

A Brief Chronicle

of the



*Rev. John Baptist Lenotti,
Superior General (1871 – 1875)*



*Rev. Peter Vignola,
Superior General (1875 – 1891)*

Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata of Our Lord Jesus Christ

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

Volume I – Second Period, Part 2

**From the Development of the Apostolic Mission
to the Approbation of the Congregation [1873-1890]**

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Chapter 1
DEVELOPMENT OF THE APOSTOLIC MISSION
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132. At long last, after six years of continual trepidation for the Congregation, it would now breath more easily and open its heart to hope. To have overcome that harsh trial was for the Community at large a powerful argument for confidence in the Divine Protection. Having terminated the scholastic year, the properties of the Stimmate and St. Teresa's were finally at the disposition of our men. As a result Fr. Lenotti immediately acted to have the necessary renovations get underway, especially in St. Teresa's Convent, which stood in extreme need. At the same time he thought of bringing to completion the construction in St. Mary of the Lily which had opened to the public on May 30, 1874.

Meanwhile, other valid workers showed themselves to be disposed to work in the vineyard of the Lord. In March of 1873, Pius Gurisatti, James Marini and Lawrence Pizzini were ordained Priests: in June of the same year Bellino Carraro and Baratholomew Perazzani were ordained; and in December, Lawrence Rigatti and Richard Tabarelli reached ordination. With the exception of Fr. Lawrence Pizzini, who was called to Verona, all the others remained in Povo to busy themselves in the formation and in the education of our students. With the help of these new workers, the community was able to attend with greater ease to the works of the ministry. Serious thought was given to a new foundation.

133. Requests were coming in for new foundations. In January of 1874, the Bishop of Cremona, Bishop Jeremiah Bonomelli, sought once again to have our Fathers take over the Sanctuary of Caravaggio. Fr. Lenotti responded, thanking His Excellency for the offer, and he recalled to the Bishop's mind how this offer had already been made in 1858, by his predecessor, Bishop Anthony Novasconi. Fr. Lenotti stated he was disposed to accept the foundation, at least on a trial basis, as soon as he would be able to agree on the conditions. By order of the Bishop, the Pastor of Caravaggio was also in Verona to negotiate the matter. Following this, he sent Fr. Lenotti a copy of the conditions proposed by the Council of Administration of the Sanctuary: unfortunately, these were even less acceptable than those offered in 1858, by reason of the dependence in which they wanted our Fathers to be on the Administrators¹. Nonetheless, the Bishop insisted on February 24th he wrote to Fr. Lenotti:

... For heaven's sake, Very reverend Father, do not leave me in pain, nor would you want to forward any difficulties of this sort. The matter is practically all arranged, and I do not even want to hear you speak of doubts on this point, rather I hope and pray that the two Fathers, who are most desired in Caravaggio at the very least, by the middle of March. I will do all that within me lies, I will do all I can for the Fathers, but, they, too must support me in this matter that is so important for me, and would be of such benefit for my diocese, and others near by...

¹ It would suffice to say that among the conditions that the Fr. Prefect could not in any way, leave the Sanctuary without first obtaining the permission in writing of the Administrators.

To understand the situation better an interview was held on the 19th day of February, to which Fr. Lenotti and Fr. Rigoni participated and the Pastor of Caravaggio. They remained in some agreement at least to make the attempt, so they sent Frs. Peter Vignola and Francis Sogaro to the place, and the Bishop had this following Decree drawn up:

...The Most Illustrious and Very Reverend Bishop, sends to the Prefect of the Sanctuary of Caravaggio, the Very Reverend Fr. Peter Vignola, and as Chaplain, the Very Reverend Fr. Francis Sogaro, with the freedom to recall them for any time that he may have need of them, substituting in such a case, other suitable individuals. The above-mentioned Priests will assume the office destined to them within the 25th of March of this present year if this is possible for them – otherwise, on the Monday following the Octave of Easter ...

Fr. Lenotti, however, had already convoked the Fifth General Chapter which was set to assemble on February 25th, and in this, one of the Proposals was to discuss the matter of Caravaggio. The Chapter heard the report of Fr. Superior, keeping in mind the restrictive conditions proposed by the Administrators, and of the opposition they advanced that these made regarding the foundation, and the Chapter decided not to accept for the moment the offices of Prefect and Chaplain, but to send to the place the two mentioned Priests for a period of 15 or 20 days, for the sake of hearing confessions and of exploring the state of the matter. In fact, after the Octave of Easter, the two Fathers did go to Caravaggio, but they were not able to agree due to the opposition of the Administrators. As a result, any further thought of that as a possible foundation, was definitively abandoned.

134. During this time, Fr. Lenotti was giving serious thought to bettering the internal life of the Congregation. He had already drawn up detailed rules for the various offices of the house, and had handed them over to the men in those positions. Now, in the Fifth General Chapter it was decided to establish a formal *Method of Studies*, for the young students of the Congregation. The Chapter took into consideration the proposal and charged the Father Prefect of Studies [Fr. Louis Morando] to put into writing the method employed up to that time, then drawing up his own observations. This document would then be examined by a Capitular Commission set up precisely for this purpose, and then established in a stable manner.

In this same Chapter, the Fathers of the House of the Stimmate made this proposal:

*... to open an elementary school and a high school, so that **the Community (1) might correspond to one of the principal ends of our Congregation, which was born and made itself loved through instruction.** (2) to correspond to the desire of the public who in the present circumstances expects this. (3) to eliminate the scandal of having a locale that is so vast without any public benefit accruing therefrom: being mindful of that statement of Our Holy Father, Pius IX: 'For the instruction of the youth, go as far as sin!'*

...

The Chapter, recognizing the need of taking part in the instruction of the youth proposed that two individuals be designated by the Superior General to prepare themselves and present themselves for the examinations in order to be qualified for

high school teaching. As far as the moment to activate the schools, this was left to the decision of the same Superior General and his Council.

Finally, in the same chapter Fr. Sogaro made the proposal that there be sent to Rome one member of the Institute to expose to the Holy See the state of the Congregation, and to offer the work of this Community for the Church in the Missions outside of Italy. The Chapter judged that the opportune time had not yet arrived for this: however, this desire was universally felt throughout the Congregation, and we will see this realized in a short time.

135. Meanwhile, since the most necessary renovations of St. Teresa's Convent had been completed, Fr. Lenotti thought of recalling from Povo our Clerical Students of theology. In the month of March they had solemnly celebrated at Povo the 6th Centenary of St. Thomas Aquinas. For the feast, this was preceded by a Triduum, with appropriate discourses delivered by three of our Fathers during the solemn celebrations. On the Feast Day of the Saint itself, Fr. Vincent Vignola, the Director, spoke, and in the evening the great celebrations came to a close even with fire works. At these same students were preparing likewise to celebrate in the month of July the centenary of St. Bonaventure, when during the early days of June, the little squadron of students had to depart for Verona in order to terminate the scholastic year in St. Teresa's Convent. Together with them, Frs. Tabarelli and Morando, their teachers, came with them, and Fathers Gurisatti and Sterza were then assigned to the House of the *Dereletti*.

At the Stimmate on August 5th of this year 1874, the Sixth General Chapter assembled in order to deliberate the request of Fr. Sogaro to be freed from all his obligations contracted with the Congregation. He brought forward as his reason the vocation that he deeply felt, and which he had always had, for the Foreign Missions. He maintained that this call he had already manifested to his Superiors when he was a student. He asked, therefore, for permission to leave the Congregation in order to follow this special vocation of his. At the same time, he sincerely thanked the Superiors for all that they had done for him and he stated that he had always retained for the Congregation a sincere affection and recognition. The Capitular Fathers accepted his request, allowing him to leave the Congregation: and he immediately offered his services in the vacant Parish of St. George's, where he had been made Pastor².

Toward the end of this month, the young students terminated their scholastic year, and then spent a bit of vacation at Sezano, and while they enjoyed a few pleasant days there in that pleasing locality, it made them think of the beautiful hills they had left behind in Povo and Villazzano.³

² In later years, Fr. Sogaro would be ordained a Bishop in St. Agatha of the Goths Church in Rome. He would succeed + Daniel Comboni in Central Africa – and Cardinal Merry dal Val, as President of the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics in Rome [the Diplomatic Corps]

³ The nostalgia that they felt after having abandoned those places, which contained for so many the memories of their youth. For example, on June 3rd, on the day of his arrival, Brother Joseph Zandonai wrote: this was a journey mixed with joy and sadness: what a sacrifice! - But, in September, he had written: 'We went to Sezano, Marroni, and so on. What beautiful places ...!'

At Sezano, right at this time, there had been brought to a happy end a matter which Fr. Benciolini had sustained against the Pastor of the place in order to maintain his rights; we will refer to this in a short while.

136. Up until the year 1867, there had been a door which opened on a little passage way, connecting our old rustic house with the near-by sacristy of the Parish Church: for this, our Confreres had always enjoyed the right of way. In the period of the long litigation with the Government, the Pastor had taken that occasion to suppress this connection, closing it off by constructing a wall. As soon as Fr. Benciolini had realized this in 1873, he made known to the Arch-Priest that he should put things back the way they were in their former state and to open up once more the passage way. The Pastor strongly opposed this, by denying all right of way to our men: hence, after having attempted every manner of reconciliation, it proved necessary to have recourse to the Royal Prefect of Grezzana, before whom the Pastor and the Blacksmiths of Sezano were cited.

Finally, through the intervention of the Bishop, Louis di Canossa, an agreement could be reached. The act of this transaction was under-signed by both parties on September 5th, and in it the agreement was that the gate in question would definitively walled in. In return, however, the shop there would give the keys of the gate outside the Sacristy to Fr. Benciolini. These keys would be kept by Fr. Benciolini and were to be made available for his Confreres. If he however, would ever come to serve he property containing the shop to others who would not be members of the Congregation, then, the right of passage would indeed have ceased. Thus, this controversy came to an end by re-establishing the harmony between the two parties that from then on, remained quite cordial⁴.

137. In the course of that autumn, a grave loss struck the Congregation: on October 13th Fr. Louis Bragato died in Prague. He had always conducted himself as a most affectionate son of the Congregation, and he had often helped it in its moments of great need. All the Confreres mourned his death, and they offered their suffrages for his blessed soul, begging God to grant him a great reward in heaven. On November 13th, there was also celebrated for him a service of the 'Month's Mind' in the Church of the Stimmate. The number of priests who participated in this was quite numerous, and many came to celebrate their Masses there. The more sedate and solemn Mass was devoutly celebrated by the Very Rev. Fr. Giacobbe. In the eloquent and learned oration that the same Very Reverend Arch-priest delivered⁵ that day over the catafalque, was later printed as a small booklet.

⁴ In the years following the time when our students remained out in the country, they offered themselves always to decorate for the solemnity celebrate in the parish with their assistance and with chant. And in 1883, in September to celebrate the Priestly Jubilee of the Pastor himself.

⁵ It was thus described in the *Sunday Repose*, in its edition of November 15th. In that same edition, there was reported that there had been a biography written about Fr. Bragato by a Fr. Negrelli, and had already been published in the *Catholic Voice* of Trent. Our Fathers made use of this material to compile their own reminiscences of this worthy confrere of ours.

At Povo, then, after the departure of our Professed Clerics, the Novices and Aspirants remained there. In July, they commemorated the 6th centenary of St. Bonaventure's death with a religious celebration of an academy manifesting their talents.

In the course of that same year 1874, some consideration was given to renewing the rustic house of St. Bernardine's in Trent for the use of a religious community. Some rooms on the ground floor were done over, and these would serve as the entrance way, the visitors parlor, refectory and kitchen. A kind of a balcony was constructed with two little side towers, and the old stall was transformed into an Oratory, setting up there an altar that had been sent up from Verona. In November, the work was completed, and on the 25th of that month our Confreres moved in there permanently from Povo into this new dwelling. The House was truly quite small for the 24 individuals who made up the community⁶. This was so true that from the beginning the Fathers were forced to sleep two to a room. Finally, however, they were able to have a permanent dwelling and their own lodging. They continued there the scholastic year that was already underway, and on December 6th, the Oratory was opened for about 30 young boys, who after the ceremonies were treated to games in the court yard until about noon time.

138. Let us return now to Verona. In the House of the Stimate and at St. Teresa's, in addition to Fr. Lenotti, Superior General, there were Frs. Peter Vignola, Director; Fr. Rigoni, Procurator General; Fr. Sembianti, Economus. In addition there were these other Confreres there: Frs. Zara, Morando, Beltraimi, Thomas Vicentini and Dominic Vicentini. Pizzini and Tabarelli. There were nine Scholastics and three Professed Brothers.⁷ In the House of the *Dereletti*, there were Frs. Benciolini, Gurisatti and Sterza, as well as the aspirant Brother, Clement Albano.

The occupations of the Fathers were teaching classes to our students, and then **every sort of the sacred ministry, especially their preaching**. In the two Churches, of the Stimate and of St. Mary of the Lily, the Oratory was conducted on Sundays: however, it was not as flourishing as it had been in the 'old days'. Fr. Zara made this note in his Chronicle:

... How happy the young men who frequented the oratories: however, some discouragement is afoot, as seducers roam about, distorting the youth from these pious congregations with every manner of pretext, seduction and deceit. Oh! The Oratories of long ago are no longer seen in Verona ...

However, our Fathers have not limited themselves to care only for these two Oratories, but continuously they were invited and hastened to reaching Triduums,

⁶ Those assigned there were Fr. Vincent Vignola, Director; Fr. Bassi, Novice Master; Fr. Marini, Economus. In addition, there were also Frs. Vicentini, Lanaro, Perazzani, Carrara, and Rigatti. There were two Novice students [Nicolini and Battisti], and one lay brother [Salbego]. There were nine Aspirants with their Prefect, Fr. Paul Gradinati, and the Coadjutor Brothers Chiesa, Salocher and Zadra.

⁷ The Scholastics were: Vidali, Graziani, Zandonai, Gasperotti, Pizzighella, Vivari, Zanini, Oss-Bals and Magagna. The Brothers were: Ferrari, Falzi and Rigoni.

Retreats also in other parishes: and in the same time, they **preached in the Seminary** and to **Religious Institutes** of the city. It seemed that anyone who was in quest for someone to give a sermon, hastened to the Stimate – the House was a *broad sea of activity!*

139. The students, too, were exercised in preaching. And in addition to those practice sermons which they delivered in the Domestic Chapel on the occasion of some solemnity, they also preached in the Church of the Stimate, and in that of St. Mary's of the lily, the six Sundays honoring St. Aloysius to the young men of the Oratory. All the Sundays of the year, they went to the **prisons** to teach **Catechism** to those confined there. The Fathers, then, during the hot **summer** months, continued to explain the **Catechism** in the Parish Churches ⁸ in the parish churches, and throughout the entire year they were in perpetual motion to correspond to the requests for **Parish Missions** that came into them almost every day.

We will recall here among the many Parish Missions given in this period, that one preached in February 1875, at Solesino in the Diocese of Padua, by Frs. Peter Vignola and Joseph Sembianti. That was at the time, a rather backward and abandoned village, as this is evident from the Diocese of Padua Vicar General's comment to our Fathers in welcoming them: 'Keep in mind that you are going to cultivate a briar patch!' The Fathers in no way were put off: as soon as they had entered the town, they became promoters of the Devotion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, by exposing to the public veneration Its image and before it they recited public prayers every day. That population responded marvelously well to their invitations, and the devotion to the Sacred Heart in a few days had taken root in the parish, and the fruit from that Mission proved to be most abundant. Not only was there a large crowd for the sermons and for the Holy Sacraments, but there was seen even well known sinners who for years had not frequented the Church, being present in it and for long hours, and even full days in order to go to Confession to our Fathers, neglecting even the rigors of that season and the constant worsening of the weather. In brief, the Parish Mission was a veritable triumph of grace that had been obtained through Devotion to the Sacred Heart.

And here it will help to remember how **in that year of 1875⁹**, there occurred the second centenary of the apparition of the Divine redeemer to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. There were many and solemn ceremonies conducted for that occasion, and even our Confreres wanted to be a part of it all. On May 30th, the Sunday within the Octave of the Body of the Lord, at the Stimate there was celebrated a most solemn service: solemn Mass was sung, by the Very reverend Arch-Priest, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe, following which there was a procession conducted inside the Church with the Most Blessed Sacrament, Which then remained exposed all day for public adoration. At the evening devotions, Fr. Louis Morando delivered a panegyric, and the ceremony ended with solemn Benediction in the midst of the light offered by the

⁸ **NB: English Translator's Note:** this ministry was called the *Fourth Class* - conducted between the two celebrations of the Holy Cross, observed in May and September. Our men were experts in this.

⁹ **NB: English Translator's Note:** early in the Stigmatine History, for years there had been conducted Friday Devotions honoring the Sacred Stigmata.

many torches, carried by the young men of the Oratory. There was thus inaugurated that devout service which then was repeated each year, and still now is celebrated in the Church of the Stimmate.

140. That same evening, Fr. Rigoni left for Rome. In the name of the Superior General and of his Council, and carrying with him a Letter of Recommendation from the local Ordinary, Bishop di Canossa, he was going to begin to expose to the Holy See the state of the Congregation. This was all to get underway the long negotiations to obtain the approbation of the Congregation and the Constitutions. With this in mind, he presented himself to Monsignor Vitelleschi, the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and even obtained an Audience with the Holy Father, Pius IX.

It was the 16th of June, the precise date on which there recurred the 2nd centenary of the apparition of Jesus to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque. The Holy Father received him warmly, and after having been brought up to date on the matters concerning the Congregation and of the long litigation sustained against the Government, he blessed the Congregation itself, its benefactors and the Attorney Brasca. In the matter of the Approbation, he promised his personal interest: and asking Fr. Rigoni to keep the matter secret, the Holy Father himself gave some suggestions on the best manner to follow for this process, and gave him great encouragement, saying: 'It can be done secretly: I will speak of it myself to the Secretary'¹⁰.

Fr. Rigoni also had another task to perform in Rome and that was placing the Congregation at the disposition of the Holy See for the Propagation of the Faith for a mission outside of Italy. Therefore, on June 22nd, he was presented to Cardinal Franchi, the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, and Fr. Rigoni made the offer of the contribution of the Congregation for some foreign mission. The Cardinal willingly accepted this offering, and proposed to him the Mission in Sweden and Denmark. For this, however, Fr. Rigoni did immediately commit himself in an absolute way, but assumed only the commitment, in the name of the Congregation, to prepare the necessary workers.

The Superior General, Fr. Lenotti in his Circular Letter of August 25th, he communicated this consoling news, exhorted all the members of the Congregation to offer special prayers in order to receive light from the Lord, and he invited all those who felt that they might have a vocation for this kind of apostolate, to manifest this to him in writing within the month of September.¹¹

At the same time, the Superior General in conformity with the desires expressed by the Fifth General Chapter, gave much thought to preparing the

¹⁰ For the process to obtain the approbation, Fr. Rigoni spoke also to Fr. Steccanella, SJ, who promised him his help. On returning to Verona, he had already prepared the documents necessary for the formal Petition to be presented to the Holy See. He was waiting for the return of the Father General, who was at that time in Trent somewhat indisposed: when Fr. Lenotti returned, he was very sick, and within a few days, he died. With his death, the negotiations were put off for more than 13 years and were not taken up again until 1888.

¹¹ When Fr. Rigoni was in Rome, he sought for, and obtained, a number of faculties, among which one was the privilege to celebrate the Feast of the Espousals, as a Feast of the Double Class with an Octave.

individuals necessary to open the school again at the Stimate. Therefore, in the month of August he sent to the University in Padua, four young students: Louis Gasperotti, Bonaventure Vivali, Melchiade Vivari, Julius Zanini and Fr. Lawrence Pizzini, who took the government examinations and all obtained the license to teach as elementary school teachers.

141. Meantime, the discussions with the Bishop of Parma were coming to a happy conclusion for the foundation of a Stigmatine community in that city. In fact, that March, the Bishop had requested for a few of our Fathers to open there an Oratory and the elementary classes in a working-class neighborhood. Fr. Lenotti was immediately open to accept this invitation, and his only hesitation came from the fact that for the acceptance of the school responsibility, there was the difficulty of having licensed teachers, as well as the opposition the government advanced against private schools. There was also the indispensable condition for the foundation of a Community in the city, a dwelling was needed, and the necessary means for the individuals who would be assigned there.

After various proposals and further discussions were conducted, an agreement was signed on May 18, 1875 including the terms of the service to be rendered. Fr. Lenotti, as Superior of the Congregation, committed himself to send two Priests immediately, and at least two more after the first trimester, to open an oratory in the Community residence, and possibly a second in another location in the city, to take care of the Confessions, to teaching Catechism, to preach Parish Missions in the city and out in the country, to teach should the need arise in the Seminary, and to open whenever this would be possible the elementary school, for the advantage of the children of the working classes. The Bishop committed himself to provide a dwelling to be handed over to our Fathers. Furthermore he obliged himself to provide the sum of 1000 Lira in each of the first three years, and after this three year period, to provide 300 Lira for each Priest living in that community. All of this was contingent upon the extent to which the economic conditions of the house might have waived his responsibility for this debt.¹²

For the service of the oratory he offered the Church of St. Mary of the Quarter, presently owned by a Confraternity of St. Camillus, who showed joy in granting the use of that Church, and already from May 15th he had drawn up with Fr. Lenotti a contract, through which he left to the Fathers all freedom to hear Confessions, to preach and to catechize the people.

142. Already the Bishop, through one Sir Camillo Carraglia, a member of the Confraternity of St. Camillus, had purchased the dwelling in the Taschieri Borgo, and was having the necessary repairs and renovations done there. Fr. Lenotti was already thinking of the day when this foundation would be a reality, but unfortunately he would not be able to see this. While he was working so hard for the Congregation,

¹² Already on March 13th, Bishop Villa had made known by means of a Pastoral Letter, his thought of establishing in the city, and then later, in other places in the country, the Sunday Oratory for the children. His plan was to invite for this purpose the Priests of the Stimate in Verona. To sustain the costs for these undertakings, he proposed to print his Homilies offering an association. The cost of the House for our men was 12, 000 Lira.

his health was rapidly going down hill. In July of that year, he was counseled by the doctor to the well-known health spa at Rabbi, to try the cures in those waters. However, nothing was to any avail and he left from there in a worse condition than when he arrived shortly before. After having rested a few days in Trent, he returned to Verona about the middle of August and then spent a few days in Sezano, in the hopes that he might feel better. Nonetheless, he experienced no relief so returned to Verona, where he went to bed, and did not get up again.

He died on Sunday, September the 5th, at 2:30 in the afternoon. Fr. Zara notes his passing:

*... He died just like our Venerated Founder did, precisely in that hour when his sons were out in the various Churches of the city teaching Catechism ... Oh! What a loss for us... his life was truly that of the perfect religious, an authentic servant of God. Should anyone want to weave a eulogy for him, it would be enough to say: Fr. Lenotti was in fact, a true son of Fr. Bertoni...*¹³

And as though a this of this magnitude was not enough for the Congregation, about 6 weeks later Fr. Thomas Vicentini also died: this was the day commemorating the Purity of the Virgin Mary, to whom he was so devoted. Fr. Zara faithfully records his deep feeling:

...And now just see whom death touches: Let us be ready. However, for now we are in the Madonna's debt: may she think of us and restore to us a good priest ...

143. On the 26th of that month, the Seventh General Chapter was convoked by the Vicar General, Fr. Peter Vignola, for the election of the new Superior General. This time, too, the Capitular Fathers decided to elect the Superior for a term of five years, and elected Fr. Peter Vignola, giving him as his Counselors Fr. Sembianti, Fr. Rigoni [who was also confirmed as Procurator General], Fr. Vincent Vignola and Fr. Benciolini.

The House of the Stimmate had sent in various proposals. Above all, it requested that there be given some effect to those commitments with the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, concerning the mission in Sweden.¹⁴ The Chapter in praising those who had advanced this proposal, declared itself ready to pursue the negotiations that had already begun. However, the new Superior declared that the Institute had not as yet assumed any concrete commitment, but had only offered its work to the Holy See. The Chapter then recommended to the newly elected Father General that he might work fruitfully also in this area of the ministry, whenever the right moment came.

¹³ **NB: English Translator's Note:** as might be evident from these few pages outlining his short 4 year service as Superior General, then dying on his birthday, his administration would be much in accord with Fr. Bertoni's great plan of a broad openness to: *quocumque in Diocesi et mundo .. quodcumque Verbi Dei Ministerium...*

¹⁴ **NB: English Translator Note:** This yearning for the Stigmatine Apostolic Mission to go beyond Italy was well within the Founder's fundamental charism: *quocumque in Diocesi et mundo...!* This would also be an element in the background on the enormous difficulties of the Twelfth General Chapter in 1890.

The other proposals of the House of the Stimmate, such as to open as soon as possible, the elementary classes, and to review the Rules for the house officials which Fr. Lenotti had drawn up, and these were committed to the prudence of the new Superior General. Since the *Plan of Studies* had been readied for the students of the Congregation, in conformity with the Deliberation of the Fifth General Chapter, there was chosen a Capitular Commission, made up of Frs. Vincent Vignola, Rigoni and Bassi, who together with the Prefect of Studies, Fr. Morando within eight months had to review it and to establish it definitively in the name of the Congregation.

Fr. Michael Lanaro had presented his petition to return home for reasons of his health: and the Chapter accepted his request, but it also declared that it would not re-admit him should he presented himself again at a later date¹⁵.

Toward the end of the year, Fr. Marini arrived in Verona from Trent as he had been named the Economist for the Stimmate. In like manner, the Novices, Nicolini, Battisti, Tomasi, Marocchi and Salbego also arrived, with their Novice Master, Fr. Bellino Carrara.¹⁶ Fr. Sterza returned to Trent and he brought with him young Clement Albano, to begin his studies there. At the Stimmate, Fr. Joseph Sembianti was named Director.

144. Thus the year 1876 began, and our Fathers took up again the same occupations as in the previous years, especially to the ministry of preaching in the city and outside, everywhere they were invited. One new practice was introduced into the Church of the Stimmate: during this year, for the first time, the *Sorrowful Month* was preached, for the last 30 days of the Carnival period before Lent, with devout readings and prayers and chants in honor of the Sorrowful Mother. This devotion then came to be repeated each year, and was still going on when the *Breve Cronaca I* was written.

In this year, in solemn fashion, the Feast of St. Thomas was solemnly celebrated with an academy. People attended this observance even from outside the Congregation. The Feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph was preached with a triduum and panegyric by the Novices.

145. In February, the House of Parma was finalized, of which we have already spoken. On the first of the month, Frs. Vincent Vignola and Louis Morando left with the Coadjutor Brother James Zadra: and they were welcomed with great benevolence by the Bishop and by other good persons who had helped in those first days to prepare all the necessities for our men. Our Confreres, from the outset, applied themselves zealously for the good of the souls there, in a particular manner, for the **youth**, very

¹⁵ He left in December for his native village: as time went on, he did not maintain any relationship with the Institute, and was definitively dismissed in the VIIIth General Chapter in 1876.

¹⁶ In May, Fr. Paul Gradinati had arrived, and so in Trent, only the aspirants, with their Prefect, Fr. Alexis Magagna remained, who had returned there. It is also to be noted here that beginning the year 1876, the students of Theology from the Trentine Province on the first of October had returned to Trent and frequented the classes in that seminary, in order to free them from the obligation of military service. When the scholastic year ended, they returned to Verona to spend the summer there.

soon inaugurating an oratory in the Church of the Quarter, and then a second one in the Church dedicated to the Five Wounds. They also committed themselves to teaching Catechism and preaching in the Churches and Institutions of the city, and accepting the preaching of Missions in the parishes of the Diocese wherever they were invited, without being overwhelmed by the real privations of every sort that they had to endure because of the rather poor economic situation where they were.¹⁷ On March 16, the Bishop wrote to the Superior General:

‘... I can only repeat my supreme satisfaction for the acquisition that Parma has made in the arrival of the Priests of the Stimmate of Verona. They have already been hard at work in the exercise of their benefit in behalf of the children of that region, and the people is beginning to support them and to profess for them their due reverence...’

However, the vineyard of the Lord is very broad and there is an abundant harvest to gather. Monsignor John Baptist Gobbi, Arch-Priest and Mitered Abbot of Bassano, wrote on April 13th of this year, asking for two of our Priests and a Coadjutor Brother to entrust to them a Boarding House for youth that he wanted to establish in his city. The occupation of the Fathers would be to gather the young men on Sundays and also for some evening hours and weeks day. On the Sunday gatherings, in addition to teaching Catechism to the young children, the Fathers would also instruct the adults in the Cathedral and assist in hearing Confessions. The Superior General, Fr. Peter Vignola to reach some decision on the matter, convoked the Eighth General Chapter¹⁸, that assembled on September 26th and the foundation was accepted.

146. Once again in this Chapter the thought of serving in Missions outside of Italy arose. And the Father Superior responded to the question regarding what he was doing of furthering this possibility. He declared that he had already entrusted two individuals of the Congregation to study the languages of those countries in order to be able to be serve in the Missions. He promised further to write once again with this information to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, in order to keep with it, a lively communication.

One of these who ardently had offered himself for the foreign missions was Fr. Lawrence Pizzini. Form the time he had been a young student he had experienced a powerful attraction for that kind of life, and in order to render himself more suitable for it, he had learned French, Spanish, German and English. He dreamed that the day was approaching in which he would see realized his deepest hopes, but the Lord had destined his life in another manner. As a result of his apostolic efforts, in June of 1876 he fell into a very serious illness, and when he was somewhat better, he had been

¹⁷ In the House Chronicle, we read for February 11th that year: Brother Zadra had prepared the supper and discovered that there was not enough polenta and bread other than perhaps 2 ounces. He went to purchase some in the little shop across from the house. However, Providence arranged it so that he only had about 10 cents! thanks be to God!

¹⁸ A Proposal was also circulated among the Capitular Fathers whether they thought it was necessary to assemble the General Chapter in order to decide on any new foundation. They responded in the negative.

sent to Trent in order to restore his health in a more complete manner. However, he then contracted typhoid fever, and died in that city on August 12th at the age of only 28. Fr. Zarana wrote in his Chronicle:

... Poor Pizzini! How fervent was the beating of his heart, how generous his aspirations! He yearned with desire of sacrificing his life for souls in the foreign missions ... !

With his death, a very powerful impulse for this missionary undertaking outside of Italy was lost. It was the will of God that our Congregation, at least for the time being¹⁹, should occupy itself in other fields of endeavor. For this, the Lord did send some new workers to work for the good of souls. In April of that year, Fr. Alexis Magagna was ordained in Trent, and in December Fathers Vivari, Pizzighella and Zanini were ordained in Verona.

147. On February 1st of the next year, 1877, the House of Bassano was opened. Fathers Sembianti and Zanini, with Brother James Zadra were assigned there. Brother Zadra's place in Parma was taken by Bro. Charles Solcher, while at the Stimate, Fr. Charles Zara was named Superior. In Bassano our men were greeted with great jubilation: on the day following their arrival [February 2], the Monsignor Arch-Priest preached in the Cathedral for the occasion, and praised the spirit of our Congregation, and invited the population to assist the work of the Fathers, for the good of their youth.²⁰

And the Fathers applied themselves right away to the Christian education of the youth in the oratory and by teaching Catechism. They also lent themselves to furthering the good of all the good people there. The Arch-Priest wrote to Fr. Vignola in these terms:

...I cannot express myself in words that would be due to you, to your entire Congregation, and especially to those excellent Fathers Sembianti and Julius, for their work in spreading the gospel here. They lend themselves with such charity, pleasantness and readiness both for the youth, and also for all their other good works in behalf of souls, that i can only thank god first of all that he has sent me these men and then for all those who served as the means, all to whom I am much obliged ...

Their field of activity assigned to them had been the oratory and teaching Catechism in the little Church dedicated to St. Aloysius. This had been left for this scope by a pious lady, and the church was restored by the Arch-Priest. Here they also celebrated Mass and heard confessions²¹.

¹⁹ **NB: English Translator's Note: it would take almost 20 more years before any Stigmatine would set up a missionary post for the Congregation outside of Italy.**

²⁰ On this occasion Counts Fietta of Paderno of Ascolo, most attached to our Institute, had printed a poetic composition of theirs honoring our Fathers.

²¹ Truly the Arch-Priest desired to have at his disposition one of our Fathers, to send him to celebrate in this or that Church, according to the need: and our men lent themselves to this from the beginning, believing that it was of necessity for them to do so. However, when they saw that this came to be expected of them, they began to refuse and remained both to celebrate in

On the same day that the Fathers left for Bassano [February 1], Fr. Rigoni transferred to his new residence, **in the Seminary of Verona, as the Bishop had requested him to be its Rector**²² and the Superior General went along with this appointment. He proved to be quite capable in that office, corresponding fully to the trust his superiors had in him. In the short time that he held that responsibility, he re-established its discipline and the administration of the Seminary which had left much to be desired, he acquired the esteem and the benevolence of his Superiors and of the Clergy²³.

148. In this year, too, there were five new priests ordained, i.e., Frs. Zandonai and Oss-Bals were ordained in February; Frs. Graziani, Vidali and Gasperotti were ordained in November. Thus the Congregation was able to supply for other workers who had departed to labor in other fields, and they continued to maintain the responsibilities assumed, and new endeavors for the good of souls were already in the works. Of these matters, we will treat later: here we need to look at two happenings that happened during the year 1877.

The first of these brought not a little displeasure among the members of the Congregation. This was the sale which in a certain manner, had to be made of the House of Novitiate at the Most Holy Trinity²⁴. Since during the preceding Eighth General Chapter, the question arose whether it would be better to sell that building. The matter was left to the prudence of the Superior General. All found little comfort in the thought of depriving ourselves of that House which had always been kept as a jewel, and as a beloved memory of our many predecessors who had lived there. But, there arose at this time in Verona a group known as the *Ottoline* Sisters – who wanted to join in with the Salesians of Padua, and were seeking a suitable place, with a garden and a Church. Since at the moment our Novitiate was empty, they advanced a request, but received a negative reply. As a result, the local Ordinary, Bishop di Canossa intervened in their behalf. He dearly wanted to regulate the situation of the *Ottoline*, and also to have the Salesian Sisters come to Verona from Padua. Our Fathers, wished to do an act of charity, and to further the desire of **the Bishop whom they did not want to oppose**, sold the Convent to the Superior of *Ottoline* Community, Sister Chiara Perenzoni, with little enthusiasm, because even

the Church of St. Aloysius, which was the original agreement in accord with the Superior General. This was always a thorn for the Arch Priest.

²² **NB: English Translator's Note: in the early years of our Congregation, a number of our men had almost constant contact with the Diocesan Seminary – the Founder was Spiritual Director; Examiner of Vocations, as was Fr. Marani. Fr. Peter Vignola as a young priest, went from being the Bishop's Secretary to assistant to the Seminary Rector [Vice Rector] – and here, Fr. Rigoni as Rector.**

²³ That kind of work proved to be very difficult for him because of his disturbances to his health to which he was subject. In the following year, he requested to be exonerated from this task, and on March 15th, he returned to the Stimmate.

²⁴ With regard to this sale, Fr. Zara wrote: ' Could this have been necessitated because we are not as holy as we might have been with religious observance? May the lord bless us still.'

though at this moment the property was not necessary for them, they had hoped that perhaps in another period, it would prove to be more than helpful to them²⁵.

149. The other fact that we wish to recall was the Festival celebrated on October 9th, for the First Centenary of the Birth of our Venerated Founder. In Trent, on that day the Chapel was decorated as for one of the greatest solemnities. On that morning, the local Director, Fr. Dominic Vicentini, celebrated the Mass of devotion with the accompaniment of songs and instruments. At dinner, poems written for the occasion were recited, and in the evening a sermon recalling this special occasion was delivered by Fr. Mark Bassi. At the end of the day, the **Te Deum** was sung and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament was imparted.

However, the recurrence was celebrated in an even more solemn manner in Verona. The Church of the Stimate was all decorated. In the middle of the Church, the Confreres erected a triangular pyramid on the top of which was enthroned the bust of the Venerated Founder. Numerous Masses were celebrated throughout the morning with a continuous affluence of people. Following the Community Mass, accompanied by the organ, the Most Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and Benediction was imparted and the **Te Deum** was sung.

That evening, in the Founder's Room there was an 'academy' of local talent, presenting prose and poetry. The Superior General got the program underway with a discourse on the words: **Brothers, remember your leaders ...!** Fr. Zara has recorded the events of that evening:

...various Italian and Latin compositions were presented on the Founder's life. The Fathers from Parma took part in it also, as Fr. Rigatti and Fr. Vignola presented two poems. Fr. Morando sent a letter. From Bassano, Fr. Zanini delivered a poem and Fr. Sembianti had sent a letter. It was a very pleasant evening for all. We hope that from heaven Fr. Gaspar himself would have been pleased, and would have accepted these best intentions of his beloved sons. Now it is up to him: may he send us a good blessing and may his spirit reside in us. May his bones rejoice as well; but since he still dwells among us, even though he is deceased, in the life of his son who gather around him, as well as in the fact that no one would neglect his examples. Long live Fr. Bertoni! Long live his spirit!...

We place here a poem composed by our Confrere, Paul Gradinati, in memory of those beloved event. Its theme is:

²⁵ Fr. Superior wrote in these terms to the Sister Superior of the *Ottoline* on May 5th of that year. The contract was drawn up on August 8, and in the strength of this, it was sold for the ridiculous price of 42, 500 Lira. There was added the condition that if in the future, the Salesians would have seen fit to sell the property, the Stigmatines would have the first option of re-acquiring it. Fr. Sembianti hinted at this writing to Bassano, on July 3 of that year to the Superior: ' I thank you for bringing to light the particulars of that house of the Most Holy Trinity...the conditions placed in the contract and its guarantees please me very much...'. With the monies received from this sale. with its value at that time of also some other resources, on January 2, 1882, the Community purchased the farm of Calderara in Valpantena for 56, 000 Lira.

§§§

The Father Founder's Tomb²⁶

On this urn, I prostrate myself – Oh! how in my breast,
 Palpitating with affection.
 There rains down a pleasure both sad and joyful
 In the silence of the world!
 Within this enclosure, Father, I can hear you!
 And while I imprint upon the stone my own kiss,
 I tremble with joy and glow is on my face.
 Oh what mysterious accent, resounds within my thought! ... Father, I hear you!
 Within the arms of my
 Dilated sigh I hold you, o Father.
 Ah! You are indeed dust, as I am also dust myself;
 But in the dusty ashes is the spark of your immortal life.
 Toward your past I look and this sparkles within me.
 With the planted laurels and the palms I adorn you
 I ask the future, and a glorious
 Eternity responds to my thought.
 At the rays of this day
 I hear exulting within this grave,
 And I can see your bones reflourishing....

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²⁶ **NB: English Translator's Note:** This is a kind of free flowing poetry, translated as best as present knowledge would allow!

Chapter 2
THE APOSTOLIC MISSION OF THE SCHOOLS
[1877-1884]

150. In October of 1877, the elementary classes were opened in Parma, as this was one of the purposes that the Bishop had proposed in inviting our Fathers there. From the beginning, however, the Congregation was not able to supply licensed teachers. Bishop Villa in the meantime, who was much dedicated to this work of the Christian Formation of the youth, presented a Petition to the Royal Provisor for Education in order to obtain the permission to open the schools, despite this draw-back for the children of working-classes here. He obtained this without much difficulty. We present here a passage of the response from the Provisor because it manifests the level of esteem that our Confreres of that time enjoyed among the citizenry:

...Being persuaded as I am that the generous institution proposed by Your Most Illustrious and Reverend Lordship is for the greatest utility because it is geared solely to the religious and moral betterment of so many young children of the lowest class of our city, and confident that the Reverend Priests of the Stimate, with their piety that is so well known and with that spirit of sacrifice with which they stand out, they will know how to achieve the most holly purpose that Your Lordship has proposed, cooperating with such good will that these above-mentioned Priests, that they might open across the torrent of this city, an elementary school for the lower grades ...

To the personnel of that House, in addition Fr. Rigatti had been added the year before, and now Fr. Vidali came so that they could open the elementary grades.²⁷

In Verona they were not yet able to open classes for externs because the confreres had not yet taken the required examinations in Padua in 1875. They had not yet received their degrees that arrived only in June 1878²⁸. Thus, also in this year at the Stimate only the classes for our own intern students were underway in Philosophy and Theology. Their teachers were Frs. Tabarelli, Sterza, Gasperotti, Zandonai, Graziani and Brother Gradinati. Fr. Graziani also taught physics in the **Seminary** and continued this for several years, as the Bishop had asked for one of our Fathers for this teaching.

Also the Arch-Priest of Bassano dreamed of opening the elementary classes in his area, for the good of those youngsters who apparently seemed to have a priestly vocation, they had to frequent the municipal High School, often to their great danger. Meanwhile he sought our Fathers who might want to offer a bit of assistance to the young students inscribed in his Boarding House: and to this they willingly dedicated themselves especially in the vacation months. Following the summer holidays, they also opened a night school for the young artisans who were living in the Boarding House.

151. At the beginning of the year 1878, a very sad event saddened the entire Christian World and in a particular way, our Congregation. On February 8, the

²⁷ Fr. Vidali also taught gymnastics in the Seminary.

²⁸ For the school year of 1876-1877, they had undergone their apprenticeship in the elementary schools of St. Nicholas in Verona

Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX died. He had always shown such affection for our *little flock*, which he often called us, and had often sent his paternal benediction. Our Confreres with great affection and gratitude offered their suffrages for his beautiful soul: on the 22nd of the same month, they celebrated a funeral Mass in the Church of the Stimate, with a great number of Masses and a crowd of truly devout people. On March 7th, an academy of poetic presentations celebrated his glories, his virtues and his great kindness toward our Congregation.

Meanwhile on February 20, the new Roman Pontiff, Leo XIII was elected. The Confreres of the House of the Stimate, on March 29, sent to him a devout message with which they attested to him their sentiments of love and attachment, imploring his Apostolic Benediction on the Houses and members of the Institute. A Father had been lost, and another of no less kindness had been gained. Pius IX had bestowed on the Congregation the official Decree of Praise; Leo XIII would eventually grant the solemn Approbation for the Congregation.

