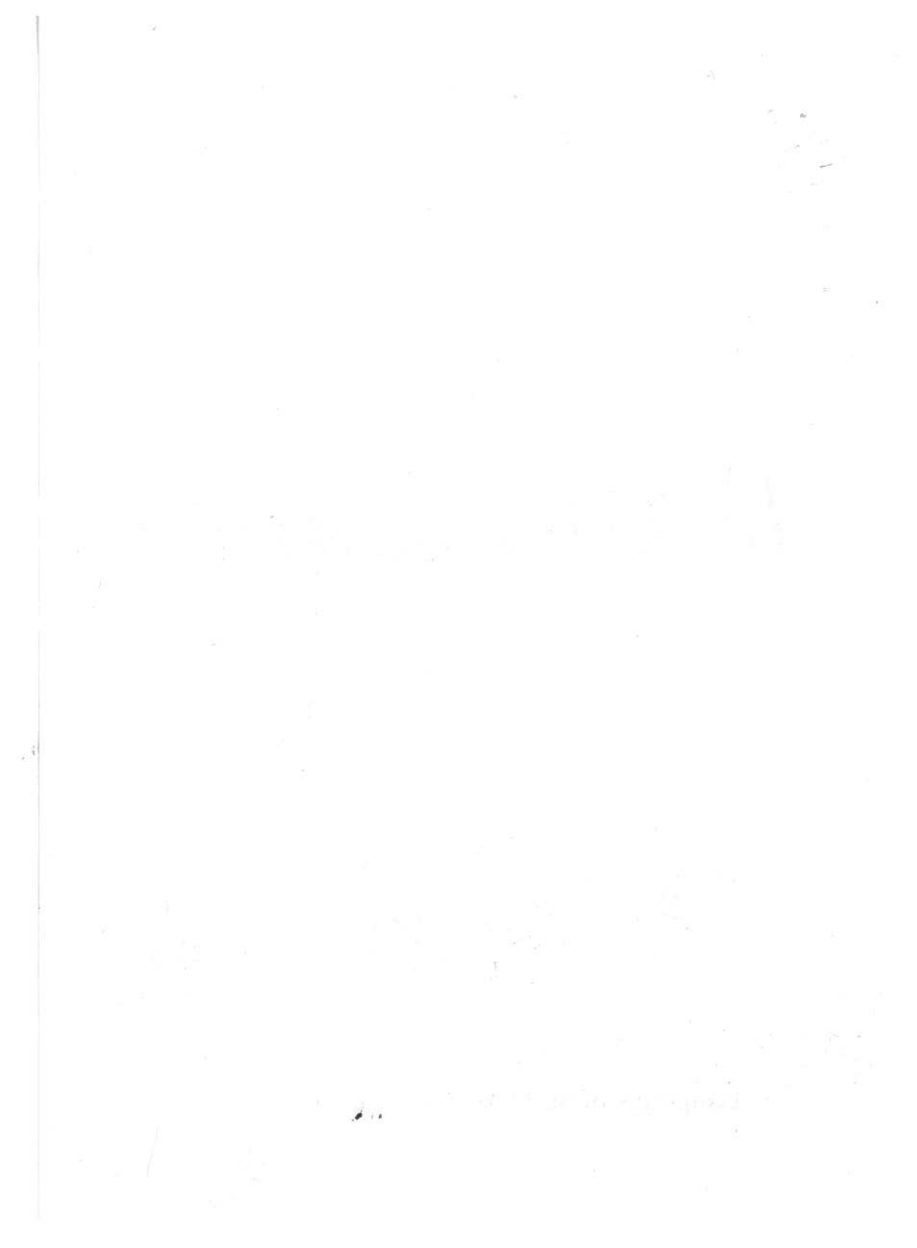


Sister Giuseppina Zenobio

DSMP

# *In their footsteps*

Daughters of St. Mary of Providence



*As a token of thanks  
to the young generations of Guanellian women,  
so that time does not wipe out the memory  
of the precious witness to fidelity  
of these pioneers of charity.*



## Presentation

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*Lord you are my Shepherd!*

*Dear Sisters,*

*I am pleased to present this little book to you all, and especially to offer it for the attention of the young sisters to whom it is dedicated.*

*From these brief outlines emerge the figures of those who marked out our way, paved with the simplicity of their lives as convinced religious.*

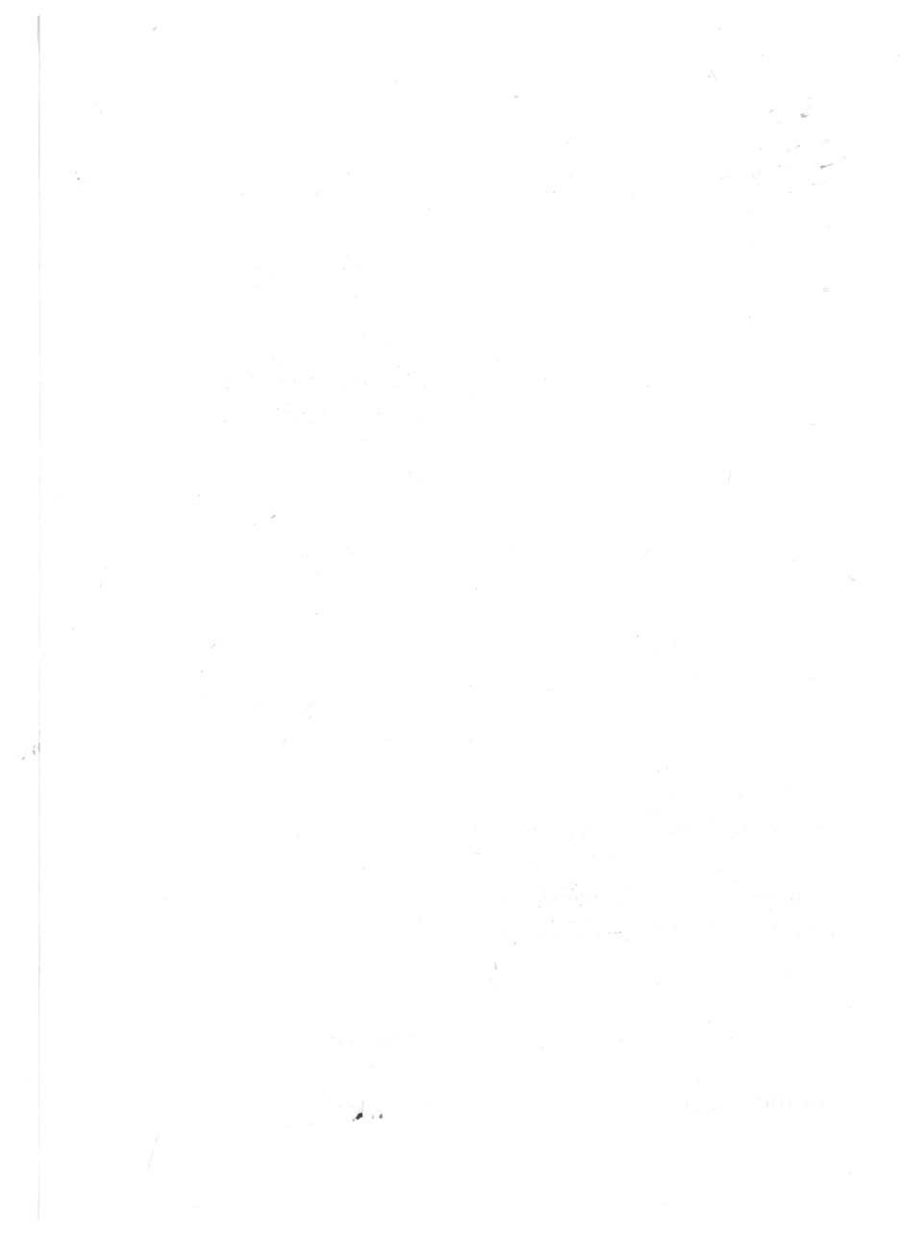
*They were courageous women, protagonists of their time, marked by their efforts and by poverty, but who lived in the joy of following Jesus Christ without reserve: steadfast in faith, glad in hope and strong in charity.*

