

## 52 YEARS IN PAKISTAN



Right after I made my perpetual profession in 1962, I was assigned to the community of Ravenna, Italy. It was a small community made up of four sisters. I worked in the book center and was happy there. One day I received a letter from Maestra Ignazia Balla, who was the Superior General at that time. She said that she and her council had decided to send me to Pakistan with several other sisters because it had been the great yearning of Prima Maestra Thecla to have the Daughters of St. Paul present in that huge Muslim metropolis. Our purpose there would be to take the Gospel of Christ to the people of Asia. In view of this transfer, Maestra Ignazia told me to go home to spend a week with my family and then come to Rome.

I followed her directives with great joy, very grateful that God had chosen me to be a missionary. When I got to Rome, I found two other sisters—Sr. Donata Bugnola and Sr. Docilia Pizarro—already there preparing for the mission to Pakistan. We remained in Rome for a long time, waiting for the visas we needed to enter the country. Obtaining this permission was not easy but we never lost hope.

In the interval before our visas arrived, Maestra Ignazia sent us to the Philippines. On 29 June 1965, two months after our arrival in Manila, Sr. Cleofe Zanoni, the FSP Provincial Superior in the Philippines, gave us the good news that the Pakistan Embassy had notified her that our visas were ready. We hastily prepared to leave for Karachi, where we opened our first house in a Muslim nation.

When we got to Karachi, we spent three months with the Sisters of the Cross while we looked for a suitable place for a book center. Thanks be to God, we finally found a good building located near the Cathedral in the oldest part of the city, and in June 1966 we opened our first book center in Pakistan. We had no shortage of apostolic initiatives: book center work, book displays in the schools and parishes, pastoral work for vocations.... In fact, several young women from Karachi entered the Congregation as a result of these vocation activities.

Two years later, our community expanded further when three other FSP missionaries from Italy joined us. Maestra Ignazia also came to visit us. She saw that even though we were a substantial group, our presence in Karachi was still very meager. So she asked us to open a second community in the country, this time in Lahore, where there were more Catholics and where the pastoral work of the Church was better organized. Today, the Daughters of St. Paul have 4 communities in Pakistan: in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan (a community that was opened only last year).



I carried out the Pauline mission in Pakistan for 52 years, alternating between Karachi and Lahore. I think that our apostolic work here faces more challenges [on the religious and political levels] than those facing the Pauline apostolate in other countries but we fulfill our mission joyfully. What is certain is that our Pakistani Catholics have a very strong faith, that they love the Bible deeply, and that they have a great capacity to bear the injustices that in this country are a part of daily life.

In May 2017, I was reassigned to Italy, where I hope to continue my missionary activities in a different way.

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