Our Confreres in this time tirelessly continued to work for the good of souls. They heard Confessions at the Stimate, in the Seminary, in various colleges, in the prisons and in a number of Religious Institutes or houses of formation, they preached the monthly retreats in Convents of Sisters, to pious associations or to oratories, and to teach Catechism, these were their regular duties. This is not to mention the various tridiums, retreats and Parish Missions, special months of preaching – in this work a number of our Confreres were engaged in a continuous manner. And also at the Stimate, as has been noted elsewhere, they preached various courses of **Retreats for those Church-men who would come there to our community for days of prayer and reflection**. On a regular basis, during the month of August those to be ordained in the city and for the diocese of Verona, would come there for their retreat. The retreat would be preached to them in preparation for the priestly ordination.

152. time was approaching the new scholastic year, 1878-1879, and thought was given at long last to open the elementary grades also at the Stimate. Permission to do so was petitioned from the Regional Superintendent for Studies, who agreed to this for September 28th. The classes actually began on November 12, and for this first year these classes were present: the first inferior and superior grades, with about 20 students. Fr. Louis Gasperotti was their teacher. The second level had about 16 students, and their teacher was Fr. Melchiade Vivari. These were very humble beginnings, but the welcoming for these classes that was shown by the citizenry was heartening. The quality of the students who came for these classes from the beginning gave promise of a glorious future. It is beautiful to see from the very start of that first year on the scholastic registers the names of a number of those students who went on to become priests, pastors, teachers, professors, or they followed some other honored profession.

Toward the end of 1878, Fr. Mark Bassi came down from Trent, as he had been assigned as Novice Master and Spiritual Father for our students. In this same period, Frs. Carrara and Oss-Bals went up to Trent. On January 19 of the following year. There was ordained to the priest, also at Trent, by Bishop Haller, Coadjutor to Bishop Riccabona, our brother, Paul Gradinati. He celebrated his First Mass in Verona on January 23, the Feast of the Holy Espousals of Mary. On the 30 then of the same

month, our young students of whom he had been their Prefect, celebrated him with an academy of poetic presentations. On the first of March, Bishop Riccabona died in Trent. For his funeral, the Superior General went to that city, and to pay tribute to him in death, as Fr. Zara wrote:

... and to give to him that recognition and offering that he had always professed toward us. He had done so much good for our Congregation, from the time he was Bishop of Verona, and even more when he was in Trent. Therefore, in our annals may our Confreres always remember his venerated name...

A month later, in April, the Aspirants came down from Trent with their Prefect, Fr. Alexis Magagna, and took up residence in St. Teresa's Convent. Now, the entire student body of the Congregation lived there²⁹.

153. In 1879, the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII granted the special Jubilee Indulgence for a period of three months. On that occasion, a number of our Confreres were called upon to preach many extraordinary Missions. Among all of them, we will remember the one preached at Solesino, where they had been previously in 1875 which also remained memorable and most fruitful.

In September of that same year, there occurred the Golden Jubilee of Fr. Francis Benciolini, and all wanted to celebrate it as a family festival. Fr. Zara records the events:

*... The poor old man, he did not want anything to do with it, and it seemed to disturb him even to have it brought up in a conversation. In the end, he surrendered to obedience. On September 19th, the Church was decorated in a festive manner: at 9:00 a.m., all the Fathers and clerics in cassock and surplice proceeded out from the Oratory of Mary Immaculate with Fr. Benciolini at the end of the long procession. At the door of the Oratory was the Father Superior in cope with two clerics, and he gave the blessing with holy water. At the Gospel, Fr. Rigoni addressed a few words regarding the solemnity. When the Mass was over, the **Te Deum** was sung. Then, Fr. Benciolini remained seated in the Sacristy and he received the congratulations from those who had come and many kissed his hand. At dinner, the table was decorated also by the presence of guests, his family members. In the refectory, there were decorations on the wall, and certain compositions were delivered in honor of the celebrant of the day. After dinner, at 3:00 p.m., they held an academy in his honor. There were many invited: Fr. Benciolini was in the place of honor, surrounded by his fellow Priests, his Brothers, his family members, friends, acquaintances. The poetic compositions, interspersed with music played on the piano, was brought to a close with the hymn, Onward, Brothers! of Maestro Gagliardi. After all this, the Superior General praised Fr. Benciolini with best wishes, and all responded enthusiastically with a prolonged applause...³⁰*

²⁹ At Trent there remained as we have hinted, some students of theology who frequented that Seminary so that they would not have to observe military duty. In 1879, the students were: Joseph Morocchi, Louis Tomasi, Joseph Nicolai: this last mentioned, however, died on February 5th of the same year, while he was in second theology.

³⁰ By order of the Superior general, an account of the festivities was drawn up for the other Houses, in order to spread this Jubilee to all our Confreres, in order to give it the perpetuity that it merits.

154. Among all the works of zeal to which our Fathers attended in this time, the one that stood mostly at their hearts was the **Christian education of the youth**. Realizing the great good that could derive from teaching, confreres were being prepared with every effort to exercise also this ministry that was both so useful and necessary. In August 1879, Fr. Perazzani and Brother Piccoli were in Parma, and presented themselves for the examinations in order to obtain the license of Teacher: and since they had completed that three year apprenticeship for the classes they taught in our house, in January 1880, they received their diploma.

Much longer and far more demanding was the process to be undertaken in order to receive the formal approval for teaching in the upper classes: after one would have obtained the high school license, one would then have to enroll in the Regional University to frequent the courses there on a regular basis. However, in the years about which we are treating, a favorable occasion presented itself to our men also in this regard. Because of an insufficient number of approved teachers, in the face of such needs in the teaching profession, on May 10, 1877 a Royal Decree was published which established extraordinary sessions for special examinations, for the period of five years, for the purpose of conferring diplomas of the legal approval to teach both for the junior college and high school, both in the technical and normal schools. The titles required to be able to qualify for these examinations, according to the regulations set down by the Minister Coppino, were that one had to be at least 25 years old, and to have taught with praise in a secondary school for at least four years, whether the school be public or private.

The Superior General, therefore, who for many years had desired to open the high schools at the Stimate, willingly seized this favorable occasion, and directed certain of our Confreres to prepare themselves for these exams. The years that they had taught in our schools fulfilled one of the requirements. The Bishop of Verona was ready to certify that those applying to take these examinations had taught for 6 years in a private ecclesiastical institute subject to his jurisdiction. However, the Chancellor of the University of Padua did not accept his attestation, in that he did not recognize any teaching experience other than that conducted in schools under the authority of the Regional Superintendent of Studies, and that of the Prefect of the Province. On the other hand, the Authority refused to emit the certificates, and would not in any way recognize the episcopal certification. Recourse was then made to the Prefect, who ordered an inspection of the School at the Stimate, in order to verify whether the existence of that private school did indeed cover all the years of teaching required of the candidates for the government examinations. As a consequence of their investigation the government published an attestation in which it was declared that that which the Bishop of Verona had stated, was indeed true, regarding the years of teaching in the respective classes and matters. Thus, in the November of that year six of our Fathers presented themselves to the Regional University of Padua, two of whom were approved for teaching in the college level, i.e., Fr. Tabarelli for Philosophy, and Fr. Zandonai, for History. Two more were approved for the upper high school level, Fr. Sterza and Fr. Magagna. Three were approved for junior high school, i.e, Fr. Zandonai, Fr. Vivari and Fr. Vidali. Thus, there would be sufficient personnel to open a complete high school course.

The school year began then and on November 10, the first three elementary classes opened at the Stimate with Frs. Louis Tommasi, Cavinato and Louis Gasperotti were the teachers.

155. At Trent, in the meantime, after the departure of the Aspirants, those Fathers who remained there were free from teaching and were able now to apply themselves to priestly ministries. Not having a public Church, several times they entered into negotiations with the Prince-Bishop in order to obtain the care of a Church in the city: finally in February 1880, the Congregation obtained the direction of the Church of St. Martin, with a small residence joined to it, along with the annual stipend of 300 florins. Fr. Anthony Oss-Balss was assigned there and named 'Prior', and Fr. Dominic Vicentini, as Director of S. Bernadine's: they lived here, but every evening they went to St Martin's where they would spend the night. Each morning, after their occupations in their ministry, they would return to the Community. On March 14th, they began to operate the oratory for the young men of the neighborhood.

156. There were by now lacking only a few months to the end of the Superior General's five year term. In October, the election of the new Superior was to be held. In the meantime, there still remained a few preliminary questions, and first among these, the length of the Superior General's term. In the February of 1880, then, Fr. Peter Vignola convoked the General Chapter, which after a long discussion, judged that those exceptional reasons according to which for two successive times, the Superior General was elected to a limited term. The decision was now made to return to the text of the Venerated Founder's Constitutions, and therefore of electing the new Superior General for life. Fr. Peter Vignola made the proposal for the Chapter to proceed right away to the new election, without any need of convoking the Chapter again in October. However, the other Fathers did not accept the proposal, and even lengthened the present Superior's term up until February of the following year, 1881.

After this, there was elected a Capitular Commission of five members for the revision of the old Document, the **Appendix to Part XII of the Founder's Constitutions** – and further, to decide in what points the General Council should have decisive vote. The following confreres were elected Frs. Peter Vignola, Bassi, Morando, Vicentini and Tabarelli. Since they had been requested that the necessary negotiations be undertaken with the ecclesiastical authorities for a further approbation of the rules, various means were proposed and discussed. These were all directed toward bringing about this common desire. Thus, it was decided that in the meantime, a *compendium* of our Constitutions be drawn up. This would first be presented to the Cardinal Bishop of Verona, because if it could be approved and supported by him, and then it could be sent along to the competent ecclesiastical authority. This charge was entrusted to Frs. Rigoni and Sembianti.³¹

157. While the General Chapter was in session, on February 21, Louis Battisti was ordained a Priest, and he celebrated his First Mass at the Stimate on the 23rd. On

³¹ They prepared this *compendium* and it is still conserved in the Archives of the Institute. In the Chapter Fr. Rigoni resigned as General Councilor and Procurator General – Fr. Bassi was named to the General Council and Fr. Marini took over as Procurator General.

the following days, the Feast of St. Thomas was celebrated with extraordinary solemnity. This was preceded by a Triduum, with special conferences and recitations offered by the Scholastics. The Roman Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII published his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, recommending the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas, prescribing that all the Catholic Schools need to be in conformity with it: our confreres had sent on that occasion a message to the Supreme Pontiff, declaring their full adherence to the teaching of the Angelic Doctor and now they took the opportunity of placing their own schools under his protection. On the day of the actual feast, the Solemn Mass was celebrated by the new Priest, Fr. Louis Battisti, who also that evening delivered the panegyric during the ceremonies.

In the following April, the Community made its Retreat, at the end of which for the first time, all made a solemn renewal of their Vows, which had been decided upon by the last General Chapter.

At the end of this scholastic year, for the first time, there was a solemn conferral of rewards, with the appropriate speech of Fr. Gasperotti, acting as Moderator. Our schools more and more came to the attention of the citizenry, and the local newspaper, *The Adige* - around the end of July, had an article praising the examinations just held at the Stimate, with much praise for the beloved young men who attended there and for their patient and loving teachers³².

158. In the meantime, in the month of January, Bishop Comboni, Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa, had asked for one of our Fathers to serve as Director of the Seminary for that Mission and permission for this had been granted. Fr. Sembianti took over that position on March 13 and Fr. Morando took his place at Bassano. On the occasion of the Ninth General Chapter, Fr. Sembianti had presented the need of increasing the personnel of that house, because three Confreres alone did not favor very much the maintaining of the religious spirit. He further brought to the attention of the Capitulars that working only with the young men living in the boarding house there provided only a very poor field for the energies of our community. The area of instruction that had been offered to them is one from which we could hope to do better and more. He thus proposed that a plan be studied with which the regular observance might be better maintained in that House, and at the same a means be found to procure our greater usefulness of the town.

The new Director arriving on the scene undertook a study of the area, noted the requests of the priests and the people, proposed to the Superior General the setting up of a private school, being content for that first year with the three lower classes, or at least two of them. He requested for this work in mind a Confrere already endowed with the regular diploma.

The Superior General examined the matter with his Councilors, and accepted the proposal in part, i.e., there was granted a two year trial of the teaching in the lower grades, however without commitment of leaving there more than four Priests. It was therefore established that for the next scholastic year, one additional Priest would be sent and the third class would be added. At the same time, it was agreed that the

³² During this year, Frs. Zandonai and Sterza filled in at the Seminary due to the lack of Professors there.

boarding house would provide an additional 600 Lira³³, until agreement could be reached on setting up a capital corresponding to 1300 Lira. In October, Fr. Alexis Magagna was sent there, and first two high school classes were opened.

In Verona in that November, the three elementary classes opened, adding then the 4th class. As for our internal schools for our own students, those of **other religious communities began coming**: the Communities of the Ministers to the Infirm, and the seminary for the Missions of Central Africa began sending their candidates.

Meanwhile others began preparing themselves for the ministry of teaching for the benefit of the youth. In August, our Confreres Louis Tomasi, Cavinato and Piccoli all earned at Parma the license to teach in the upper grades. In November, Frs. Vidali and Zandonai also obtained at Padua the diploma for teaching the upper high school level.

159. On February 18, 1881, the Tenth General Chapter convened for the election of the Superior General.. Fr. Peter Vignola was elected for life, and as Councilors he was given Frs. Bassi, Sembianti, Vincent Vignola and Charles Zara. Fr. Marini remained as Procurator General.

The Program of Studies was approved for our students, and a careful examination of the old supplementary document, the **Appendix to Part XII of the Original Constitutions** had been presented. This had been re-submitted to the Commission for further study, for its members to prepare a definitive document then to be sent to all the Houses and submitted to the vote of all the Graduate Fathers. To this same Commission was given the mandate to examine the Rules for the Offices, already edited by the Superior General, according to the mandate previously given.

The House of the Stimmate presented to the Chapter the proposal to open the entire high school curriculum for extern students and this was approved.

The Chapter then took up the discussion of the School at Bassano, and it was concluded that the Superior General should maintain the obligations assumed, in accord with his Council. However, the two-year trial period had passed, and the Congregation was not to commit itself to establishing in that city the complete high school, until a proper contract would be set up providing more equitably for the Congregation.³⁴

Lastly, the discussion centered on the House of Parma, whose condition of which left so much to be desired. This was true both regarding the situation of the house that was totally insufficient and deprived even of those basic comforts needed for the purposes establishing of teaching school and conducting the oratory – and also because of the patrimony that was totally lacking. Encouraged by Bishop Villa³⁵, our Fathers had the previous year sought a more suitable dwelling. With the offerings received from him, and from other benevolent persons, they had purchased a house furnished with a spacious garden not far from the Church of the Quarter in the Bertano

³³ The business man, Francis Fontana, was committed to paying these 600 Lira annually, until that moment when this addition to the contract could be formally established.

³⁴ On this occasion, the Chapter established that in the foundation of new houses, room and board would be requested and an annual salary of 500 Lira for each individual.

³⁵ The Bishop had given on this occasion 5000 Lira which had previously been set aside to pay for the construction of the school.

Borgo. However, this needed much renovation, in order to be suitable for their desired purposes.

Therefore, the General Chapter entrusted the Superior General to represent to the Bishop the state of that House and the hardships in which the Congregation found itself – and then, either to recall some of those Confreres leaving there only those *whom the agreed upon and established income found there*, and who could be supported; or, the second alternative to restore the capital received, and withdraw all the Confreres. However, the practical working out of these details was left by the General Chapter up to the final decision of the Superior General and his Council, having heard the opinion of the *Graduate* Fathers of the House of Verona.

160. The decision of the General Chapter was communicated to the Bishop of Parma. He was genuinely sorry for the sad condition of our residence there, and was more deeply grieved that there was not much he could do to alleviate the situation as much as he would have liked to, so he promised from his part, to provide annually 216 Lira annually that was still lacking from the agreed upon contract of 1875³⁶: further, in compensation the thought was to give to our Confreres the capital corresponding to 4000 Lira, which could be used in the work to be done in the foundation of the House. All of this still did not better the situation very much: in fact the purchase price and the costs of labor for the new dwelling surpassed 18,000 Lira, of which 1700 came through offerings, and more than 3000 were taken out in loans. As a result, at the end of all this work, our Community had a debt of some 4, 5000 Lira. As capital, they did own the House in the Taschieri Borgo, and the 8000 credit from Mr. Carraglia. In the end of all this, the Community still lacked the patrimony requested, and for their maintenance, they had to rely on the alms received for Masses and the offerings of generous people.

In September there was assembled in Verona a chapter of the *Graduate* Fathers, presided over by the Father Superior and his Council. For the matter of Bassano, as the Arch-Priest had promised to establish a sufficient capital for the support of four Priests and a Coadjutor Brother, the chapter decided that if the Monsignor Abbot offered the capital of 20000 Lira, his proposal would be accepted and the Congregation committed itself to open and to sustain a complete high school curriculum. As for the situation in Parma, having seen the good will of the Bishop, and the recent offer of 4000 Lira made by him, the decision was that it was opportune to sustain further that house. And already the restoration of the newly purchased house were underway, and continued through the summer months. By the early days of December, our Fathers were able to move in.

³⁶ In 1877, the bishop had given 5000 Lira to our Confreres for the purchase of a garden adjacent to the church in the Quarter, for the young boys of the neighborhood. That garden was then ceded to Mr. Camillo Carraglia, in compensation for the expenses that he had undergone in 1875, in the purchase of the House in the Borgo Taschieri. Furthermore the Bishop had further granted to our Fathers a credit toward the same Mr. Carraglia, of 8000 Lira, of which he was paying the annual interest of 400 Lira. If to these 11,400 Lira, there be added the 5000 Lira the Bishop gave in 1880, a capital would result of 16,400 Lira @ 6%, granting another 934 Lira annually. According to the agreement of 1875, the Bishop should also give 300 Lira annually for each Priest, that is, 1200 Lira.

161. In that same year of 1881, new candidates presented themselves for the government examinations: the cleric, Lodovico Lucchi in July, received the license to teach the elementary level but the upper grades. In November, Frs. Gradinati, Gasperotti, Battisti, Marocchi and Morando all obtained from Padua the license for the high school level.³⁷ In the course of the year, there were further ordinations to the priesthood: Fr. Joseph Marocchi [in August] and Fr. Louis Tomasi, in December. However, one of the priests also left at this time, and it was Fr. Lawrence Rigatti. Already for some time, the Superiors were much concerned about his conduct, and they tried every avenue to lead him back to religious observance, but it was all in vain. In the end, he himself asked for a dispensation, and his request was granted³⁸.

In November in Verona, along with the elementary classes, there was also added a first high school class for externs: a Bassano, there was also added to the first two grades, also the third high school class, and Fr. Vidali went there to teach it. The Director of that House, Fr. Morando, would have also liked to open a college there – a boarding house type in order to support our school there, but the means for doing so were lacking. On the one hand, there was no desire at that time to entrust the administration of the hoped for college to a lay person; and on the other hand, the Congregation could not assign the personnel necessary to direct also a College. The number of students of the high school classes reached 70

At the beginning of 1882, we find another new event in the Church at the Stimate: on the morning of January 6th, under the direction of the Pious Union of the Holy Infancy, a devout function was celebrated. In the evening, in the same Church, there had been prepared a modest academy of musical and poetic talent for the organization itself. It was the first time that this feast dear to the Italian people was ever celebrated in Verona, and it came to be repeated in the subsequent years at the Stimate. In the year 1883, it switched over to St. Teresa's Church, and the academy began to be more and more sophisticated and well prepared, with great crowds of people and the local authorities in attendance.

In the Church of the Stimate, during the night between January 17 and 18, a robbery occurred from the altar of the Sorrowful Mary, and the statue was stolen.³⁹ With all of its appurtenances its value was somewhere near 2000 Lira. In reparation for this sacrilege, on the 30th of the same month a Triduum was begun that proved very successful due to the great number of the devout and the many Holy Communions.

³⁷ Furthermore, in that December Fr. Carrara obtained in Padua the license for the teaching of mathematics.

³⁸ As soon as he left, he became seriously ill, and after a very painful period of suffering, he died, on December 23rd that same year. 'What a lesson this should be for us', the Superior wrote.

³⁹ This stone statue had been done by the Veronese sculptor, Spazzi, and was placed on the altar on February 6, 1882, in place of the painting of Deposition: it had cost 300 Lira offered by a devout person. In 1879 there had also been stolen from St. Francis' altar the painting representing the transition of the Saint, and this was substituted for by another, presenting his Stigmata. This had been the work of the artist Orbetto and had cost 250 Lira, offered likewise by the pious faithful.

On that occasion, and on the closing of the Sorrowful Month, many precious gifts were contributed to the altar of Mary⁴⁰.

162. In October 1881, Bishop Daniel Comboni died, as Vicar Apostolic of Central Africa. His successor was our old confrere, now Bishop Francis Sogaro. He had served for a few years as Pastor of St. George's and then withdrew to the Seminary for that Mission group, in order to prepare himself for this new kind of apostolic life, to which from his boyhood days, he had always felt inclined. Fr. Sembianti, who had been Director of that Seminary, had asked our Superior, Fr. Peter Vignola, to go as a companion to Bishop Sogaro, and also Fr. Dominic Vicentini, who aspired to the same mission. The chapter of the *Graduate* Fathers of the House of the Stimmate assembled, and after hearing the reasons put forward by Fr. Vicentini, decided to let him go to African under the condition that he would remain bound with his vows to the Congregation, and would be disposed to return, should the Superior ask him to do that. With this permission, it was also made clear that the Congregation did not intend to assume any commitment regarding that mission.

Following this deliberation, Fr. Vicentini left the House of Trent where he had been Director, and was transferred to Verona, to the Seminary for the African Missions, to study there the Arabic Language: and later, on December 16th, he departed for Africa.

163. At the end of the scholastic year, great solemnities accompanied the conferral of honors. His Eminence, Cardinal di Canossa attended, as did the Rector of the Seminary, Monsignor Bacilieri, some of the professors of the Seminary, a number of Monsignors, pastors and priests. The young students of the freshman year offered an display of their prowess in Latin, and all were quite pleased with their efforts. However, while our work for the advantage of the youth was much appreciated by so many good souls, there was never lacking an embedded sentiment of envy and jealousy. The Father Superior, in his address, had to declare that with the institution of the schools, he had not intended to enter into rivalry with any others, but that our sole purpose was to supply for a need that was felt by all. Convinced of the holiness of their cause, our Fathers redoubled their ardor in this undertaking, and at the same time were committed to preparing new personnel who would be dedicated to the mission of teaching. During this year, 1882, the professed student, J. B. Cavinato, and the Aspirant, **John B. Tomasi**, happily passed all their examinations for the license to teach on the junior college level, while the professed students Stephen Rosa and Julius Zambiasi obtained the high school license to teach.

In the fall of that same year, an even took place that we cannot pass over in silence. A flood overwhelmed the city of Verona, and the work that our Confreres offered valuable help for flood victims. The overflowing of the Adige began on September 17, the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis, as it had rained uninterruptedly for several days. The streets of the city were torrents of water – the

⁴⁰ On February 18, there was donated a backdrop of silk, embroidered in gold, for the altar of the Sorrowful Mary. On February 28th there was placed in service the crystal for the same altar, which together with the frame and ironworks cost 240 Lira, all of which were offerings from the devout faithful.

houses inundated and in real danger. Many took refuge at the Stimate, asking for temporary protection. The rooms in St. Teresa's were emptied as was the Church itself, to offer refuge and all was placed at the disposal of those seeking it. On that day, and on the following night, the torrential rain continued to fall, so much so that by the 18, many houses had collapsed, the new bridge went under, the dock for the boats were damaged, and even the railway was threatened. Verona seemed to have become part of the Adige, and moving about was greatly restricted. More refugees flocked toward the Stimate, so much so that they numbered about 300 in all. Frs. Graziani, Zandonai, Zanini were at the disposition of the refugees, and went about seeking to give consolation. The town sent bread, polenta and food stuffs. This situation remained until the 28 of the same month, when the refugees left for the town hall, as a kind of hospice had been opened up at St. Bernardine's. For these poor victims, the service offered by our Confreres for that people proved to be providential, and all the local papers spoke of our Community's great generosity during the tragedy.

184. At long last, on the 11 of November finally arrived, a day of such expectancy, when at the Stimate there opened the complete high school course. Among the students attending, were those from the College of St. Aloysius, directed by Fr. J.B. Carrara, so that from the very first year, the students on the high school level, numbered around 80. Also in the classes of Philosophy and Theology, in addition to our own students, there were **externs, and clerics from Bishop Comboni's community** as well as **the Community dedicated to the care of the Hearing-Speech impaired.**⁴¹

In the following year of 1883, seizing upon the occasion of the new classes, much thought was given to the celebration with utmost solemnity the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. At the morning Mass for all the students, there was celebrated a General Communion and the dedication of studies. In the evening there was held the customary 'academy' in the presence of His Eminence, the Cardinal-Bishop of Verona, his Vicar General, the Rector of the Seminary and others. In this 'talent show' three theology students defended a variety of theses regarding creation. For the event, there were choir pieces of the Maestro Ravignani, which were subsequently often performed among us.

The opening of the school year brought with it the need of more space. Already in August of the previous year, the building of a new House was begun, and in May of this year, renovations were also initiated in St. Teresa's Convent. The floor of the cloister which went around the court-yard was re-done, as were those of the refectory

⁴¹ **NB: We-site note: the training of men for the Priesthood for Dioceses and for Religious Communities, has long been a central mission of Stigmatines. The training of Seminarians and helping Priests and Religious is part of the work of Fr. Bertoni's ideal of those promoted to the *Grade of Apostolic Missionary* : cf. CF ## 67, cf. particularly: # 164. [The 'Professed' will be dedicated to] contributing to the formation and discipline of Seminarians, whether these are living in Seminaries, or are extern students, assigned to parishes or living at home. They will accomplish this either through public courses, or private conversations, by promoting the Seminarians' life of study and spirituality.**

and the kitchen.⁴² At the same time, the floor of St. Teresa's Church was repaired, which had begun to be used by the students there: in fact, for them for the first time in this Church the May devotions were conducted.

165. On June 20 of this year Fr. Charles Zara died at the Stimate. Up until the beginning of January, he had been the Director of that house, and his place was taken by Fr. Pius Gurisatti. For some time, he had already been suffering from an illness that proved to be extremely painful, and this brought him great sufferings the last months of his life. He was most beloved in the Congregation, and he had gathered with loving care all that spoke of it, completing and continuing the Chronicle of the Congregation. He had worked long for the benefit of the young, especially in the Marian Oratory, and he was deeply mourned especially by the young men who attended it. On the 22 of July, there was a solemn commemoration of his Month's Mind.

That same morning of June 20, Fr. Bellino Carrara left the Congregation, in order to become a Jesuit. He said he had been moved by the desire to embrace an Institute the way of life was more canonically stable and more perfect. Others, however, still entered to work in the vineyard of the Lord. In September, at Parma, Frs. Eugene Laudon and Lodivico Lucchi were ordained, and in Verona Frs. Albano Clementi and J. B. Cavinato were ordained: they came to take up the slack of the vacancies left behind.

On December 25th of this same year, Fr. Cajetan Giacobbe celebrated his Golden Jubilee. He more than merited the gratitude of Stigmatines and for the affection that he always manifested for our Congregation, and because he had written the biography of our venerated Founder: and Stigmatines who for long had helped him very much in his parish duties, willing offered themselves to render even more solemn this festivity. In the morning, *during the solemn Mass*, Fr. Rigoni in the Parish Church offered a sermon for the occasion which left an excellent impression. In the evening there was the usual ceremony in front of the Crib, and various compositions were presented in prose and in verse honoring the Arc-Priest, as well as songs and chants adapted for the occasion. In all, this was a genuine production of the customary academy, much merited by the jubilarian.

166. Before leaving this year 1883, we should recall a period of preaching assignments accomplished by our men in the city of Pavia. The bishop of that diocese, Bishop Riboldi had known some of our Fathers who had come to Pavia from their examinations for their licentiates to teach, and he had known from them **the end of the Congregation**, about which he also had fresh testimony from the Ordinary of Parma, Bishop Dominic Villa. He had already conceived the desire to have one of our Houses in his Diocese. In the meantime, he requested two of our Priests to offer a series of Missions that might prepare the population for his Pastoral Visitation, which he had to make in various towns during the autumn months. There were designated for this Frs. Andrew Sterza and Melchiade Vivari, later substituted for by Fr. Zanini.

