

ISTITUTO PIA SOCIETÀ
FIGLIE DI S. PAOLO
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Dearest Sisters,

At 3:00 p.m. today, the eve of the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the Divine Master, one of the members of the FSP community of Albano, Italy was called to everlasting life in the bosom of the Trinity:

GENTILI – SR. GIOVANNA
born in Rovereto (Trent), Italy, on 9 December 1938.

It would be moving to leaf through our congregational photos and discover any unpublished pictures taken during the twenty-five years Sr. Giovanna spent in the Vatican Press Office at the service of the Apostolic See: photos that capture her with Pope John Paul II and with Pope Benedict throughout almost the entire span of their pontificates. Sr. Giovanna lived this beautiful and very intense period of her life right in the heart of the Church, providing a service that Fr. Federico Lombardi, SJ (for years the director of this Office), described as “exemplary and carried out with the dedication and professionalism proper to a Daughter of St. Paul. Sr. Giovanna was appreciated and loved by volunteers and communications professionals alike, offering them an image of the Holy See as approachable and efficient.”

She entered our Institute in the house in Alba, Italy, on 2 May 1960, after obtaining a diploma in teaching while still at home with her family. She made her novitiate in Rome, concluding it with her first profession on 30 June 1963. In a letter to the Superior General requesting permission to make her final vows, she said that she was deeply impressed by the beauty and holiness of the Pauline vocation and wanted to place herself in the hands of her superiors with complete availability. As a young professed sister, she carried out Bible missions in the communities of Novara and Livorno.

In Rome, Sr. Giovanna worked for several years in the Congregation’s central apostolic offices, particularly in the promotional sector. In 1970 she was sent as a missionary to Great Britain, where she carried out book center services with kindness and zeal in Liverpool, Glasgow, Langley and Birmingham, while at the same time improving her skills in English. Upon returning to Italy in 1983, she was sent to Verona and then to Reggio Emilia where she lived unforgettable experiences as an apostle of the Gospel. Captivated by Fr. Alberione’s incessant use of the word “all” (used in the sense of *totality*), she felt a powerful need to dedicate her entire life to the Word, perceiving that through the Pauline vocation she could achieve the total self-donation for which she yearned.

In 1985 Sr. Giovanna had the grace to begin an unusual ecclesial experience in the heart of Christendom. As the person in charge of the Vatican Press Room’s Accreditation Office, it was her job to introduce journalists to the Pope when heads of state or other distinguished personalities came to visit him. She recalled her great joy at being able to work for ecumenism, peace and inter-religious dialogue, in particular during the two important ecumenical meetings hosted by Pope John Paul II at Assisi. She never forgot the dynamic experiences in which she participated, especially concerning major events that received wide media coverage, drawing thousands of communicators to Rome (for instance, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, the funeral of Pope John Paul II, the jam-packed beatification ceremonies of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, Pope John XXIII, etc.). Sr. Giovanna often had to work late into the night to coordinate the crowds of journalists and ensure that each event came to a satisfactory conclusion. Sometimes, *in extremis*, she would make some quick last-minute translations into English.

Sr. Giovanna was truly worthy of maximum trust, including the preparation of the strictly confidential briefcase containing the speeches that the Pope delivered on his travels around the world. Discreet and reserved, careful and prudent, she was considered the right arm of the Director of the Vatican Press Office, Dr. Navarro Valls, Pope John Paul II’s historic spokesperson. In 2009, when she concluded her precious activities at the service of the Holy See, she was awarded the

medal *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice*, the highest distinction granted by the Pope to those who distinguish themselves for their service to the Church. She herself had the honor of presenting to Pope Benedict XIV her successor in the Accreditation Office, Dr. Matteo Bruni. At the conclusion of her work in the Vatican, she said: “In these twenty-five years, I have tried to understand journalists, walking side-by-side with them with a sister’s heart, accepting my duty as a ‘postmistress’ to present their hopes and problems to the Lord.”

A few months later, in 2010, Sr. Giovanna was assigned to our FSP house of Albano, where she continued her apostolic responsibilities through her service of welcoming visitors at the reception desk of Queen of Apostles Hospital, through her secretarial and animation activities in her community, and through her painstaking preparation and submission of the Albano community’s relevant paperwork to the Regional Health Office. But above all, she felt the profound urge to share with her sisters her great love for the Church and its shepherds.

Early last year, the colon cancer for which she had undergone surgery in 2018 revived. She serenely accepted the situation, which appeared to be very serious, looking forward without fear to her upcoming meeting with her Lord and Master, and supported by the affection of her two sisters, Teresa and Rosa, who remained at her bedside, tending to her needs day after day with great care and tenderness.

Convinced that our dear Sr. Giovanna has already been welcomed into the heart of God the Father, we want to entrust to her care today’s communicators, asking her to make it possible for them to be advocates of clear and transparent communication, capable of kindling the fire of faith in the hearts of their receivers.

Affectionately,


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan

Rome, 28 October 2023