*This is how our elder sisters lived.*

*I hope that each and every one will draw from these clear sources, to continue in their footsteps with the knowledge that love is not built with great crusade, but with the daily acts of our self-giving to the Lord and to our weakest brethren.*

*h. Giustina Valicenti*  
Superior General

Rome, the Year of the Great Jubilee, 2000



**Mother  
ROSA COLOMBO \***

Born in Samarate, Varese	04.22.1875
Entered the Congregation	01.07.1895
Consecrated	10.15.1897
Died in Como-Lora	10.12.1956



**A**fter the death of Mother Marcellina Bosatta, Fr Aloysius Guanella's first collaborator, the governance of the Congregation passed to Sister Rosina Colombo. She entered the Institute at the age of twenty, strong and generous; she was not particularly well educated, but had a ready, lively and practical intelligence. Fr Guanella appreciated these gifts, but what he admired above all was her profound interior life, her capacity for sacrifice and renunciation, her sense of that true humility which recognizes its gifts but also its limitations... in short, she was a sister that he, the Founder, found to his liking.

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\* The criterion followed in presenting the following biographical outlines concerns the service of authority as it is carried out in the Congregation.

Elected Superior General, she was to impress upon the Congregation the hallmark of true spirituality: Sister Rosa wanted to be faithful to the charism of charity at all costs and so her houses were filled with people suffering every sort of wretchedness. She governed firmly, drawing strength from her continuous prayer. She always prayed, at home and outside, by day and by night, and made use of an instrument of penance.

She was a biblical woman, a woman who was to pass on the original, genuine spirit of the Founder to future generations.

Motherly but at the same time demanding, she required of her sisters silence, prayer and poverty, but she made herself an indisputable model. She expected perfection of herself before expecting it of others. She allowed herself nothing that did not comply with the Rule of life and with the three religious vows.

She made many journeys, always traveling with the inseparable Sister Apollonia, her Vicar. Despite being worn out and advanced in years, she regularly visited the communities in North America and those in neighboring Switzerland.

After the war, the Congregation experienced a wonderful flowering of vocations. In those days there were more than a hundred novices. The Lord was watching over the institute and blessing its efforts.



After living an extremely full apostolic life, Mother Rosina was visited by the suffering of an incurable illness; she accepted it all with loving submission to God's will, bearing it with patience and dignity.

She died leaving everyone, the sisters and the assisted, convinced that she had lived her vocation as a Guanellian religious to the full and with holiness.

**Mother**  
**APOLLONIA BISTOLETTI**

Born in Albusciago, Varese	02.08.1877
Entered the Congregation	10.14.1897
Consecrated	01.01.1899
Died in S. Chiara, Albese	02.06.1968



She was one of the first sisters to receive her spiritual formation from the Founder, Fr. Aloysius Guanella, himself. She was distinguished for her deep piety, her service to the most deprived, her love of keeping in the background, her prudence in governing and her faithful observance of the Rule of life. This is the true praise that the Superior General of the Servants of Charity, Fr. Olimpio Giampedraglia, gave Mother Apollonia on the day of her funeral.

He wanted to bring into the limelight the great qualities of this humble, simple Daughter of St. Mary of Providence, a faithful disciple of Fr. Guanella.

She entered the Guanellian Congregation at the age of twenty, at a time when the activity of the priest from Valchiavenna was being disputed, in the thick of misunderstandings and all kinds of

problems. She supported the future Blessed in his work of assistance to the deprived, outcasts of a society that was politically opposed to the Church and to her priests.

Fr. Guanella, an observer with a flare, became aware of the treasures locked in the heart of that simple and unpretentious young country woman, whom the Lord was sending to him at the right time.

The Founder was able to appreciate the gifts of mind and heart with which this young religious had been endowed, and it was not long before he made her superior of the new branch of the Work in Switzerland, in the city of Roveredo. He himself accompanied her to that community where he left her in charge for many years.

From Switzerland she went to Menagio and then to Saronno, still in the service of authority. In 1925 she was elected first Councilor, then Vicar General and at the next Chapter in 1937, Superior General.

Sister Apollonia had sought to live in concealment, and the Lord had put her in the limelight; but the service of authority did not hinder her, indeed, it helped her to adjust to the right pace, not to miss a step and to reach her goal, listening to the heartbeats of the poor in a charitable institution which made a wonderful impression on the world.