⁴² The new kitchen and refectory were used for the first time on June 29th, for the Name day of the Superior.

From August 26th until November 25th, they preached 13 continuous and full weeks, without a break in between.

Meanwhile, without repeating what we have already said elsewhere, preaching assignments continued in other localities as well, especially in the city and throughout the diocese of Verona – not even to mention the many monthly days of recollection in oratories also of other religious families, as well as the teaching of Catechism went on in the colleges and religious institutes, with the spiritual assistance being offered to those who were living in recoveries for the poor. One of the outstanding members here was Fr. Marini, who attended to this with much zeal. Fr. Paul Gradinati noted in his Chronicle, somewhat facetiously: it does not seem that lazinees had ever found a home in the Stimate. Among all the Confreres Fr. Andrew Sterza stood out for his extraordinary physical stamina. He was described with the old saying: *he was a most long-suffering man of labor, being able to sustain far beyond what was believable*. He was able to go on without interruption, and was almost always occupied in preaching parish Missions and courses of Retreat, Lenten courses and monthly days of recollection. He had a great ease about him, and a clarity, being extremely capable of adapting himself to every class of people.⁴³

167. Another matter that we should note here: about this time, in the Church of the Stimate, there was established the Congregation of the Third Order of St. Francis. From the very beginning a number of our early Fathers and Brothers had enrolled in this, but later the Holy See declared that members of other religious Institutes could not belong to it, it was the Congregation of the Third Order was continued just for the laity. The first solemn vestition took place on September 17, and a second day, was October 4, Feast of St. Francis. In the early days of January of the following year, 1884, a monthly conference was offered for the adherents.

Meanwhile from the previous November 9 school had re-opened at the Stimate. There is nothing special to be noted here for the new school year, except that there was offered a solemn Triduum for the students in the Church of the Stimate during the last days of May to commemorate the first centenary of the institution of the May devotions: thus, together with the instruction, every effort was made to infuse into our students that love for piety which is the basis of every authentic and sound education⁴⁴.

⁴³ In 1887, for example, he preached the entire Lent and then gave a Retraet in the Church of the Rosary in Vicenza, where the Abbot Zanella who went to hear him praised him in these words: ‘he is a most effective preacher because of his evangelical simplicity.’

⁴⁴**NB: English Translator’s Note: this subordination was to our Founder: cf. his *Original Constitutions*:**

66. It will be up to the Superiors to see to it that neither the love for piety will be cooled through the fervor of studies, nor that through any excess of piety, will the necessary studies be impeded.

167. Even though children might be accepted in our ministry for the purpose of educating them, nevertheless the main goal to be sought and intended in our institution is their being instructed in their moral life.

168. Still in this year 1884, the following were ordained in December: Frs. Stephen Rosa, Julius Zambiasi, Joseph Bertapelle, Joseph Chemello⁴⁵. The first two had obtained in this same year the license to teach on the junior college level, and in November they were transferred to Parma to enroll in the University in order to frequent the Faculty of mathematics, and at the same time, to help the other Fathers there in the elementary school.

In that city, our Confreres were living as best they could in the Borgo Bertano, where they continued being occupied with the education of the youth with the school and the Sunday Oratory, and giving themselves further to other works of the ministry, both in the city, and throughout the Diocese. In 1884, they sold the first dwelling they owned in Borgo Tashieri, increasing just a bit more their patrimony of the House, which still remain quite insufficient and restrictive for a regular foundation.⁴⁶

In the year 1882, worn down and consumed by his apostolic endeavors, and mourned by all, on July 22, Bishop Villa died. He had much loved our Confreres. He was succeeded by Bishop Andrew Miotti, who was consecrated in Rome on October 1 of the same year. In this same House of Parma in 1883, Fr. Andrew Sterza was assigned. He, however, was always 'on the road' in preaching throughout the Dioceses of Parma and Reggio, and throughout the Veneto. Fr. Vincent continued to work tirelessly for the good of souls, enjoying the esteem and the affection of all good people, especially by the Bishop who entrusted to him the most delicate charges.⁴⁷ The other Fathers took care of the school and other works of the ministry, and around this time they assumed also the care of the small hospital next to the Church of the Quarter.

169. In Bassano, from the year 1882, the two years of experimentation were over, and the Director, Fr. Louis Morando, had asked that there be granted to him also the responsibility of the upper grades of high school. The General Councilors were gathered to discuss this, with the *Graduate* Fathers of the Stimmate under the presidency of the Superior General on June 15 of that year. Their view was not to continue on with the classes there with the addition of one upper grade would not require an increase of personnel. So, they granted a year of trial with the faculty of adding to the first three grades also the fourth, without committing to complete the upper high school curriculum, if not under the absolute condition that within the new scholastic year, there would be obtained the necessary funds, already established by the Congregation in support of six priests. This capital was not forthcoming, but at the end of that scholastic year, the Monsignor Arch-Priest came up with 500 Lira for an additional priest.⁴⁸ As a result, due to the insistent appeals of Fr. Morando, in 1883

⁴⁵ This last mentioned left in May 1885, for his general poor health brought about by tuberculosis, 'but even more due to a diabolic temptation.' Very shortly, he would repent of this, and state that he would be sorry for the rest of his life.

⁴⁶ To make up for this, the people there contributed generously to their support, in a particular manner the families of their students and the Religious Communities to which our men offered their spiritual assistance.

⁴⁷ In the year 1886, Bishop Villa had nominated him as a Member of the Academy of St. Thomas.

⁴⁸ The Abbot therefore increased his contribution from 700 Lira a year, to 1100 for the school.

the Congregation did grant the 5th priest and the high school curriculum at Bassano was complete. Nonetheless, this remained a precarious situation as no one seemed that concerned to constitute the capital necessary to insure the existence of the endeavor. Added to this, was the fact that the number of the students dipped to a level that was not foreseen. Already in 1881, a boarding house-college had come into being – called the Vinanti Dormitory, to reinforce the public high school, and to the harm of the private high school. Fr. Morando had not been able to found a college, which he did try to do in 1882-1883. His hope was to supply from his students boarding house for the number of students in the afternoon sessions, but the undertaking was too costly and did not bring with it proportionate advantages. Therefore, his endeavor lasted only a year.⁴⁹

In the meantime, there began the battles between those schools, and this overflowed into the newspapers: this even reached the level of violence, in the effort brought to bear to keep students for enrolling. In February 1882, the Superintendent visited the schools, and he had only words of praise and gratitude for our men were doing there. However, this was not enough to pacify the families. There began some indications of real prejudice, spreading the fear that those students of ours who would present themselves for the examinations of licentiate would not pass. In fact, those who presented themselves for the first time in 1884 and in the first session did not have a very satisfying result. However, in the October session, all, except for one, were promoted, but even this did not remove the prejudice and the fears that had built up, and so this proved to bring about defections from our school. As a result, support for this high school was still forthcoming, but it was already clear that it could not last for very long: in that public center there was too much shadow cast by the public schools and ours was exposed to continual struggle.

Let us summarize this period for the Chronicle: on the example of our Venerated Founder, our Confreres were dedicated with great ardor and zeal for the ministry in the apostolic mission of teaching. And the men, in order to render themselves suitable for teaching, a great number of them had presented themselves successfully for the examinations of approval, passing them with praise worthy results.

At this juncture, they were conducting the ministry of teaching school in Verona, both on the elementary as well as on the high school level; the elementary classes in Parma; the high school classes in Bassano; and they were taking in extern students also for our classes of Philosophy and Theology. They had understood well the importance of school for the Christian formation of the youth, that was being threatened on all sides.. And they committed themselves to this at great personal sacrifice, achieving wonderful advantages, and were blessed and encouraged by so many good people.

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⁴⁹ On April 11, 1883, the young student, Anthony Conte, came from Bassano and in June he began his Novitiate in Verona.

Chapter 3
APPROBATION OF THE CONGREGATION
[1885-1890]

170. Nonetheless, in that face of the enthusiasm which the majority of the Fathers felt for the Mission of the Schools, others felt themselves inclined to the work of the **Missions**.⁵⁰ **There were even those who wanted to restrict to preaching alone, the purpose of our Institute.** We have noted this tendency that manifested itself ten years earlier, especially among the young, for the Missions outside of Italy, a tendency that had not abated in any way.⁵¹

From June 1884, the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Francis Sogaro, had written from Central Africa to the Superior General for our Congregation and to fuse our Institute with that for Black Africa. The Superior General convoked the Chapter of all the Fathers present and proposed this idea which by common accord was rejected. In 1885, Fr. Sogaro was nominated Titular Bishop of Trapezopoli, and came to Italy to be consecrated.⁵² In August, Fr. Peter Vignola made the trip to Rome to assist at this consecration: and on that occasion, when the newly ordained Bishop visited Verona, he repeated his idea.⁵³ He did this also out of the sincere affection that he always nourished, and had ever conserved, towards our Congregation, from which he had

⁵⁰ **NB: English Translator's Note:** there were many at this time who understood **Apostolic Mission**, to include those **Missions outside of Italy**, under the responsibility of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith; and there were those who understood **Missions**, to mean solely **Parish Missions**. Frs. Sogaro, Sembianti, D. Vicentini and others believed they were called to the developing apostolates in Africa. The main stream of our membership, however, always held that the intellectual and spiritual formation of the youth likewise remains a central part of the **Apostolic Mission** as codified in St. Gaspar's *Original Constitutions*.

The **Apostolic Mission** of St. Gaspar clearly includes both: **CF # 5: quocumque in Diocesi et mundo** - and cf. especially:

- NINTH PART :** **THE GRADE OF THE 'PROFESSED'** [## 158- 196]
- Chapter 1:** **The 'Profession'** [## 158-160]
- Chapter 2:** **The Means by which the Institute promotes the
Salvation of Others** [## 161-164]
- Chapter 3:** **The Instruction of Children and Youth** [## 165-167]
- Chapter 4:** **The Means to be employed developing Morality in the Young** [## 168-174]
- Chapter 5:** **The Means employed for the Academic Progress of the Youth** [## 175-181]
- Chapter 6:** **The Duties of the 'Professed'** [## 182-184]
- Chapter 7:** **The Principal Purpose of the 'Professed'** [## 185-186]

⁵¹ While Fr. D. Vicentini with repeated requests did obtain permission to leave for the Missions in Africa, Fr. Vivari had repeatedly asked permission to go to that Mission, or even to place himself at the disposition of the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith.

⁵² **NB: English Translator's Note:** this ordination took place in the Church St. Agatha of the Goths in Rome – at that time, the seat of the Pontifical Irish College, also with ties to the S. Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith.

⁵³ On September 17th, being in Verona, Bishop Sogaro celebrated a Mass of Devotion at the Stimate, and stayed to lunch with the Community.

received his education and out of his sincere desire to return to its womb, without giving up that type of the *Mission* for which he had always felt a strong attraction. However, the realization of his desires was opposed by insuperable obstacles: that Mission would have absorbed all, or almost all of the man-power of our Congregation. Our Community would have had to change substantially its program and its purpose: and this was pleasing to no one.

In June of 1885, Fr. Richard Tabarelli underwent the examinations in Dogmatic Theology at the Academy of St. Thomas in Parma, and achieved unanimous approval and the most sublime praise, and was declared a Doctor in Sacred Theology. He had taught Philosophy and Theology for many years to our Students. In 1876, he had been named Prefect of Studies and then also Director of the Elementary and High Schools at the Stimmate, and continued in this teaching and duties up until 1889, when he was transferred to Rome, as we shall see.

On May 30 of this same year 1885, Fr. Octavian Piccoli was ordained a Priest in Verona. In September, Fr. Paul Gradinati was appointed Novice Master. From July of the previous year, Fr. Mark Bassi was exonerated from that task due to his failing health, and he had already been substituted for by Fr. Alexis Magagna. On September 8, 1885, he ceded the office to Fr. Gradinati, who would then exercise this office for many years, to the great advantage of your young students.⁵⁴

171. In the month of November finally the foundation of the House in Pavia was realized. Already since January 1884, following that cycle of Parish Missions which we have already recalled, Bishop Riboldi wrote to the Superior General, proposing to him a foundation in his diocese, but this idea could not be acted upon right away. In 1884, once more that Bishop asked our Fathers for a Parish Mission in preparation for the Parish Visitation as the year before. Fathers Zanini and Zandonai went for this, and later, he was substituted for by Fr. Pius Gurisatti. In 1885, there were established the pacts for the foundation that was set for November 4th. To our Confreres, the following tasks were entrusted: (1) assistance at the Sunday Oratory of St. Aloysius opened in the seminary property; (2) the direction of the night school also at the Seminary from the beginning of November until the end of March, teaching Catechism to these three classes in the same schools and offering some rudimentary ideas regarding grammar and mathematics in one of these; (3) the work of Parish Missions in the parishes in so far as they would not prejudice the above noted duties. The Bishop then committed himself to give the Congregation the annual sum of 1000 Lira, which in addition to the alms for the Masses, should serve well for their financial support.⁵⁵

In the letter of definitive acceptance, the Bishop stated that the late Bishop of Parma, His Excellency, Bishop Villa, had sublimely commended our Institute, assuring him both of its apostolic spirit and its sure devotion to the Holy See, as well as the real dedication of the members of the Congregation. And he added that he had also experienced first hand in his Diocese, all of this, in that the men had already

⁵⁴ On that very day, Fr. Gradinati wrote: 'May God be good our Superiors in their choice, may the Madonna help me to carry it out without any harm to myself or to others.'

⁵⁵ The truth of the matter is that our men in asking for 500 Lira for each individual, was computing in this sum also the Mass stipends.

harvested in it most abundant fruit from the zeal of this Community and of these outstanding Missionaries.

Frs. Vivari and Graziani were sent⁵⁶: they were temporarily lodged in one of the rented houses near the Church of St. Gervase⁵⁷, and they had the duty of taking care of the Church. For that House, there was at the beginning some fear of the difficult neighborhood in which it was situated, both for the laity and for ecclesiastics, since among the clergy there remained still the remnants of Jansenism.

And the Bishop himself, a little after the arrival of our men, wrote to our Superior General:

... From the beginning the good Fathers perhaps will have a bit of penance to endure and to sustain some real discomfort: but later I hope that they will find themselves well off materially and that there will develop in them to their own and my consolation and with great fruit in this Diocese ...

For that matter, they had found in the Bishop a Father full of concern and good will. Meanwhile, they applied themselves to the oratory and to the night school: later, the Bishop intended to entrust to them the lower high school classes already opened for the boys in the city and a college yet to establish, as also to give to their care a house and a Church under their responsibility which must have been that of St. Peter in his heaven of gold.

172. In 1886, the Superior General recalled Fr. Vicentini from Africa, who did return with the hope of returning there after a few months. Instead, in September he was sent to Parma as Director in substitution for Fr. Vincent Vignola who was re-called to Verona.

In that same time on September 24, there was celebrated in Cerona the Golden Jubilee of the Ordination of the beloved Superior General. Almost all the Fathers took part in the celebrations, having come to Verona from all the other houses, and it came off as a very intimate family festival. In the morning at 8:00, the Jubilarian celebrated the solemn Mass, assisted by his brother, Monsignor Paul Vignola. During dinner, to which the family members of the Superior General were sharing as well as other invited guests, there was a little entertainment from a literary perspective in which to the beloved Father there were addressed affectionate words of good wishes, hopes and congratulations from the hearts of his sons and friends.⁵⁸ In the evening, there was offered an Academy in St. Teresa's Church, with the solemn distribution of rewards, that had been put off to that day in order to add to the splendor of the celebrations. All took the occasion to remember the merits of the Jubilarian, who was rightfully described as:

⁵⁶ A few days earlier, Brother Emilio Bernardi went ahead to prepare the dwelling. And before he got there, Fr. Cavinato had already arrived, preparing himself for the examinations at the Royal University.

⁵⁷ This rent was paid for by the Bishop.

⁵⁸ The most brilliant composition was that of a Fr. Peter Zenari, Pastor of Caldiero, and a very close friend of ours

... the heir of the spirit, the prudence, no less than the authority of our most venerated Founder, Fr. Gaspar Bertoni. He chose to follow after his example and his traditions, having dedicated the work of his sons also to the instruction of the youth ...

On that occasion many gifts were bestowed on the venerated Superior General, among which we will recall two chasubles, and there were dedicated to him several printed works for the occasion. Also his sons and confreres wanted to present to him a certain homage by collecting and printing the material as a book, then entitled: **Reminiscences of our Fathers and Brothers**, which was dedicated to him.

Meanwhile Frs. Rosa and Zambiasi had returned from Parma to Verona after having obtained the licentiate in mathematics and physics, and other young students presented themselves for the public examinations, in order to be ready for teaching and one day offer a real service to the apostolates of the Congregation. However, there were not lacking ungrateful and unfaithful sons who turned their backs on the Congregation, from which they had received their education. In October of that year, Frs. Battisti and Laudon left and returned home, and from there sought to be dispensed from their vows.⁵⁹

173. In this time, there arrived requests for new foundations. The Bishop of Borgo San Donnino asked for a House of Confreres in order to open a school: the Bishop of Parma offered to our men **the Seminary of Berceto**; the Arch-Bishop of Udine offered the College, already established, called *John of Udine*, but it was necessary to reject all these requests due to the lack of personnel. In Verona, Parma and Bassano, in addition to attending to the schools, our Confreres were dedicated to every type of preaching and in other ministries to the advantage of our neighbors⁶⁰: in Pavia, the Bishop asked for a third Priest who would attend to the night classes while the others preached the Parish Missions, but there was no one available.

In this city our men were seeking a more stable residence. After much seeking and attempts, they finally found one suitable for their purposes, near the Church of Sts. Philip and James, and they bought on March 31, 1887, for the price of 50,000 Lira⁶¹. In part, the house was rented and it remained that way subsequently, while the other part was ready for use by a religious community. There was space for a boarding house that some wanted to open to benefit the young university students. While our men were committed to the works of the sacred ministry in that time offered in the Church of St. Gervase had aroused jealousy and opposition from certain members of the Clergy, the subsequent purchase of a new house and later, taking it over [which happened around the first days of October], excited the wrath of those not happy with us and the really spiteful.

⁵⁹ Fr. Laudon later repented, and asked to return somewhat later, and he was accepted; however, in 1889, he left again in a definitive way.

⁶⁰ In this time, Fr. Sembianti was administering also other African Missionary Institutes, while dedicating himself continuously in preaching Parish Missions with Frs. Gurisatti and Zanini. Fr. Gradinati was teaching the five high school classes in Seminary. Fr. Zandonai also went each Sunday to St. Michael's 'Extra', for the oratory.

⁶¹ The capital was provided by the Bishop – in addition to this he would have to pay 1000 Lira interest annually, and our Fathers committed themselves to pay this.

Inflammatory articles were published in the local newspapers with unworthy caricatures and words of hatred, and about the city there were put up notices with messages such as: *Death to the Jesuits! ... Down with the Jesuits!* Processions were organized with the repeated chant: *We do not want Jesuits!* These rowdy manifestations were organized with continual shouting, and the protest passed right under the windows of where our men were living. They were hoping that the government would intervene and apply the law against all religious corporations. The Municipal Council on October 4 made an appeal to the Regional Prefect that he might decide to take opportune provisions to remove from their midst the causes which were disturbing public order. He, however, declined every responsibility for whatever improprieties were resulting. The newspapers assumed a real threatening stance. The cry was that if the government was powerless, the crowds would provide for themselves, as the first and supreme law-giver. The Prefect did intervene seeking information from Verona, from which he learned that these priests were no more than peaceful men and innocent citizens. As a result, he did nothing and the Masonic inspired uprising had to be silent, keeping its anger within.

Meanwhile, that August in Verona, Fr. Anthony Conte was ordained, and he was assigned to Pavia: and he went there about the middle of October. With his arrival, our Fathers took over the caring for the Sts. Philip and James Church, and got the university boarding-house plan underway, all the while busying themselves with preaching Parish Missions in the villages of the Diocese where they had been invited. The Bishop wrote of them the following year, 1888:

... These excellent Missionaries have achieved great good: their spirit is a spirit that is eminently priestly; they are full of zeal and are most humble men; they love sacrifice even to the point of heroism, and they sustain this with an edifying ease: they profess and defend Catholic Doctrine in all its integrity and in all its consequences, as well as the teachings of the Angelic Doctor and St. Alphonsus de Liguori ...

In this manner they were truly assisting that most zealous Bishop in regenerating that Diocese, in destroying the evil plant of Jansenism, that had one day planted deep roots there.

174. In Verona, there were two events that we should recall, that were celebrated in 1887: the Episcopal Jubilee of Cardinal di Canossa, and the Priestly Golden Jubilee of the Roman Pontiff, Pope Leo XIII. The former occurred on January 23: on that occasion there were celebrated in the Cathedral a most solemn Mass with the intervention of seven Bishops, among whom was the Patriarch of Venice. At the Stimmate for the solemnity of the Espousals, Bishop Brandolini, of Ceneda, celebrated the Mass of devotion, and a General Communion was held for Cardinal di Canossa, and also a medal commemorating him was distributed. In the evening prior to the imparting of Benediction, the ***Te Deum*** was sung in thanksgiving.⁶²

The priestly jubilee of the Supreme Pontiff was celebrated by our Confreres on December 22nd of that same year with an academy presentation, in which there was

⁶² On that day, in the *Verona Fedele*, there was published a special edition, in which appeared also poems composed by our Confreres, Frs. Vincent Vignola and Paul Gradinati.

also held the distribution of honors for our students. Cardinal di Canossa attended, as did numerous Monsignors, Professors, Priests and other personalities of regard: the **Verona Fedele** commented that the *academy* presentation was most imposing and solemn, and it surpassed by far the expectations of all. On that occasion, there was also sent a telegram to the Holy Father, who responded blessing the Superior General, the Congregation and the schools.

175. The Confreres of the House of Parma also held their own jubilee celebrations honoring the Roman Pontiff. In fact, Bishop Andrew Miotti had made an appeal to the young students of Italy to put together an album of poems to present to the Holy Father. Our men contributed greatly to this undertaking, and they were much helped by our own Fr. Andrew Sterza, who on this occasion had written a collage of Latin compositions. As time went on, following the advice of Bishop Miotti, he collected a number of those poems and had them printed in an Italian translation, entitled *A Duck on the Pindo*, which was published by the Fiaccadori press in 1888, and was dedicated to the glorious Pontiff.⁶³

Here we should also mention Fr. Richard Tabarelli, who collected some of his works and published them in the learned journal of Parma, called *The Echo of St. Thomas Aquinas*,⁶⁴ as a contribution in celebrating the Jubilee of Pope Leo XIII, he published a volume entitled: *The Absolute Optimism in the World*, which was also published in that city in 1887.

Meanwhile, in Parma for that scholastic year 1886-1887, there was added the 4th class to the lower elementary grades. In that same year, the new Director, Fr. Vicentini, initiated some repairs in the house, which were then continued also in the following years, in order to adapt some of the rooms as class rooms, and to set up a domestic chapel, which was inaugurated solemnly on May 9, 1889. In the meantime our Confreres opened a new oratory in the Church of St. Apollonia, which was later transferred to the more spacious St. Paul's Church. Through the efforts of Fr. Bertapelle this was furnished with a rather copious circulating library.

176. In Trent, in 1885, the Ordinary died, Bishop Dalla Bona, and he was succeeded by Bishop Eugene Valussi, consecrated in the Diocese in 1886, by the Pontifical Nuntius, His Excellency Seraphim Vanutelli. Our Confreres continued to officiate St. Martin's Church, from which in 1887 Fr. Anthony Oss-Balss was transferred, and substituting for him as Prior was Fr. Beltrami who in 1888, organized some extensive renovations.

In October 1887, Fr. Louis Morando was transferred from Bassano, and called to Verona and named General Councilor, taking the place of Fr. Charles Zara who had died in 1883. He had tried every means in order to better the school situation: after his many attempts mentioned above, he had tried in 1885 to open a preparatory

⁶³ In 1889, Fr. Sterza presented at the Concourse of Amsterdam his Latin composition, *Adam and Christ*, which received an award. Other honored works of his at this same concourse came out in subsequent years, as his *The Virgin Mary on Calvary*, in 1891; *The Seven Maccabee Brothers*, in 1893; and *The Poet taught by the Christian Muses*, in 1894.

⁶⁴ In January 1886, Fr. Tabarelli had been named a member of the Academy of St. Thomas in Parma; on March 7, 1887 he had presented one of his philosophical studies.

school, but this did not work out, just as the public examinations which were happily more than passed by our students in the years 1885 and 1886, but all counted for naught. He left those schools in a very poor situation.

To succeed him as Director, Fr. Joseph Zandonai came with the charge of studying the situation and to draw up a practical plan for the definitive organization of that house. After he had spoken with the Arch-Priest, a final decision was reached on February 12, 1888. The plan was to maintain: (1) the boarding-house, and the Sunday morning gathering of the Oratory, Catechism after lunch, with recreation in the court yard in the morning and afternoon; (2) the *paternal* high school classes with four teachers.

The following questions remained: (1) the care of the Church, to be cared for exclusively by our men; (2) our own house, set up according to the needs of the Fathers living there, near the Church, and sufficient for the classes, and with a garden; (3) a court yard large enough for the recreational needs of the young men living in the boarding-house; (4) a sufficient fund for the financial support of four Priests.

The Abbot responded to these questions with his letter of February 4th, and he showed in it that he was not disposed to maintain them, even though he did have great confidence in our men and in the Congregation. As a result in his letter of March 7th, the Superior General informed him that at the end of present scholastic year, the Fathers would definitively leave Bassano. In this manner, there came to an end of that House of ours, after 12 years of existence, which proved always to be a struggle and most precarious⁶⁵.

177. Meanwhile, Bishop Sogaro once more asked the Superior General for the services of Fr. Vicentini for Africa, and when he did not get him, the Bishop appealed to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith which asked for his services for two years, March 13, 1888. The Superior General, therefore, acquiesced – and so, Fr. Vicentini left in the month of August, and he was substituted for in Parma by Fr. Perazzani.

In the meantime, other requests came from Bishops. Bishop Riboldi of Parma, made the proposal of entrusting to our men **a place of restoration for Priests** that he wished to set up in his Diocese. The Bishop of Vegevano asked insistently for our Stigmatine House in his Diocese for the benefit of his **Seminary**, for the **religious institutes** of his city and for all the populace: but, due to the lack of personnel all these invitations had to be turned down.

⁶⁵ At the last moment, On July 7, there was presented to Fr. Zandonai in the name of the Arch-Priest a new proposal, supported by the Bishop of Vicenza. The Arch-Priest would have given another House, and 4000 Lira to renovate it, with the obligation of staying there for two years, and to stabilize a fund of some 1800 Lira. The Fathers would conduct the oratory, teach Catechism to the boys and the high school classes, and the Congregation would possibly have to add an additional Priest. These conditions as they appear here, were not acceptable because they seemed insufficient; therefore, Fr. Zandonai was authorized to continue the negotiations in order to arrive at better conditions but he did not succeed. Furthermore, on our side, there was much pressure in establishing a house in Rome, and personnel was even more lacking. Thus, our assignment there came definitively to an end

In 1888, Frs. Joseph Antonioli and Egidio Stfella were ordained,, but at the same time the Congregation suffered a terrible loss in the person of Fr. Anthony Conte. For about a year, he had been working in Pavia, and there he had won universal affection and esteem: he died after a very brief illness on the 18 of December at the age of only 32. He was a religious of outstanding holiness and of tireless zeal. So, his death was mourned bitterly by all, but especially by his own confreres and Superiors of the Congregation, who all held the highest hopes for him.

178. Let us come now to what is to form the principal argument of this last chapter. What we have in mind is the negotiations undertaken for the approbation of the Congregation. The Capitular Commission elected by the Ninth General Chapter and confirmed by the Tenth, for the revision of the old Document: ***Appendix to Part XII of the Founder's Constitutions***, had finally finished its work on September 22, 1887 and had formulated the responses to its work, that were submitted to a careful examination. Following all this, the Constitutions of the Founder were printed with the pertinent Appendices and the collected documents to present to the Holy See in order to obtain its approbation: all was sent to Rome, with an appeal signed by the Superior General and his Councilors. In this packet, there was also included the report on the moral, disciplinary and economic state of the Congregation⁶⁶.

Along with these documents, there were also added Letters of Recommendation from the Bishops of Trent, Parma and Pavia, and especially the one from the Cardinal of Verona. In his letter, His Eminence declared his full satisfaction for the services received in all times from our men, and the great good that they accomplished with their excellent preaching and their unalterable attachment to the Holy See, both in the field of doctrine and also in the practical life.

Fr. Richard Tabarelli was commissioned to present these documents in person. He left for Rome in the early days of July, and there he had the responsibility of negotiating and moving along the project for a foundation of a House in the Eternal City. Fortified with a special recommendation of the Cardinal of Verona, he presented himself to His Eminence, Cardinal Masotti, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He much encouraged Fr. Tabarelli, confiding to him that if Cardinal di Canossa had this matter so high in his heart, this was a sign that it merited approval.

In depositing the packet of documents for the review of Bishop Sepiacci, the Secretary of the sacred Congregation, Fr. Tabarelli presented a document to assist in the understanding of our Rules and Customs and to offer support for some points regarding the regime of the Congregation on which our Fathers insisted the more. These pertained above all to those points concerning the length of the Superior General in office, which most wanted for life, his absolute power in governing the Institute, making use of Councilors only for consultative vote; and the length of term for the Councilors which should last as long as the Superior General lives, and the

⁶⁶ From this Report, bearing the date June 25, 1888, we note that at that time the Congregation counted 35 Priests, 2 Sub-Deacons, 5 Professed Students in theology, 7 Student Novices, 20 Professed Coadjutor Brothers and 6 Brother Novices: in addition to these, there were also about 20 young Aspirants.

convocation of the General Chapter to be had at fixed intervals, but in the judgment of the Superior General.

179. Fr. Tabarelli had with him the Letters of recommendation of Cardinal di Canossa, Bishop Bacilieri, for the Eminences, Cardinal Parrocchi and Rampolla, by whom he was received with the utmost courtesy: Cardinal Rampolla to the step of offering to obtain for him a Private Audience with the Holy Father, Leo XIII, provided he could remain in the Eternal City for a few days. As for the foundation of a house for Stigmatines, Cardinal Parrocchi suggested the section called the *Meadows of the Castles*. Fr. Tabarelli had already taken some steps in this regard, and found individuals who would give him some land gratuitously, provided he would see to the building of a Church and that he would be responsible for providing for its care.⁶⁷

In the meantime, Fr. Tabarelli had received assurances that the documents that he had presented were in good order, and that they had been given to a Consultor of the Sacred Congregation, and so he left to return to Verona on the 14th of the same month.

The Consultor in question was Fr. John Mary Cammileri, OSA, and after his own mature examination, he submitted his Report, recommending our Congregation, in these terms:

... this is a very good community, and is most opportune in these calamitous times that are the present. And furthermore, it is highly recommended by four Ordinaries in the Dioceses in which it has Houses, who describe the zeal and the religious spirit that reigns among them, and the great good that they bring to the people with the Sacred Missions and administration of the sacraments, to the youth, with their teaching, to the Clergy through their retreats, and to the Bishops by placing at their disposal sacred ministers in this time of the scarcity of the clergy...

In conclusion, Fr. Battandier gave his favorable vote for the Approbation of the Institute, proposing, however, a few substantial modifications to be inserted into the Constitutions.

The Sacred Congregation however, in its Response of February 20, 1889 put off its Approbation, and ordered furthermore to work into the Constitutions the appendices dealing mostly with government, in an organic manner, introducing also several modifications, among which were the following: regarding the office of the General Councilors, in matters of greater importance they should have deliberative vote; regarding the emission of solemn vows, the Church no longer grants them to new Institutes - and the dispensation from simple vows, this is reserved to the Holy See. On the basis of these observations, the Constitutions of the saintly Founder were fused in with the appendices and worked into the text, and then placed again for the review of the Eleventh General Chapter, which gathered in Verona on September 25.

189. Also in this year, new foundations were requested. From the month of January, there was requested a foundation in Soresina, a place of about 6000 inhabitants in the

⁶⁷ These benefactors were the Superiors of the Pious Latin American College – the land was worth 130 Lira per square.

Diocese of Cremona, where the idea was to set up an oratory and a Sunday recreation center for the good of the youth there, for which scope they offered a house with a court-yard and a chapel. In the beginning, the foundation was accepted, but then some real difficulties arose, concerning the manner of working it all out: in the month of March Frs. Marini and Semibianti made a visit to the place, and they noted that the house was indeed insufficient for the purposes intended. Furthermore, at the last minute, personnel suddenly became unavailable, due with the rather sudden death of Fr. Anthony Conte, as was noted, and then that of Fr. Vincent Vignola. He suffered a stroke the evening of April 19, Good Friday, while he was preaching at the Stimate. Then, Fr. Morando suddenly came down with a serious illness, and for a long time, all hope was given up for him: there were others by then close to the Priesthood, in addition to Fr. John B. Tomasi, who was ordained on January 26, of the following year, 1890. For all these reasons, every thought of this foundation was abandoned.

Meanwhile, other appeals came in. In March, the Bishop of Pola and Potenza requested our Fathers to take over the direction of a Diocesan Boarding-house [a kind of **Minor Seminary**] that had been opened in Capodistria for the young men of the two Dioceses, aspiring to the **Priesthood** and who frequented the local high school.

In September, a Monsignor John B. Mander of Treviso, with the consent of his Bishop, offered to our Confreres the direction of a **Pious Institute** founded by him in 1880, for the young men of some age, who aspired to the **Priesthood**. If the Congregation had 100 workers at this time, they could have all fruitfully been employed in the Lord's vineyard.⁶⁸

181. The Constitutions in the meantime, after having been approved by the General Chapter were sent on to Rome, accompanied once again by a new Petition, dated February 28, 1890 and by new Letters of Recommendations by the Bishops⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ In 1890, an appeal came in for a house of ours in Mirandola, where there was offered a Church to officiate and a few rooms near by for lodging, and a very spacious garden. The matter was put off for a later time, and in the meantime, the Superior General died. And since there were other defections in the following year 1891, the negotiations were definitively halted.

⁶⁹ It merits to be recalled here the Letter of Recommendation from the Bishop of Pavia, who stated:

... desiring to introduce into my own Diocese some religious congregations of men, and following the information obtained from many Prelates and from other outstanding personalities, I received the most beautiful recommendations regarding the Congregation of Apostolic Missionaries ... And now I am happy to be able to say from my own experience, that this above-mentioned Congregation shows itself to be full of a most excellent ecclesial and apostolic spirit, and that the members who make it up, have been formed in sane and solid studies, both in profane learning as well as and principally in the sacred sciences, trained to sacrifice, zealous for the glory of God and for the good of souls, sincerely obsequious and devout toward the Holy See, and to the august person of the Supreme Pontiff, very observant of their own rules, in dependence on their Superior, they attend with edifying commitment and copious fruit to the works which the Diocesan Ordinary entrusts and recommends to them, with the genuine recognition on the part of the good faithful and our outstanding diocesan clergy...

Already that previous December, Fr. Richard Tabarelli had taken up residence in the Eternal City with Brother Alphonsus Guglielmi, and he was commissioned to busy himself about the negotiations for the Approbation of the Congregation, and also to establish a House of the Congregation in Rome⁷⁰.

During the first days of March, he presented the new redaction of the Constitutions, which was presented for the examination of Fr. Battandier. And following the favorable vote of the Sacred Congregation, dated September 15, 1890, the Decree of Approbation was granted. As for the approval of the Constitutions, this was put off to another time, and further modifications were ordered.

182. On September 24, of this same month, the Superior General had convoked the Twelfth General Chapter, which emended the Constitutions in conformity with the observations received from the Holy See, and ordered that these enter immediately in force. The Superior General, in adherence to the new Constitutions, resigned from his office, inviting the General Chapter to a new election. He, however, was unanimously re-elected.⁷¹

In reviewing the Constitutions, a first question arose immediately, on the *title of the Congregation*: since the Holy See did not accept the title then in vogue: ***Apostolic Missionaries for the service of Bishops*** - and suggested this other: ***Congregation of the Priests of the Stigmata of our Lord Jesus Christ***. To many this was not agreeable. After having proposed a new title that was also rejected, the Chapter decided to accept the title assigned by the Holy Spirit, which is evident in the Decree of Approbation.

Another question also arose concerning the ***end, purpose, scope of the Congregation***. The matter was a bit complex: whether from the words of the Decree, there should be understood that the schools were **an end equally 'principal'** as the parish missions: and the answer of the Chapter was 21 in favor; one negative and one abstention.⁷²

In passing, then, on the modifications to be introduced into the Constitutions, two Priests, Frs. Dominic Vicentini⁷³ and Joseph Marocchi, withdrew disgusted from

⁷⁰ In the meantime, the Confreres were living in a rented House in Trastevere, where in 1890, there was also Monsignor Andrew Ferrari, former Rector of the Seminary in Parma, who had been elected Bishop of Guastella. He was in Rome for his Episcopal Ordination.

⁷¹ In this Chapter Fr. Tabarelli presented the proposals to introduce the Cause of Beatification of the venerated Founder, and to petition the Holy See for a Cardinal Protector: both proposals were unanimously approved.

⁷² The good that had been achieved that had been conducted at the Stimate was evident for this school year there, 1889-1890: there were 350 students, of whom 193 were in high school. Cardinal di Canossa pointed out that they came from the highest levels of the local citizenry. In Parma, too, in the 5 elementary grades there were about a hundred students. Therefore, our Confreres attended to this work with ardor. In October 1889, Fr. Antonioli obtained from the Region the license of elementary teacher. In these same years, Frs. Louis Tommasi and Lodovico Lucchi after extraordinary results in their examinations at the University of Parma obtained the permit to teach in the Normal Schools.

⁷³ He had returned from Africa in October of the preceding year, recalled by the Superior General.

the Chapter Hall, and after a while, they presented the formal request to be absolved from the bond of their vows. And on the following day, Fr. Sembianti also presented the simple request for the same purpose, recalling a letter he had written to the Superior General and his Council in the year 1879.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ **NB: English Translator's Note; this Letter of Fr. Sembianti may be found in the folder of the IXth General Chapter of 1880 – and on the English Translation of the General Chapters, found on the web-site www.st-bertoni.com, section Constitutions, under GENERAL CHAPTERS, 9th. As Superior of Bassano, he asked to increase the school apostolate there as may be seen from his Proposals in the chapters of that era. Fr. Sembianti seems to be in crisis, with little to do with the difficulties on the 'End' of the Congregation, as discussed so ardently in the XIIth General Chapter of 1890. Here is an English translation of his letter:**

A MISCELLANEOUS DOCUMENT

[A Letter of Crisis?]

VV. J.M. J.

PN 321

Very Rev. and dear Father,

I received yesterday your most gracious letter, with the date of October 31st, and I am grateful again, one more time, for the most kind understanding of your Very Reverend Paternity. I am most sorry for having opened this wound, of which your Paternity speaks to me, and your grief only increases mine all the more. But, how could this be helped, my most loving Father, that these two wounds be opened when the most imperative reasons imposed them on me?... And what are these reasons? They are not at all secret, nor will I try to cover them, or hide them. I accept the invitation that Your Paternity extends to me; I will be obedient to my Superior at the Stimate, and I will be open and sincere, also on this occasion, as I always have been in every encounter with my Superiors. By this, I believe I will give to Your Paternity, and to all my Confreres, an evident proof of the rectitude of my intentions, and of the maturity of my resolutions.

I believe that I should point out to Your Paternity, that up until now in this matter, I have not forgotten at all, the 48th Rule of the **Common Rules: No one will take counsel from externs, without the permission of the Superior** – and in my own case, I am without fear of having broken it. The formalities of being absolved from the vows, I do not recall; I remember only that for Fr. Sogaro, there was not employed much solemnity, and that the *Appendix* existed then, as now. I do not remember exactly what the late Fr. Lenotti said to me, even though I was a Councilor, on the reason why Fr. Sogaro asked his release from the vows, as certainly he did not say it publicly in the Council, where he only exposed that all the means had been employed, and that they had all come to naught, to have him change his decision, and in insisting in asking to be released, he asked those in the meeting, what should be done. But, this makes no difference; the prescribed formalities, I repeat, I do not remember them, nor do I pretend that they should be omitted for me. The motives for my request, I will expose to Your Very Reverend Paternity, and to the entire Congregation.

I therefore, will be at the Stimate on next Wednesday, the 12th of this month, on the first coach, bringing with me young Tommasi, and I hope to be able to return the same day. And therefore, I do not think it is necessary for you to substitute for me.

I would be most obliged if our Paternity will continue to recommend this matter with me, and that all be done with holy charity, and in conformity to His divine good pleasure.

With the greatest respect, I am

Of your Very Reverend Paternity

These were the consequences of the profound disagreements that existed for a long time among the elder and younger members of the Congregation, principally because of the changes brought by preceding General Chapters, to the *Original Constitutions* of the Venerated Founder, these were changes that displeased the younger members, for the most part. Added to this was the aversion that some members felt for the ministry of the schools, and the great attraction that there was experienced for preaching, and in particular for the ministry of parish Missions: all this was **in part** the cause for the defections that occurred in recent years.⁷⁵

The Chapter, therefore, after long discussions, decided that it could dissolve the vows of Frs. Vicentini and Sembianti. Fr. Marocchi was given a bit of time to deliberate. But, this was not enough: the Congregation had not been content with the conduct of Fr. Cavinato, and the Chapter deliberated whether all the possible avenues had been tried to lead him back to the regular observance. If this were not enough, he would be dismissed from the Institute. And this is what happened: he left on October 12 of that year, and ten days latter, Fr. Marocchi also departed.

To all these, we might also add Fr. Zanini: he had asked to be freed from the bond of his vows in 1889, but he left definitively in 1891. These were 7 Priests, all in the flower of their years, who abandoned the Institute: and if to these we were to add the two Priests who died a little before, the Congregation in a little more than two years, had lost nine of its valid workers.

This was a harsh trial for our Institute, but it was necessary: once the Approbation was obtained, and the End of the Congregation established, and the manner of its government determined, hope arose for a new era for the Congregation, in which all the members would in perfect harmony attend to the good and to the prosperity of the Institute and its Increase.

Volume One ends here!

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Bassano, Nov. 5, 1879

A most humble son and devoted Servant,
Fr. Joseph Sembianti.

⁷⁵ In addition to those recorded above, in 1889, Fr. Vidali left, as did Fr. Laudon for the second and final time.