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Dearest Sisters,

We received the news that today, at 3:02 p.m. (local time), the Lord visited the Hiratsuka Fujishiro-en Senior Citizens Home in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, to gently call to himself our sister:

**NAGATA AIKO – SR. MARIA ELISA**  
**born in Nagasaki, Japan, on 11 October 1936.**

A few years ago, already ill and living in the senior citizens facility in Kanagawa, Sr. M. Elisa confided to her provincial superior: “My life is overflowing with joy and gratitude. I have received so many graces: I entered a missionary Congregation that gave me strength, encouragement and the joy of proclaiming the Gospel. The Congregation helped me to grow and many people in it offered me their support. I feel surrounded by care both among the sisters and here, and I know I will die with great gratitude in my heart.” Sr. M. Elisa witnessed to a truly touching goodness throughout her long life, dedicating her entire self with great simplicity and love to various apostolic and community endeavors, including a long period of time as a cook.

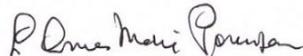
Her parents were Buddhists but before she joined the Congregation, her father confided to her that their family had originally been Christian. In fact, they had belonged to the group of “underground Christians,” that is, those Christians who had been forced to live in hiding due to persecution by the government but who continued to pass on the Faith to the younger generations through contemplation of the mysteries of the rosary. Aiko was baptized at the age of twenty-one, but even before this milestone in her life, she had had the opportunity to participate in a retreat organized by the Daughters of St. Paul that sparked in her the desire to make a radical response to God. A vocation brochure produced by the sisters included her testimony, in which she said: “I was grasped by Christ. The Lord chose me before I could choose him, so I believe that he will protect me to the end. Trusting in his power, I want to follow him wherever he leads me.”

She entered the Congregation in the house in Nagoya, Japan, on 4 May 1958. Her faith matured in this community and at the end of her novitiate, she made her first profession in Tokyo on 30 June 1962. Now known as Sr. M. Elisa, she worked for ten consecutive years in the FSP book center in Nagasaki. In 1972 she was transferred to Sendai, where she worked primarily in the bookkeeping sector. Afterward, she had the joy of spreading the Word of God in the diocese of Kagoshima. Later she served for almost thirty years as a cook in the communities of Tokyo, Sapporo, and Osaka. A quiet, discreet sister, Sr. M. Elisa was eager to offer her life so that the Gospel would race ahead and reach everyone thirsting for the Truth, including through her hidden activities.

In 2011, given her increasingly frail health, she was assigned to our Hiratsuka community, where she generously carried out small community services for as long as her strength allowed. In 2014, she was reduced to moving around with a wheelchair, and two years later she was admitted to the local facility for senior citizens in need of long-term care. She spent the last years of her life in a spirit of ongoing thanksgiving and intimacy with her Master and Lord, whom, she related, continued to repeat deep in her heart, “Come to me with all your fatigue and burdens, and I will give you rest” (cf. Mt. 11:28). These words, she said, were the support of her life.

Today, while the Daughters of St. Paul all over the world are celebrating the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the definitive approval of our Constitutions, we want to remember in a special way the many FSPs throughout our Pauline history who confirmed with their lives the words of Maestra Thecla on 15 March 1953: “The path we are treading is broad and secure and will lead us quickly to our goal: heaven!” Affectionately,

Rome, 15 March 2023

  
Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan