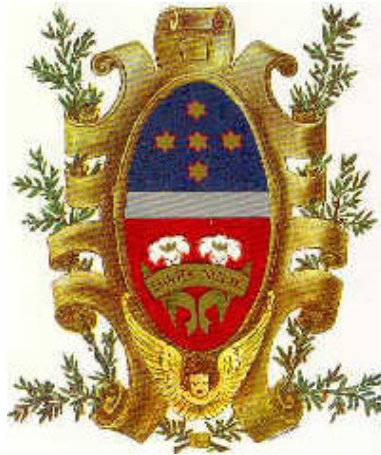


# **A Brief Chronicle**

**of the**



*The Seal of the Stigmatine Congregation*

## **Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ**

**Rev. Joseph Fiorio – Stigmatine  
1876-1958**

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& Early Decrees of the Holy See**

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## Preface

It would seem to me that I could not offer a better Preface for this historical recollections which see the light of day in order to recall the first centenary of our Congregation – than the Circular Letter that I sent out to the Confreres on that occasion. Along with this, I will also add the kind testimonies that have come to me from the authoritative persons to whom I thought myself to be duty-bound to have them participate in the remembrance of such an extraordinary occasion.

I wish with all my heart that this publication might animate us all to realize that yearning that I expressed in my letter, for the greater good of our Institute, souls and of the Church.

**Fr. John Baptist Tommasi**

**Superior General**

**The Superior General  
to all the venerable Fathers and beloved Brothers  
of the religious Congregation of the  
Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ**

The 4<sup>th</sup> day of November 1816, our Venerable Founder took possession of the locality of the House of the Stimate and established there his dwelling, accompanied by Fr John Marani and by Brother Paul Zanolì, for the purpose of carrying out there the holy plan with which the Lord had inspired him. On that day, therefore, there began our beloved Congregation which as a result will complete on November 4<sup>th</sup> next, the first century of its existence. In this centenary recurrence, the Congregation finds the world in conditions very similar to those which were experienced at its beginning. At that time, there were deeply felt the disastrous results of a world-wide crisis that had just terminated – while the crisis that so travails the world today is even more acute, and we are experiencing all the horrors of an inhuman war and all the alarm for its consequences, which will result from this for the cause of religion and society. Nonetheless, the memory of our beginnings ought to serve as some comfort in the present hour.

There was indeed the desolating spectacle of devastation wreaked on the religious field by so many human deviations at the beginning of the last century. The occasion of all this served the Lord in order to lead our Venerable Founder to experience within himself the inspiration for a new religious community. He thus manifested, with still an additional argument, how the divine Providence always makes His purposes holy even when situated into the greatest human travail.

The fact that there can be no external celebrations would seem to be fitting for the circumstances in which we are living. And therefore, with my present Circular Letter, I invite all the Confreres to celebrate on that day such a joyous recurrence, with some religious service of a family and intimate character, for the scope of thanking the Lord for all the benefits showered on our Congregation in this century of its existence, to placate the Divine Justice and to obtain the grace to keep ourselves ready for all He might permit as a just punishment for our own sins and those of others.

Let us pray above all that the Lord might concede to us, even at the cost of some heavy sacrifice, to re-acquire fully that secret of the saints, through which our early members knew how to harmonize together so many values which, by human criteria, are altogether irreconcilable. Our first confreres knew very well how to unite the following:

1. The continuous quest for the most humble, hidden way, given as the characteristic of their life, together with an illustrious reputation for holiness.
2. The most austere penance the most sincere joy.
3. An heroic detachment and an authentic spirit of poverty with the legitimate expenses undertaken for the buildings of the house and the Church, realized

without debt, and also in taking care of them without sparing propriety and décor.

4. The most regular discipline with the most varied multiplicity of occupations.
5. The most complete subjection with the full development of the individual activities of the Confreres.
6. Their constant study and work with their most solid piety.

These conciliations represent the secret of the saints; they remain a mystery to this world, and precisely for this reason, they represent the divine character of the Lord's works. This secret ought to be the precious inheritance that our first Fathers and Brothers have left to us. If we have lost these to some extent, may the Lord grant them to us anew. And let there be the humble recognition that in fact we have lost these values in part, and the vivid yearning that we might reacquire this spirit in its entirety. These are the sole conditions that the Lord asks of us in order to bestow on us this important gift that would constitute for us the most beautiful celebration of our centenary.

In order to facilitate for us the acquisition of such a grace, the reception of the Apostolic Approbation of our Constitutions could indeed contribute to this. It is my hope that during this year, this grace will be granted.

I announce further that as a remembrance of such a happy experience as this is, that there are being published the historical recollections of our Religious Congregation.

I wish from my heart the blessings of heaven on all

Rome, October 24, 1916

The Superior General  
Father John Baptist Tommasi.

**Letter of Cardinal Falconio,  
Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious**

October 29, 1916

Very Reverend Father,

With genuine pleasure, I have come to know that this Congregation, under the Direction of Your most holy Reverence, is preparing to celebrate the solemn recurrence of the first Centenary of its foundation, and that this will take place on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of November next. I congratulate Your Reverence and extend this to all Your Confreres, to whom I wish every good from God, expressing the yearning for the prosperity of the entire Congregation, for the greater glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

With particular sentiments of service toward Your Reverence, I profess myself to be,

Your most devoted in the Lord,  
D. Cardinal Falconio of Velletri  
Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious

**Letter of  
Cardinal Bacilieri  
Bishop of Verona**

From the Bishop's Residence in Verona, November 22, 1916

Very Reverend and dear Father Superior,

I have read and pondered the Circular Letter sent out by you to your beloved Congregation on the memorable occasion that this is about to achieve in the first century of religious life. I extend my most fervent congratulations to your Community of the Stimate for its very apostolic life, conducted by its members through difficulties that have not been insignificant nor few in number in these one hundred years. I am very pleased, Very Reverend Father, for the paternal Circular Letter through which you invite the Community to meditate on its principals, the secret of its success, its precious documents and the splendid examples left to it by the Venerable Founder and by his first companions. These men, from the quiet of their religious tomb, they keep repeating to their successors and sons: *Be mindful of your fathers who spoke the word of God to you, understanding the end of their conversation, imitate their faith* [Qo 13:7]<sup>1</sup>. This cry of the saints wishes to be heard by their not indifferent descendants, from whom the Church expects them to make flourish anew the virtues of the likes of fathers Bertoni, Marani, Fedelini, Benciolini, and on and on and on.

This is the crux of the matter found in the exercise of the virtues, in the cult of piety, and in the holiness of life: without all this, of what good is all the rest? And with this, is it not true that the lack of all the rest harms only a little? *Only one thing is necessary*. Please pray, and have others pray also for me, Very Reverend Father, and for this most beloved Veronese Church – which was, and still is the mother of the Congregation of the Priests of the Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ, which is now celebrating its centenary. For you, I desire and I pray for still many more centuries of a productive, holy and sanctifying life.

In the Heart of Jesus I wish you all good with all those with you, and I renew to you that I am,

Most affectionately in the Lord,

Bartholomew Cardinal Bacilieri, Bishop

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<sup>1</sup> A mis-quote?

**Letter of Cardinal Pompilj  
Vicar of Rome**

Rome, November 3, 1916

Very Reverend and dear Father,

I have learned that tomorrow a century will be completed from the foundation of the Congregation, over which you so worthily preside, and on this very happy occasion, I very willingly join with You and Your Confreres in thanking God for the merits acquired by their Congregation in the Church in this century of its existence. At the same time, I express that it might keep itself faithful always to the spirit of the Founder, and that it might be ever more productive of the better results in the field of the apostolate for the salvation of souls. And since in the time from which this same Congregation has established itself in Rome it has always been of great help and consolation to the diocesan authority. So, it is a pleasure for me on this recurrence to give you witness of my particular esteem and benevolence and to invoke on all who make up part of it, the abundance of the heavenly blessings.

With sentiments of genuine reverence, I reaffirm that I am

Of Your Paternity,  
Most Devoted in serving it.  
B. Cardinal Pompilj.

### Letter of Cardinal Casetta

Very Reverend Father General,

I received your venerated notice and the Circular Letter on the first centenary of the Congregation of Stigmatine Priests, and I render my most sincere thanks.

Please accept my sincerest congratulations which I offer from my heart, in blessing the Lord, and expressing the wish that I might see Your Congregation grow and spread its branches over the world for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. I take this occasion to renew to You my thanks for all that the Stigmatine Fathers have done and will do in the Church of *San Nicolo' dei Prefetti* for the honor of God and for the edification of His People.

In recommending myself to its prayers, I profess that I am

Yours, most devoted

F. Cardinal Casetta,  
Bishop of Tusculano

**Letter of Cardinal Ferrari  
Arch-Bishop of Milan**

Milan, October 30, 1916

To the venerated and truly meriting Congregation of the Stigmatine Priests, on their first centenary on the Feast of St. Charles, of this year.

Feasts, no: for this is a time of war, of trepidation, anguish and inexpressible sorrows. Therefore, only prayers: but those that are fervent, confident and persevering.

There will also be my poor prayers, and, even though unworthy, they will be most sincere: and I ask the Lord that the most dear Stigmatines might always conserve those conciliations that are beyond discussion expressed in those six most wise conciliations from your history and opportunely brought to mind by the Very Reverend Father Superior General in his beautiful Circular Letter of this current month; and I recommend myself to their holy prayers, while I beseech upon them every choice blessing and celestial benediction.

Andrew C., Cardinal  
Arch-Bishop of Milan

**Letter of Bishop Guido Conforti,  
Bishop of Parma**

I extend my congratulations to Your Very Reverend Paternity for the auspicious recurrence of the first Centenary of the foundation of the Religious Institute of the Priests of the Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

If there are those who ought to rejoice with the admirable sons of the Venerable Bertonì In this joyful circumstance, in a way that is most particular does the Bishop of Parma have reason to do so. He cannot forget that for more than 40 years the Stigmatine Fathers have labored with tireless zeal in this his Episcopal City, for the good of so many of our beloved youth. The Bishop cannot forget so many distinguished Religious, such as Fr. Vignola, Fr. Morando, Fr. Vivari, Fr. Piccioli, and not even mentioning many others who have left behind a lasting memory of themselves because of their learning and virtue, in all those who ever had the good fortune of approaching them.

On this solemn occasion, I would like to show all my recognition and all the most high esteem I feel, and also publicly, to the Venerable Congregation over which Your Very Reverend Paternity presides. However, since the present sad hour that weighs upon us all does not permit this, I express the wish that this might be done in a time that is not far distant, with solemn festivities, that would attest to the excellent Stigmatine Fathers, not only the deference the Bishop has for them, but also that of the entire city of Parma.

In the meantime, in my unworthiness, I pray to the blessed God that this Venerable Congregation might continue to prosper. It is already most worthy of merit for the Church and for its civil counter-part. May this Congregation be conserved for a long unfolding of the centuries ahead in the spirit of its admirable Founder.

It is my joy on this occasion to offer to you my sincerest best wishes, while recommending myself to your prayers. It is in this spirit, that I sign<sup>2</sup>, from

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<sup>2</sup> We think that this is a beautiful and opportune occasion to transcribe here a section of the Pastoral Letter that Bishop Conforti of Parma, addressed to his Clergy and people of his Diocese this past November:

*...And now, before bringing this Pastoral Letter of mine to a conclusion, I experience the need of pointing out to the Diocese a fact that should not pass unobserved for us, even in the midst of these sorrowful circumstances we are experiencing. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of this month there recurs the anniversary of a century from that day on which a modest Priest, great in the eyes of God, because he was rich in every most choice virtue, the Venerable Bertonì founded in Verona the Religious Congregation of the Stigmatine Fathers. The foundation of a religious family always constitutes a great event for the reign of God on this earth and I will not recount now that which this Sacred Institution has done for the good of the Church and its civil counter-part. History itself will make this known.*

Parma, November 7, 1916.

Your most Devoted Servant,  
Guido M.  
Arch-Bishop - Bishop

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*I, as Bishop of Parma, limit myself to pointing out to the public, my recognition on this happy occasion that cannot be properly celebrated with due solemnity, that which the sons of the Venerable Bertoni, who are as humble as they are hard-working, have accomplished among us for the education of the children of our people and for the salvation of souls. They have done all this within the city, in the country-side, on the plains and in the mountains with the exercise of the sacred Ministry.*

*These facts are already well known and all recall the many distinguished Religious who have left behind of themselves here in Parma a lasting memory for their learning and holiness. Suffice it to mention the likes of Fr. Vignola, Fr. Morando, Fr. Vivari, Fr. Sterza, whole not even mentioning the others still living! And how many parents have entrusted to the Stigmatines the education of their children, and how many excellent Priests have come from their schools, who today honor the Diocese. And how many outstanding professional people and artisans who nourish the family and society, with their civic and Christian virtues. All of these bear eloquent testimony of how these men have been able to accomplish in their 40 years of presence in this our welcoming City of these tireless workers.*

*May the just Lord, true Judge of virtue and merit, grant you, excellent Stigmatines, the reward that awaits you and which mere men cannot bestow upon you, and from now on may your holy Institute prosper even more and may you experience the most vivid gratitude of the Bishop, who highly appreciates your work, and give you the material and moral support, the admiration and the applause of all those who admire all those who sacrifice to God their own energies for the good of others.*

The above-mentioned Bishop expressed the desire that there be observed, with every effort, and with solemnity, this centenary celebration in our House of Parma. And on January 28, 1917, with very many of our former students in attendance, the religious services were conducted, and they remained the entire day with our Fathers, thus manifesting their special affection for them. For this occasion, Canon Professor Castellina delivered the discourse.

**Letter of His Excellency, Anastasio Rossi  
Arch-Bishop of Udine**

Udine, November 8, 1916

Very Reverend Father,

I have appreciated very much the Circular Letter that Your Reverence very courteously sent to me, in which there is recalled the Centenary of the foundation of the meritorious Congregation of the Stigmata.

I enthusiastically extend my congratulations to Your Lordship who worthily presides over your Congregation: I join with you in the most fervent hopes for its conservation and ever greater flourishing, with that spirit of the first Venerable Fathers who know how, as You have said so well, 'to harmonize together so many values which, by human criteria, are altogether irreconcilable'.

Recognizing the good that this Institute has accomplished and still carries out, with their varied activities in my Diocese, I express the wish that this Congregation might see approved its Constitutions by the Apostolic See, in the faithful observance of all that this Institute will find for the nourishment and guarantee of its very fertile activity.

Best wishes to Your Very Reverend Paternity, and I recommend myself to your holy prayers.

Very devotedly yours in Jesus Christ,

Anthony Anastasio Rossi  
Arch-Bishop

**Letter of Fr. Henry Rosa, SJ**  
**Director of the *Civilta' Cattolica***

October 30, 1916

Very Reverend Father General,

I thank you most sincerely for your kind communication, which I have immediately shared with the other Fathers of the ***Civilta' Cattolica***, who reserve for all the excellent Stigmatine Fathers the most cordial esteem and reverence.

With fraternal joy, therefore, we join you, Reverend Father, and your beloved Congregation on this, its happy anniversary. And while we present our most fervent congratulations, we also share in all those religious sentiments of gratitude to God, joy and hope, as You and all your fervent Congregation celebrate the happy recurrence of this first Centenary. So we also join in prayer so that the Lord might prosper always this Religious Family which from its inception was always so fraternally united with ours. And may this prosperity increase, as the perfection of those marvelous conciliations develops, which your Reverence refers to in your most religious letter of October 24<sup>th</sup>. These are truly the 'secret of the saints'. We can say that we have seen a beautiful and example of these in our closeness of so many years with the excellent Stigmatine Fathers. This contact has always been most dear to us, and which is still now, most desired.

May this simple and cordial attestation of my sentiments and that of the entire staff of the ***Civilta Cattolica*** be acceptable to you, while I with every respect, express my reverence for you, and I repeat that I am

A most Devoted Servant in Christ  
of your Reverence,  
H. Rosa, SJ

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**APPENDIX**  
**Early Decrees from the Holy See**

**Decree of Praise**

Fr. John Marani, Superior of the Congregation, commonly called the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ, has addressed a humble petition to His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, that he might deign to approve and confirm with his Apostolic Authority the above-mentioned Congregation, that has been established now for a number of years in the city of Verona, and do likewise for its Constitutions.

His Holiness, therefore, has taken this petitioner consideration and has been fully informed on all that pertains to this Institute by means of the Testimonial Letters of the Bishop of Verona. From this testimony, the readiness and zeal with which the members of this same Congregation attend to the end proposed for them, are very evident. The Holy Father has ordained that by this present Decree, this same Congregation and its scope are to be highly praised and recommended, so that the religious who are professed in it, being encouraged by this public testimony of the Apostolic See, with an every great readiness, they might dedicate themselves to work for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.

As for the other requests submitted, His Holiness has established that these will be provided for at a later and more opportune time.

Given at Rome, from the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1855

[Place of the Seal]

**G. Cardinal DeGenga, Prefect.**  
**A. Pagiotti, Under-Secretary.**

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### Decree of Approbation of the Congregation

In the year 1816, the Veronese Priest, Gaspar Bertoni, obtained from the Pastor of St. John's in Foro, a public Oratory, named for the Stigmata. Fr. Bertoni gathered there a number of associates, and took up residence with them in the house next to Oratory. Their purpose was to dedicate themselves to the works of the sacred ministry under the direction of the bishops, and to attend to the Christian formation of youth, through schools.

During the year 1853, the pious Founder realized that he was near death. He gave his followers, who were then only six in number, the plan of the Constitutions for the new Society, that took as its title the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Scarcely two years after the death of the Founder, the Institute obtained the Decree of Praise from the Holy See.

Now, the above- mentioned Congregation, having grown with the blessing of God, is made up of priests, students and brothers, seventy-five in number ,working in various dioceses. The members of this Congregation, living a common life, in dependence on a Superior General, pronounce the three customary simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. While attending to their own sanctification, they strive above all, to assist Bishops in working for the salvation of their fellow-man, through any exercise of the ecclesiastical ministry whatsoever, and through every work of spiritual charity, excluding the ordinary and perpetual care of souls and of Sisters. Therefore, the members of this Institute, propose to spend themselves in assisting the Bishop of the Diocese in which they dwell, especially by giving parish missions, retreats, catechetical instructions and sermons, as well as by the Christian formation of the youth, being totally dedicated to guiding them impiety and helping them in their own studies, in Oratories, Seminaries and in their own schools.

The present Superior, recently reporting on all these endeavors, has petitioned His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, to deign to grant his Apostolic Approbation to this Institute. With this end in view, he has enclosed with his Petition, the Letters of Recommendation of various Bishops. In these Letters, the Institute and its members are highly praised and recommended to the Holy See. His Holiness, therefore, in the Audience granted to the under-signed secretary of this Congregation of Bishops and regulars, on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of September 1890, after having maturely examined everything, and considered the recommendations of the Ordinaries, has deigned to approve the above-named Institute, saving the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries, according to the norms of the sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions. He has remanded, however, to a more opportune time, the approval of the Constitutions concerning which for now, he has commanded that some observations be communicated.

Given at Rome from the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of September 1890.

Place of the Seal

I. Cardinal Verga, Prefect  
F. Louis, Bishop

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**Decree of Approbation of the Constitutions**

Our Most Holy Lord, Benedict, by Divine Providence, Pope the XVth, in an audience granted to the Reverend Father, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of September 1916. having paid attention to the Letters of Recommendation of the Bishops of the places in which the Sodality named of the Priests of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ is found, the general house of which is located here in the City and having heard the vote of the Most Eminent and Most Reverend heads of this same Sacred Congregation, who in a Plenary Council held on November 24<sup>th</sup> of this year, who after a mature examination have ponder the Constitutions of this above-mentioned pious Sodality, a hand-written copy of which is held in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation, benignly has deigned to approve and confirm in the manner of experiment for a seven-year period, and approves and confirms in the strength of this present Decree, saving the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries in accord with the norms of the Sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions.

Given at Rome from the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation for matters pertaining to Religious, dated November 16, 1916.

[Place of the Seal]

Cardinal Falconio, Bishop of Velitri, Prefect  
Adulphus Bishop Canoptan., Secretary

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