Sister Apollonia's most remarkable feature was her convinced humility, a sincere humility that caused

to consider herself as the lowliest, the simplest, the least talented. This was how she introduced herself in her prayers, which centered on Jesus in the Sacrament. The bells for the consecration at Mass, for the Rosary and for the Eucharistic blessing were never rung in vain for her. She fostered an outstanding devotion to Our Lady and to St. Joseph, whom she considered the true custodians of the House of Providence.

She gave to all she did a sense of sacrifice and penance; she worked very hard, without granting herself any respite, especially during the 15 years of her governance in times that were far from easy.

Mother Apollonia's life was distinguished by the poverty that marked her from her very first steps as a religious. She retained her simplicity even during the time when she held the most important office, and strengthened by a boundless faith in Providence, she never asked for anything for herself but gave her life in all its seasons to divine love.

Her encounter with the Lord took place in the silence of night, and she was to awaken to the dawn of that sky that never darkens.

It was the day of her 91st birthday.

## **Mother ANGELA CETTINI**

Born in Lovero, Sondrio	11.29.1901
Entered the Congregation	01.08.1924
Consecrated	06.21.1926
Died in Chicago, USA	10.07.1977



**M**other Angela had no difficulty in becoming acquainted with our Congregation because there were numerous Guanellian houses and nursery schools, opened by Fr. Aloysius Guanella himself, all over the Alta Valtellina, her birthplace.

Therefore when she was 23 years old she decided to share the ideals and efforts of our sisters, in whom lingered the fragrance of the early spirit and who were full of love for the needy.

After her years of formation in the novitiate, she made her first profession into the hands of the Superior General, Sister Rosa Colombo; Mother Marcellina Bosatta was among those present.

Sister Angela was reserved, almost introverted, and showed that she was endowed with a profound religious spirit and good health; she was chosen for

the service to the sick. The superiors sent her to Rome to acquire a professional nursing diploma. The young sister accepted the obedience as a sign of God's will. She attended classes in the Roman Clinic of S. Giuseppe al Trionfale, and qualified with brilliant grades.

She returned to the Mother House in Como-Lora and the care of the sick sisters was entrusted to her; many of them were suffering from tuberculosis, a disease that was unfortunately doomed to take a heavy toll of victims among our young sisters.

Sister Angela not only put her professional skill at these sisters' disposal, but also her love, her understanding and her sensitivity.

However, she did not remain long in that service: her Superiors were observing her and noted her dignity, her calm, her deep inner life and the authority she exercised. They therefore decided to send her to the recently founded institutions in North America. Sister Angela, ever available to God's plans, accepted without "ifs and buts", complying with the instructions of the Founder.

She later told a sister how deeply she had suffered in tearing herself away from her parents and her beautiful Italy.

In 1939 the tragic world war broke out in which America was hostile to Italy. Sister Angela was sent as superior and nurse to Milbank in St. Bernard's

Providence Hospital. She did so much good in that place of pain that she obtained American citizenship from the competent authorities. She was esteemed and beloved by her sisters, by the medical and paramedical personnel and by the friends of the Guanellian Institute.

As always, human projects differ from those of God. In 1952 Sister Cettini was summoned to take part in the Congregation's General Chapter, which among other things had to elect the Superior General and her Council for the next six-year term. Sister Cettini was chosen, and could not therefore return to "her" America at that time. Instead, she governed the Congregation for eighteen consecutive years, having been re-elected three times.

They were difficult years, but Sister Angela, entrusting her governance to Mary, Mother of Providence, was not dismayed. The Second Vatican Council was to introduce the renewal and up-dating of religious institutes. The new times and signs required religious and lay personnel to obtain qualifications, and the restructuring of buildings. The Chapter desired by the Church for the renewal of the Rule was organized, and Mother Angela set to work, involving all the members of the Congregation. It was an enormous effort, but this woman religious was always strong and willing.

In those years, the Guanellian Work expanded in many Latin American countries: Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, etc.

Time flew. In 1970, the governance of the Congregation passed to Sister Rosa Costantini, but Sister Angela did not retire, she went back to the United States where she was welcomed with great joy by the sisters, residents and acquaintances; she continued her service of authority as Superior of the US Delegation. Sister Angela lived her consecration to Christ to the full and without reserve. She was struck by the terrible illness of the century that was soon to end her life.

However, this strong woman did not lay down her weapons, she was not afraid of pain, she made the most of it as a precious means and wanted to give her suffering its full meaning for the Church, for her Congregation and for "her" America. Assisted lovingly and with deep sorrow by her sisters, on October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary to whom she had always prayed, while she was calling upon her: "*O clemens, o pia o dulcis Virgo Maria*", she was immersed for ever in the immense ocean of God's love. To us all, she has bequeathed the memory of her fidelity to Christ, who made her a credible witness.



**Mother  
ROSA COSTANTINI**

Born in Brenta, Milan	03.23.1924
Entered the Congregation	12.28.1942
Consecrated	06.21.1945
Died in Malpensa, Milan	12.19.1985



**I**t is not easy to describe the features of Mother Rosa Costantini, an excellent woman and an excellent consecrated Guanellian religious. Much has been said and written about her with affection and with competence. I attempt to sum up these authoritative writings in a brief synthesis which may serve to keep alive our memory of her.

Eighteen years old, lovely to look at, her heart brimming with hope in the future, she presented herself at the Institute of the Sisters of Providence, founded by Fr. Aloysius Guanella, the priest from Valtellino who made room in his heart for the underprivileged, rejected by society since they were deemed to be useless.

This exuberant and courageous young woman was delightedly accepted by the superiors who liked her, and she made a good impression on them.

This is how a new life began for her that was to crown her dreams as a young girl with pure ideals.

On December 21, 1942, Italy was immersed in war, the people were living in fear and trepidation. Rosa entrusted her future to God and put herself at the service of her poor and forsaken brothers and sisters with a love that raised them to the dignity of God's children.

At the end of the first stage of her religious formation, with her profession she prepared to receive the obedience. It was 1945, the tragic war was almost over. Sister Rosa was ready for a new undertaking.

Her excellent intellectual ability, tenacious will and outstanding personality did not escape the notice of the Superiors who sent her to Rome to complete her religious and cultural formation. She attended the Teachers Training Institute and qualified with top marks. She stayed at the Casa di San Giuseppe and began to teach in the flourishing elementary school.

She taught the young people who came for the recreational facilities provided, and organized parties and plays. She felt fulfilled and was content with the life she had chosen.

Seventeen years passed and Sister Rosa was given a new office: she had to leave "her" school and go to Calabria. In the house at Cosenza she was given the

role of local superior and directress of the school. The Calabrese girl students were fascinated by this Guanellian sister from Lombardy and gathered round her with sympathy and affection. She was their unfailing guide and sincere friend; many of them followed her in the religious life of the Congregation.

In the 1970s, Sister Rosa took part in the Guanellian Women's Chapter and was elected Superior General, an office she held for 15 years. She did her utmost in this new service and worked hard for the spiritual, social and structural progress of the Congregation.

She opened houses in the mission lands, carried out all the directives of the conciliar Church; she was open to the signs of the new times and said: "religious life must not experience weariness and sterile identity crises, it must rely on prayer and self-sacrifice, with faith and perseverance". She wrote circular letters as treatises of spiritual life, inviting the religious to love Christ and the Church of the poor.

Mother Rosa was on the point of leaving for Latin America for the regular canonical visitation, but she seemed exhausted and suffering. She stayed in those mission lands for two months and was preparing her return. Nothing hinted at the tragic event.

My own writing stops here. I would like to cite a passage from *La Voce*, written on that occasion:

Mother Rosa Costantini, after having "glided" and shaken her dewy wings over the Guanellian fields of Latin America, landed to take her leave of Italy at Malpensa Airport. Another flap of her wings, and there she was in heaven!

It was December 19, 1985, the date on which we commemorate the Founder's birth. Mother Rosa was to celebrate it with him in the everlasting joy of heaven.

## **Sister PIERA FERRARI**

Born in S. Martino in Strada (MI)	08.09.1904
Entered the Congregation	12.20.1934
Consecrated	06.21.1937
Died at S. Pio X, Rome	07.17.1988



**S**ister Piera belongs to that array of Guanellian women who made the history of our Congregation.

She was not very talkative, but made an impression with her strong and visible conviction of being a consecrated religious: she had a dignified bearing, a deep sense of humanity and the ability to be both affable and sympathetic.

Her sensitivity and attention for all of nature's marvels were her predominant features: she loved music, and notes of the piano would often send ripples of melody through the house. Flowers were her "weakness", she tended them with enthusiasm and enjoyed seeing her rose bush covered in scented flowers, admiring the beauty and harmony ordained by the Creator to whom she offered grateful praise.

But Sister Piera's attention was focused above all

on her Lord and on those who were close to her. Her precision in carrying out her duties and the order she created around her were transposed into her spiritual life. Punctual in regular observance, she was never in a hurry with community or personal prayer.

She had a deep devotion for Our Lady and never failed to greet her, reciting the Angelus and the holy Rosary daily.

Her gifts did not stay hidden and responsible roles were entrusted to her. For 18 years she was Vicar General to both Mother Angela and Mother Rosa, as well as legal representative of the Congregation, and in every area gave the best of herself.

She was welcoming and always had a smile for the young women who listened to her, and she knew how to involve them in the adventure of religious life. She longed to spend all her energy for the good of the Church, of the poor, of the Guanellian missions that were so dear to her heart.

Filled with merits, Sister Piera entered the Father's House to continue enjoying the harmony of God's beauty and greatness, to hear the music of the angels, to delight in the beatific vision of her Creator, her Lord, her bountiful Father and to love for ever all those who had known, esteemed and loved her. To us she bequeathed her example of fidelity to life as a consecrated Guanellian.

## **Sister MARIA BIANCHINI**

Born in Campo, Sondrio	02.12.1912
Entered the Congregation	12.10.1930
Consecrated	06.21.1933
Died in S. Chiara, Albese	11.16.1989



**I**t is not easy to sum up Sister Maria Bianchini's life; one risks impoverishing it and depriving us all of a rare model of holiness.

She entered the Guanellian Congregation in the fast half of the 20th century, absorbed Fr. Aloysius Guanella's spirituality, still fresh, and made her own his program: "Prayer and Suffering".

Her days were woven of prayer, work and the Rule. This would be her constant praise to her God. Loyal to every religious duty, she fostered interior and exterior silence with serenity and peace.

Despite having a temperament as strong as her mountains, her approach was always gentle and also, if need be, quick-witted. Attentive to the needs of the sisters and of others, she knew how to make herself esteemed and loved.

She had learned at the school of Christ to be poor

in practice. She possessed nothing that was not absolutely necessary. She lived chaste, in a crescendo of love and the unconditional offering of herself without reserve to God, who had invited her to follow him.

Her strength derived from the obedience that set her free and immersed her in the dimension of total and gratuitous abandonment in the Father's hands.

Sister Maria lived her consecration to the full, even when her progress became difficult and arduous. She knew how to make a qualitative leap in holiness.

She was a simple woman with ordinary gestures: they were not spectacular, but little seeds of peace, compassion, esteem and trust for the sisters, for everyone.

She was happy to belong to the Guanellian family and dedicated herself to the institutions with an apostolic spirit and a heartfelt desire for good and so, always in harmony with her Superiors, she would hasten to wherever they sent her. She was a most professional kindergarten school teacher devoted to the little ones, taking great care of the integral formation of their personality.

Sister Maria was later entrusted with services of authority in various houses of the Congregation. She was a wise counselor to the young students in Cosenza: she knew how to offer "Bread and



Paradise" to the disabled girls at S. Maria della Nocetta and wanted the sisters to have the knowledge and awareness that a satisfactory service demands.

Close to the lives and deaths of the elderly residents at the Casa S. Pio X in Rome, she used to like to say: "the sick are images of the crucified Christ, and we must approach them with sensitivity and faith".

In the Chapter of 1970, she was elected Vicar General, a role that sorely tried her humility but which she accepted in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, as a "service" to the Church. Her availability was the fruit of her closeness to the Lord, nourished by intense and constant prayer, convinced as she was that it is not so much what we do that counts, but "how" and for "whom" we do it.

This "small" woman, in her identity as a Guannellian sister, attained the radical nature of the Gospel which made her a credible witness of God the Father's tenderness.

She departed in this way, silently and serenely, to enjoy the infinite light that shines from God's heart.

## **Sister CAROLINA GHIDONI**

Born in S. Fiorano, Milan	04.24.1883
Entered the Congregation	07.21.1904
Consecrated	11.01.1905
Died in S. Chiara, Albese	05.07.1971



**S**ister Carolina Ghidoni left her earthly dwelling place after a long journey through life which lasted 88 years, 66 of which she spent as a religious with the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence.

She came from a lovely town in the Lodigiano, and had the joy of meeting the great missionary, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, the foundress of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who came from that locality. She also completed her teacher's training course at a school founded by Frances Cabrini herself.

A young woman with a brilliant future, she felt called to follow Christ in the consecrated life and chose our religious family without hesitation. It was then an almost unknown Congregation, because it was still new and also simple and humble; it was only concerned with those who were marginalized and rejected by "good" society.

Carolina was accepted by Fr. Aloysius Guanella, who discerned her sincere vocation to charity. The young woman made her vows in the hands of Fr. Aloysius himself, and he followed her spiritual progress and formed her for a life of intense prayer, strength of mind and dedication to the good of the Congregation. Sister Carolina became a true disciple of his, docile to her Superiors' directives.

Roles of responsibility in the Congregation were soon entrusted to her. She was appointed novice mistress of a group of novices whom she trained in the harsh reality of our early days, and successfully passed on to them cultural knowledge and fidelity to the given word. She had a special loving devotion to the Eucharist and to God's word and was loyal to all her duties, observant of the Rule and respectful of traditions.

She was subsequently made responsible for the large community in the Mother House, where she imparted lessons of catechism and of life to the sisters.

Sister Carolina was "the center of attention" of the sisters who taught at the nursery schools, of whom she was in charge: during the summer months she summoned them all to S. Maria for updating and to find fresh enthusiasm in the days of their retreat.

She found it enchanting to observe those young

teachers praying and singing in harmonious affection and joy.

She kept her gaze turned toward the future of the Congregation, and therefore wanted the sisters to have a basic knowledge in every area.

Sister Ghidoni's activities were many, but they did not distract her from what was the most important of all: the religious life she had chosen and loved, and to which she had promised to be faithful.

The memory of this Guanellian woman of the early times lives on for ever in the hearts of those who knew her. She was able to communicate the richness of her wisdom and humility without ostentation, with freedom and sincerity.

She is certainly looking down from her reign of glory and watching over our Congregation.

## **Sister ANNA VALERANI**

Born in Lambrate, Milan	03.12.1901
Entered the Congregation	10.15.1921
Consecrated	06.27.1924
Died at S. Pio X, Rome	04.16.1992



**S**ister Anna felt chosen by God from her childhood. She was left an orphan and taken in by the Guanellian school in Via Cagnola, Milan, which then housed orphaned little girls.

She often used to say: "Jesus grasped me from my adolescence, he wanted me all for himself, I belong to him".

In this way the young woman responded with enthusiasm and willingness to the Lord's call.

When she had completed the teachers' training course, she entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence. She was intelligent, willing, clever and open, and these gifts did not remain hidden: Sister Anna was to make them available to the needy, to children, to everyone. She used to say that it is important "to be".

Observant of the Rule, she was always first at

community prayers, faithful to the personal dialogue with God.

She lived on faith, and wanted this theological virtue to grow in her heart and in all the brothers and sisters for whom she prayed.

Sister Anna was keen on culture because it helped her to understand and to love more. She interested herself in human events and nothing left her indifferent.

She also had a large dose of humor which she liked to communicate during recreation.

She held responsible roles in the Congregation, first as an elementary school teacher at S. Giuseppe al Trionfale, then as superior at the Milan house, and later as Secretary and General Councilor in the Chapter of 1958.

In 1970 the Generalate was transferred from Como to Rome: Sister Anna, as General Councilor, was pleased to move to the holy city for she was very fond of Rome, but she did not forget "her" Lombardy.

She was entrusted with the group of junior sisters, and did her best to pass on the Founder's spirit and charism. She was prudent and wise but when necessary, also intransigent. She had a deep love for Fr. Guanella, for she had known him as a child and had received his fatherly caresses. She often remembered him.

She lived happily until the age of 91, and thanked God every day for the gift of life.

A figure to whom others could refer and with no useless regrets, she lived a joyful life of prayer and work and was constantly studying.

It is moving to remember Sister Anna's death. Still mentally lucid, she was praying with the community gathered round her bed, while waiting for the priest to arrive to give her the Anointing of the Sick and the Holy Viaticum. After receiving the Sacraments, the community sang the *Magnificat*, and the sick woman submissively followed the singing. At the last notes, Sister Anna took flight for a new heaven and a new earth. It was Holy Thursday in April 1992; she departed to celebrate Easter in heaven and to join in singing the paschal alleluia of the heavenly Jerusalem.

## **Sister TERESA RAVIZZA**

Born in Berbenno, Sondrio	05.08.1915
Entered the Congregation	10.11.1939
Consecrated	06.21.1942
Died in S. Chiara, Albese	05.29.1983



**S**ister Teresa Ravizza's life was not an easy one and was marked from the very beginning by physical suffering because of the many ailments that afflicted her. She was frail in her humanity, but strong and great in her spiritual energy.

Endowed with a placid temperament, she was always seen to be smiling and gentle, so that some even joked about it. On the contrary, Sister Teresa had a great charism and communicated it to everyone through her welcoming smile and her acts that were impressed with delicacy and gentleness. She had a simple but engaging approach.

She entered the House in Milan as an elementary school teacher; at that time the Congregation took in normal little girls, the daughters of immigrants and orphans.

This young school teacher listened to the voice of



the Lord who wanted her to be his own and she chose our Congregation; in it she could exercise all her love for her weakest neighbor, certain that she could more easily become holy in the service of charity.

So the years of her novitiate began, during which she was given the task of completing the education of her sister novices. As novice mistress she was immediately esteemed and loved by the sisters, who took her as a model to be imitated. One of them said: "Sister Teresa called our school Bethany, because she wanted that same love to prevail among us". Grace was at work in Sister Teresa, because everyone was attracted by her way of living, praying and acting.

She was then elected Superior of the house in Genoa, in which the sisters suffering from bone diseases lived. To each of them she was a true sister, and an unfailing point of reference for them all. They confided their problems and moral sufferings to Sister Teresa and always found her ready to listen.

When she too was forced to remain motionless with her whole body enveloped in rigid plaster, her bed became the place from which she imparted lessons on the acceptance of the will of God who never takes from his children except in order to enrich them with merits. She never lacked a smile and gentle, persuasive words. She accepted all physical and moral pain for her own holiness and

the sanctification of those whom the Lord had placed on her path.

In the 1970s Sister Teresa at last had some respite, she recovered and the Lord called her to a new service. In the Chapter of 1970 she was elected Councilor and General Secretary of the Congregation. She was obliged to leave Genoa and move to the Generalate in Rome. There too, the good Lord did not spare her moral and spiritual suffering.

After six years in Rome, Sister Teresa was transferred to the Rest Home of S. Chiara di Albese; illness once again came knocking at her door, and she moved up a step, continuing to ascend.

She had given her all to the Lord, to the Church and to her beloved Congregation. She now had to prepare herself for the final encounter with her Bridegroom, Jesus. This is what she said to a sister: "How beautiful the dawn is when the sun rises.... Ah! But there are also some marvelous and enchanting sunsets, I am close to my own sunset and I want it to be a marvelous one".

Sister Teresa's life was the lamp placed on the stand that lit up the whole house, illuminating everyone.

Her soul is now immersed in the fullness of divine love.

## **Sister ROSETTA FONTANA**

Born in Berbenno, Sondrio 03.19.1909  
Entered the Congregation 06.11.1932  
Consecrated 01.05.1935  
Died in Bogota, Colombia 02.25.1983



**S**ister Rosetta was born in Berbenno in the green land of Valtellina on March 19, 1909.

She entered our religious family in June 1932, at the age of 23. Young, exuberant and also beautiful, she chose to dedicate her life to Christ and her brothers and sisters through the charism of Fr Aloysius Guanella.

After making her first vows in 1935, she asked and obtained permission to leave for North America. Although it cost her an effort to wrench herself away from "her" land, that same year, on May 11, 1935, she left for Chicago in the United States.

She began her apostolate among the mentally retarded girls, with whom she remained for at least 37 years. She loved them with a mother's heart and cared for them with every pedagogical and scientific means.

Her intellectual gifts, goodness and amiability were soon recognized, and she was appointed superior of the Springfield community and later, of the community of Monte S. Giuseppe.

The sisters who had her as their guide describe the many virtues exercised by Sister Rosetta: she found time for everyone, the sisters and those they cared for alike, no one was too lowly or too important for her, she loved them all, forgave them all and always with a smile.

She had her own way of making reproaches: she would never reprimand any sister in public but would summon her and explain everything to her. After her death, some sisters spoke of her in richly significant words: "I spent the loveliest years of my life at Sister Rosetta's side. She loved Christ, life, her poor and defenseless brothers and sisters, hers was a universal love". She had a melodious voice and sang and played as a way of praising the Lord; she loved the liturgy, and observed the liturgical norms issued by the conciliar Church.

So much could still be said about this sister of ours, because there is a wealth of testimonies about her, all of which it would be impossible to include in this brief biographical outline.

We recall her great effort of detachment from that America which she had made her own, in order to accomplish her last heroic act of fidelity to the vow

of obedience. During the Chapter of 1968, Sister Rosetta was asked to make a great sacrifice: to leave North America and go to Bogota in Colombia.

On that occasion she said: "I must tear myself away from the United States, and especially from you whom I so love. I possess no diplomas, I do not know the language, I am alone with Jesus Christ. Let us be strong and pray together: the best place for us is always the one where God wants us. He wants this separation for our own sanctification".

In Colombia she still and always knew how to love, pray and smile. She was appointed Superior of the Hispanic-America Delegation, an office that she carried out with her usual willingness, having sought nothing and refused nothing: that was her slogan.

Sister Rosetta Fontana lives on in the hearts of all those who knew and esteemed her, for to know her and to love her was one and the same. She is now in heaven among the hosts of saints and sings of God's mercies for ever.

## **Sister PIERA BERNASCONI**

Born in Olgiate Comasco, Como	09.27.1906
Entered the Congregation	12.29.1928
Consecrated	01.05.1932
Died in Lipomo, Como	12.13.1986



**S**ister Piera Bernasconi left her earthly dwelling place at the age of 80 after spending 54 years in our Congregation. A precious life in God's eyes and in those of the people who lived beside her. She was endowed with a true Guanellian religious spirit inherited from the Father Founder himself and lived it out in the various offices of responsibility to which she was called by obedience.

Sister Piera was a woman of few words, but always ready to listen and for conversation. She trusted in prayer for the solution of problems. One sister said of her that she was like the good seed that fell in the hearts of the sisters and the needy. If hardships came her way, she would say: "Let us go and tell the Lord about it, because the greater the suffering is, the greater the medicine that he gives us".

She knew her limits and her strengths and her

outlook was therefore submissive and silent, but ever serene. She wanted to build up her holiness in the Guanellian charism, that is, in simplicity and concealment, and she would say, as a "*martorella*".

She held roles of responsibility in the Congregation, in Italy and in Switzerland. She found it congenial to be obey readily because in obedience she saw God's will. A sister said of her: "At times she appeared severe, almost hard; it was a reaction for which she never failed to feel guilty later, and to ask forgiveness".

These are the strong women who portray the women of the Bible, and help us to "be" rather than to "seem" good religious.

In the last period of her life, after serving as Superior of the Swiss Delegation, she was transferred to Lipomo, and although she was very sick, she forced herself to animate enthusiastically the prayers of the elderly residents in the house.

Our Superiors were pillars that supported the Congregation in "Prayer and Suffering", the program outlined by our Blessed Founder which Sister Piera made her own.

Now our sister has reached Jesus her Bridegroom and enjoys the happiness promised to those who stay faithful to his love. We are left with the memory of her example as a convinced religious, in the awareness that the choice of Christ is fullness of life.

**Sister**  
**LUCIA COAN**

Born in Cordignano, Treviso	09.10.1924
Entered the Congregation	12.16.1947
Consecrated	06.21.1950
Died in Milan	12.03.1979



**O**n December 3, 1979, the feast of St. Francis Xavier, the great missionary of India, Sister Lucia Coan, a Guanellian missionary in Brazil, ended her earthly life. She was only 55 and had spent 15 years precisely in Brazil.

Young Lucia was full of energy and endowed with an acute intelligence: she was able to combine a strong charity and gentle manners. Thoughtful and generous, she chose Christ as the ideal of her youth.

After her first profession, she was sent to Rome to begin advanced studies. After attending the Teachers' Training Institute "Sedes Sapientiae", she enrolled at the university and gained a degree in psychology and pedagogy. The Superior then called her to the Mother House, making her responsible for teaching the young novices and juniors. Sister Lucia obeyed the directives of the Superiors in a spirit of obe-



dience but her heart was beating with love for the missions. She longed to realize this dream.

The Lord heard her, and Sister Lucia was ready for her departure to Brazil, where the Guanellian Work had already been founded. For this young woman facing the future, a vast field of work lay ahead among the lowly, the deprived, the poor and the neglected. She opened schools and soup kitchens, she devoted herself to catechesis to create new children of God and followers of Christ. It was 1964, and the Church was about to close the Second Vatican Council. Sister Lucia was also attentive to the desires and expectations of the local Church.

Several years passed, and she was put in charge of the community. She was then appointed Superior of the whole Brazilian Delegation, a most demanding service of authority which Sister Lucia fulfilled with professionalism and love. For the sisters of Brazil, Sister Lucia was the cornerstone. In her they saw the true Guanellian spirit, in her humility, her sacrifices, her ability to harmonize prayer and action, the way she lived "Prayer and Suffering" daily.

The sisters of Brazil remember her in this way: "She was strict with herself, and with a marvelous effort of adaptation, she came to understand and respect the cultural and temperamental diversity of the Brazilian sisters".

This consecrated woman had an abundant har-

vest before her: but God's plans did not coincide with hers, although they were beautiful. Sister Lucia began to notice the first symptoms of an inexorable illness, which was soon to bring her to the end of her earthly life. She was taken to Italy in the hope that she could be saved, but it was all in vain, her illness had reached an irreversible stage. Sister Lucia never gave up: she waited for her Bridegroom with her lamp lit, even though being obliged to leave the mission caused her deep sorrow.

She said to a sister: "I am waiting for the second coming of Christ, I feel it is at hand. That day will be the apogee of my life. Let us sing together the Italian hymn I like so much: 'Santa Maria della speranza, mantieni viva la mia attesa!'"

So our Sister Lucia died, singing and praising Mary. Now that she has gone beyond the boundaries of space and time, she will continue to watch over her Congregation and "her" Brazil so that the space she left may be filled by young vocations. The plan of love has been fulfilled, and our sister is enjoying its fullness.

## **Sister EMILIA LECCHI**

Born in Civate al Piano (Bergamo)	11.06.1901
Entered the Congregation	10.09.1923
Consecrated	06.21.1926
Died in S. Chiara, Albese	09.26.1996



**S**ister Emilia was accepted by the Guanellian Sisters of the house in Milan when she was only just thirteen years old.

The institute at that time took in girl orphans and little Emilia had lost both her parents.

She was an intelligent, quick and lively girl. She seemed the picture of good health; instead, while only at the threshold of adolescence she became so seriously ill that the doctors were obliged to remove one of her lungs: none of them expected her to recover, on the contrary, they predicted that she would only live a few months.

But the future of this girl was in God's hands. Emilia recovered and planned her future: she would consecrate her young life to the Lord in service to the poor, the weak, the benjamins of Guanellian Providence.

An extrovert, cheerful, open and generous: these were the qualities that marked the young woman and helped her to realize her dream. She loved life, no longer remembered her physical ailment, was considered suitable for community life by the Superiors and made her three religious vows. She would breathe with a single lung for the rest of her life, without problems, and with joy and serenity.

Sister Emilia was only twenty. She was sent to the San Lorenzo house of Ardenno, first as secretary and then as superior.

Those who were acquainted with her, loved her and held her in high esteem; she knew how to direct people and also how to be a friend. She welcomed every type of suffering person: disabled, poor, forsaken. The Founder's charism seemed incarnate in the heart of this follower of his who was always smiling, even when her duties forced her to be severe.

In the dark years of the war, with the fratricidal fighting and so many victims, Sister Emilia sheltered and protected even partisans, and she exposed herself to the risk of being shot by the German soldiers to help those who were "wanted".

Her courageous charity, full of humanity and authority, earned her the Silver Medal of Military Bravery and the accompanying Diploma of Merit, which were awarded to her by the authorities of the Province of Sondrio.

Ardenno, Loreto, the Casa San Pio X in Rome, where she was Local Superior and Superior of the Center South Delegation, were the places where Sister Emilia left indelible memories. The young polio victims of S. Pio X will never forget her. For these girls, so harshly tried by life, she had motherly sentiments, did not count costs and redesigned their section. They remember her as their "redemptress", with affection and gratitude.

Some sisters say that they owe their fidelity to their vocation to Sister Emilia's love.

At her funeral, celebrated in Casa S. Chiara in Alberese, the celebrant said: "This sister did not draft many programs, she did not organize important round tables; she worked with her life, nourished with prayer, especially Marian prayer, and with Jesus in the Eucharist".

A few minutes before she died, she recited the *Hail Mary*, and Mary will certainly have received her into the reign of bliss.

Medical science predicted that Sister Emilia would die at the beginning of her adolescence, but she lived to the age of 95. Life and death are in God's hands, and no one can alter them.

Let us thank the Lord for giving her to our religious family, as an example of fidelity to the promise she made on the day of her consecration to Christ.

## **Sister CLARE HOLMES**

Born in Chicago, USA	09.06.1885
Entered the Congregation	06.01.1918
Consecrated	11.07.1927
Died in Chicago, USA	08.05.1979



**S**ister Clare Holmes is another pillar of the Guanellian women's Congregation and she was the first American vocation.

An excellent figure with an outstanding personality, cultured and well-to-do, she met the first humble Guanellian sisters who were establishing the institutes of the Guanellian Work in North America.

Ethel Clare was fascinated by these sisters: their affability in relations, their generosity and daring in the most difficult services, their willing sacrifices and their serenity in facing the difficulties of the language, were indelibly impressed upon this young American's mind.

Ethel was only 20 years old and did not need to think twice to understand that their choice of life was strongly dosed with love. She therefore decided to make it her own and to dedicate all her faculties

to serving the Guanellian Work that was coming into being in her land, and was still frail and without a history.

However, although this young woman was determined and willing, she had doubts and a struggle, and was therefore tempted to start elsewhere. But God had chosen her and wanted her to be his, and every doubt vanished. The sisters realized what talent the Lord was putting in their hands and thanked Providence. Everything seemed easier with Sister Clare, even the problems with the language. Henceforth Ethel was called only Sister Clare, henceforth she belonged to God and to our Congregation.

The quality of St. Mary's Work in Chicago advanced by leaps and bounds, so that it became a place where high school students were trained. Sister Clare's professionalism in various branches of science brought her to the attention of eminent specialists.

Sister Angela Cettini was in America then and was able to get to know Sister Clare well. Therefore, having returned from the United States for the 1958 Chapter at which she was elected Superior of the Congregation, she did not hesitate to summon Sister Clare to Italy to take care of our Work for the disabled.

Sister Clare came to Italy and began her invaluable service. Rome, Ardenno, Fratta, Loreto, Verdello

had an extraordinary and necessary updating. Italy was not yet aware of the problems of the mentally and physically handicapped.

Our houses experienced a surge of development at various levels, structural, environmental, social and pedagogical. The American "pillar" brought about a sort of revolution that was particularly beneficial and effective.

Mother Cettini sent a large number of sisters to schools for specialized training in pedagogy, psychology, social services, physiotherapy, etc.

Today the Guanellian houses for these residents of ours are among the most advanced, at the scientific level as well as that of pedagogy and rehabilitation.

One figure, Sister Clare, deserves far more emphasis than it is possible to give her in this short biographical outline. I would only like to point out the heart of her activity which exceeds and transcends all she did: her principles, her faith in the value of pain and in the person of the mentally weak, of the poor, of the brother or sister in difficulty. She had in her work a taste for God and the Guanellian concern to transmit God's love for each person, respecting his dignity.

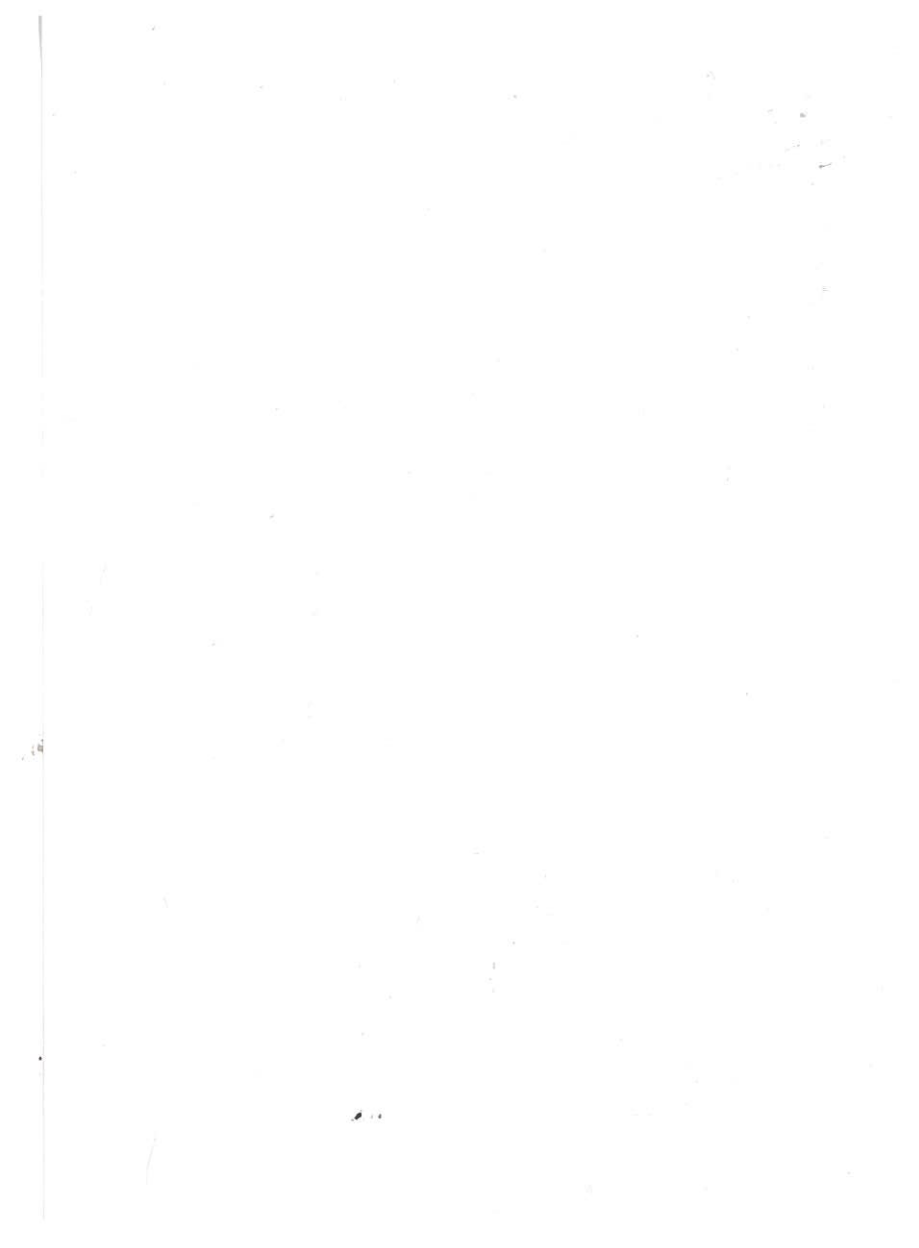
It was Sister Clare's way of life which made her remarkable, not only for her service to Italy, but because it made the Guanellian charism under-



standable, first and foremost in her own country, America.

Remembering her gives us joy and edification. Sister Clare wanted to die in Italy, but God wanted her in her own land.

The new "earth" and the new "heaven" are now the dwelling place of Sister Clare Holmes, a Guanellian religious who lived in charity, which she was well able to combine with science.



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