sr. M. Serena's greatest apostolic commitment was to book center work—a very challenging apostolate because the small pre-existing diocesan book shop contained just a few books, yellowed with age, and the people, who were very poor, were not interested in reading. Without becoming discouraged, Sr. M. Serena and the other members of the little Macau community transformed the book center into a very appealing place, increasing its stock with books imported from Taiwan, Brazil, Portugal and India. In a short time, the renovated ambient took on a Pauline "face" and became the heart of the diocese. Our sisters say: "Every day, students on their way home from school would stop in to leaf through our books and, if they could, buy some of them. Priests and sisters also came in willingly, confident that they would find material suited to their needs."


In Macau, Sr. M. Serena learned to speak Portuguese and to love the Chinese people, including those of Mainland China, which she often visited. She and the other members of her community frequently crossed the nearby border to provide help and support to a group of lepers. In 1987, Sr. M. Serena was made a councilor of our Taiwanese Delegation, and the following year she was appointed superior of the Macau community. She had the chance to offer her sufferings for the immense population of China when the political events that took place in the early 1990's provoked a crisis that brought our Macau book center to the brink of closure.

Sr. M. Serena returned to her homeland for a short time, but in 1997 the Superior General asked her to go back to Macau so as to enrich the re-established community with her experience. In 2000, she was transferred to nearby Hong Kong to continue the Pauline mission in that huge metropolis. But at that point her health was failing as a result of Parkinson's disease. About 10 years ago she returned to Japan definitively, where she was lovingly assisted by her community, but her condition continued to worsen, making it necessary to admit her to a care home for the elderly in 2017. But Sr. M. Serena never forgot the rich experiences of her missionary life and she continued to carry in her heart and offer her sufferings for the people of immense China, and also those of Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan, all of whom she deeply loved. Her eyes would shine at the mere mention of these countries.

By now she was ready for the wedding feast of heaven, her bridal gown of grace adorned with the intensive apostolate she had carried out and above all with her profound love for the Gospel, which she had joyfully proclaimed at the crossroads of Southeast Asia, fulfilling her mission to spread the light of God.

Affectionately,

Rome, 12 October 2020


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan