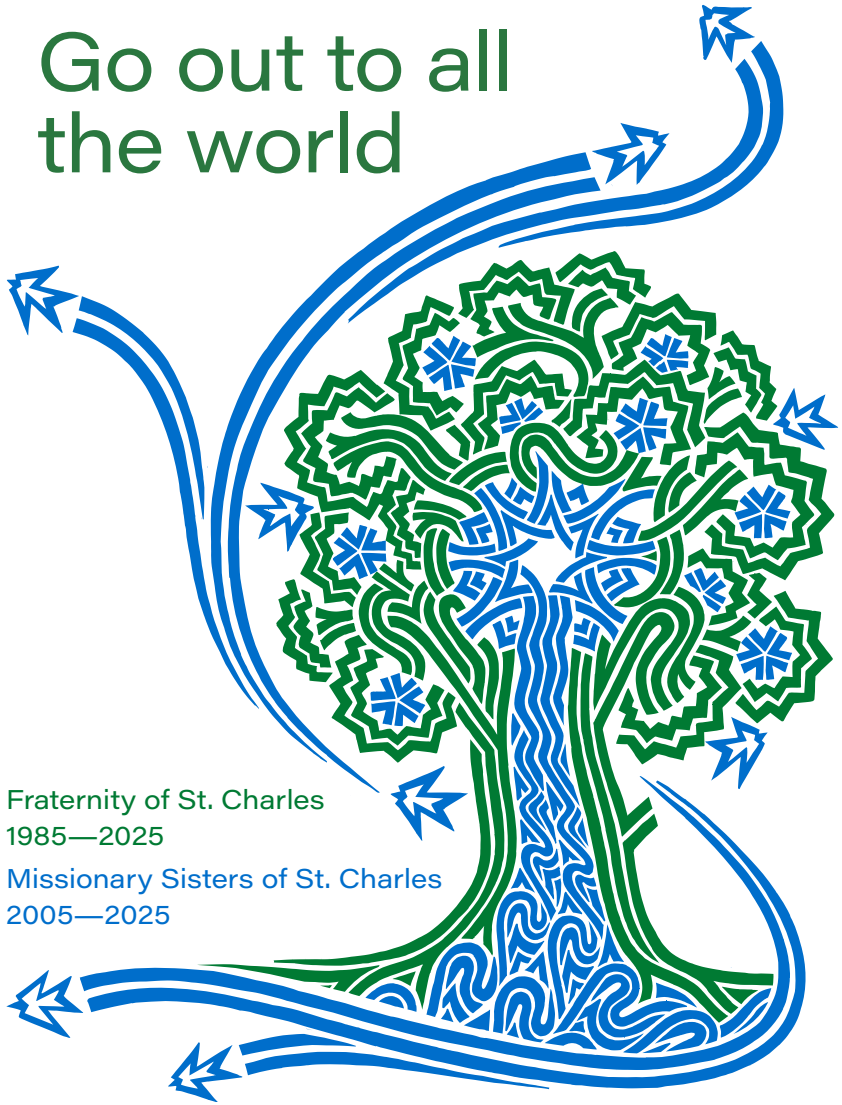
FRATERNITY
of ST. CHARLES

MISSIONARY SISTERS
of ST. CHARLES

Go out to all the world



Fraternity of St. Charles
1985—2025

Missionary Sisters of St. Charles
2005—2025

Go out to all the world

Edited by the seminarians of the Fraternity of St. Charles and by the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles

FRATERNITY
of ST. CHARLES

MISSIONARY SISTERS
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In recognition of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo and the 20th anniversary of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles, we are publishing this booklet which gathers stories from several of our missions. Each chapter aims to highlight an aspect of our missionary and communal experience and is introduced by a brief description of the context in which we live and work in each of these places of mission.

We wanted to tell these stories, selected from the many that we could have chosen, out of our desire to share the fruits that God has granted to us in these first four decades of our history, filled with gratitude for what we have seen happen.

The seminarians of the Fraternity of St. Charles
and the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles

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The Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo

The year is 1984. On the occasion of the audience granted for the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of Communion and Liberation, St. John Paul II gives the Movement this mandate: "Go out to all the world to bring the truth, beauty, and peace that are found in Christ the Redeemer." These are prophetic words because they reveal a desire that lives in the heart of God. Prophetic because they give form and clarity to an intuition that several men, present at that audience, were carrying in their hearts.

In September of the following year, accepting the Pope's invitation, Fr. Massimo Camisasca, together with six other priests, signed the founding document that marked the beginning of the history of the Fraternity. "The Fraternity of St. Charles was born from the passion that Fr. Giussani introduced into my life and the lives of several of my brothers; it is the fruit of what he sowed within us. It draws life from his charism and desires to communicate it as a missionary passion. This Fraternity was born not only in harmony with Fr. Giussani, but

together with him; I would say at his invitation."[1]

Initially, it was a priestly association whose purpose was to train young men for the missionary priesthood. The first house of formation was on the Via Liberiana, next to Santa Maria Maggiore. Later, in 1989, the association was recognized as a Society of Apostolic Life of diocesan right. The first priest, Agostino Molteni, was ordained that same year and immediately left for Petropolis, Brazil. "Mission is not our invention, the expression of our particular talents or passions, even if it can be nourished by all the gifts that God has given us. It consists simply of entering into the same mission for which God sent his Son to Earth and for which the Son sent the apostles and they, in turn, other brothers until the visible echo of that event touched us."[2]

The priests of the Fraternity of St. Charles desire to live communion as a dimension of their lives and the form of their vocation. During the 1990s, the first houses of the Fraternity began to spread in Italy and around the world, composed of small communities of three or four priests: the Fraternity is, in fact, a group of friends. As Don Massimo likes to repeat: "Men whom Christ has called to live together forever. The necessity of mission sends them to live far apart. But they live far apart as if they were together." "Forever": the certainty of these words can only come from an encounter with

[1] M. Camisasca, in *Fraternità san Carlo, Venticinque anni di cammino*. 1985–2010, pro manuscripto, Roma 2010.

[2] M. Camisasca, *Il nostro volto*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2016, 78.

Christ. It is He who pronounces them and gives them to us. How else could men live together and experience the joy of being one body? It is His mercy that makes their coexistence a true witness to the face of God. Even for themselves. And so, living together, bearing one another's burdens, they discover that they are children of the same father and therefore share common responsibility for their missions.

On March 19, 1999, John Paul II recognized the Fraternity as a Society of Apostolic Life of pontifical right. The Church, before the whole world, thus invites it to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth - according to the particular emphasis of Communion and Liberation. It is an important step because it confirms the prophetic value of the words that the same John Paul II had spoken fifteen years earlier. It also confirmed that what was given to Fr. Giussani belongs to the whole Church.

Currently, the Fraternity has 152 definitive members and over 30 houses scattered throughout the world.

The Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo

In the early 2000s, several young women, all university students from different parts of Italy, came into contact with the priests of the Fraternity of St. Charles. This friendship grew stronger over the years and, in 2004, gave rise to a request: to be able to join the experience of the missionary priests, ready to go out to all the world, living together in houses in a communal life nourished by the charism of Fr. Giussani.

The Missionary Sisters were thus born in Rome in September 2005, 20 years ago, thanks to the hospitality of Fr. Massimo Camisasca and under the guidance of Fr. Paolo Sottopietra.

Less than two years later, on the Feast of the Annunciation in 2007, five of them stood before Bishop Gino Reali who signed the first Constitution and recognized the birth of a new community in the Church. With each passing year, new members entered the House of Formation, and the life of the sisters took shape: habit, vows, the rule of daily life and the relationship with the Fraternity. In 2012, the Missionary Sisters were ready to open

their first house of mission in Nairobi, Kenya, alongside the house of the priests who have been there for many years: for the first time, the horizon of the world, a new culture, and a new people opened up before them. For the first time, several sisters went forth from the core group of the founders to proclaim the new life in Christ that they had begun to live together. Just two years later, a house was opened in the United States, in Denver, Colorado. Then in 2017 a shelter was opened in Rome, in the neighborhood of the Magliana. Finally, in 2019, a mission was founded in Grenoble, France. Today, each of these houses is home to five sisters.

Rome is also home to the Mother House, located on the Via Aurelia Antica, where the missionaries who work in the governance of the institute live alongside the young women in formation who are preparing for their final profession. "The house is the place where we encounter Christ alive and present, every day, in the life of the community, by participating in the liturgy, the hours of silence in the morning, the study of Scripture and the history of the people to whom we are sent; together, we strive to gain a taste for poverty that frees us from all that is not essential, virginity in our relationships with one another, obedience of heart to those who guide us; and finally, love for people, which makes us open our homes for a continuous hospitality."[3]

"I am your sister and your friend." These words of

[3] This and the following citations come from the rule of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles.

Saint Thérèse, patron saint of missions, which today enshrine the entrance to her convent in Lisieux, express the first movement of the Missionary Sister's hearts toward the people to whom they are sent. "We have encountered the meaning of joy and pain, friendship and the depth of relationships, forgiveness and salvation from evil, and there is an urgent desire within us to become companions to every person in order to tell everyone: you are not alone, you, too, are destined for this true Life." They are available to go to any country in the world and to engage in any task: with children, the sick, young people, and families; in parishes, schools, charitable works, hospitals, home visits, and in all the paths that the Lord wishes to open before them. "This missionary passion for the people of our time, which impels us to leave our homeland, families, friends, and studies, and to work with joy, has its roots in the passion for Christ who loved and chose each one of us, as the formula of our profession says: I desire to respond to Christ who loved me by giving him all of myself."

The Missionary Sister's habits and their whole lives proclaim Christ in an explicit way. By becoming companions to others, they invite them to stand with them before God. "Our life is held together by the adoration of the Lord, in praying the liturgy hour by hour and day by day, in familiarity with the sacraments. Every man thirsts for this, and this is what we wish to offer to everyone."

The ultimate desire of their mission is to invite ev-

eryone into the Church, into a definitive place, a stable community life to which one can belong forever. "The heart of every man sings with the words of one of the most beautiful songs in our history: if there is one thing I want, *if there is one thing my heart seeks, it is to dwell in Your house, for many long years, for many long years…"*


HEAR ME
ROAR!!

The Heart of the Mission

Mexico City

Tenochtitlán – the capital of the Mexica (Aztec) people, now known as Mexico City – is one of the largest cities in the world. Approximately 25 million people live there.

The urban highways, always packed with cars, divide the city into immense neighborhoods, which are lined with low houses built in orderly rows, alternating with large parks filled with tropical plants, green from May to November, dry for the rest of the year.

It was here, in 1997, that the Fraternity of St. Charles desired to begin a mission to accompany the nascent community of Communion and Liberation and to serve in the small rectory of María Inmaculada, which has since become a parish.

People from diverse social backgrounds live in the neighborhood where the mission is located, many of them first- or second-generation families who have migrated from other states of the Mexican Republic in search of work in the big city.

Precisely for this reason, over the years, several schools and universities have sprung up in the vicinity

of the parish, where our priests have taught and with which they still collaborate.

Little by little, beginning from the first young people we met and continuing to today, the experience of GS, called Compañía Juvenil [Student Youth], has developed, as well as a group of university students, or CLU.

An active parish life has developed as well, and has come to involve many others: some help with the education of young people, from catechism to university; others contribute to liturgical celebrations or the financial management of the parish; still others take on the task of cleaning the church every week in preparation for Sunday Mass. Finally, there are ministers who help the priests visit the elderly and the sick.

People from troubled backgrounds, carrying deep family wounds, come to the parish in search of God and often find in the small community of priests and in the larger parish community a home where they finally feel welcomed and embraced.

Since 1997, many priests of the Fraternity of St. Charles have lived in the mission

in Mexico City: through each of them, the Lord has wished to build up this small portion of His great people, under the protection of the Virgen de Guadalupe, who watches over America and our small community.

The mission in Mexico City, like every mission of the Fraternity or the Missionary Sisters, has a beating heart which is the house. It is in the daily life of communion

that the luminous presence of Christ is reflected, as Fr. Davide Tonini tells us in the following testimony:

> One of the most dramatic experiences you can have while in mission is meeting twelve-year-old children who no longer want to live, who do not believe that true friendship exists, and, most gravely, who deny the existence of love. Of course, when we get to know their stories, we come to understand many things. The skepticism that arises in them because of family dramas is then reinforced by a truly toxic cultural environment: it would seem that believing in good and true things is the naivety of inexperienced children.
>
> Here, then, is the first front of our mission: to bear witness to a different reality. Come and see: at the heart of these words that Jesus addresses to John and Andrew lies our entire raison d'être. But when we say to the kids "come and see," where do we take them? And what do we show them?
>
> We take them to a place, our community; we show them a relationship, our friendship, the Church. We are not here to explain a theory or talk about a reality that cannot be known, but to invite them into a lived experience, which happens every day and which can be encountered, described, and communicated. It is called communion.
>
> Soon our mission in Mexico will be thirty years old. This time has helped us understand that in order to make our mission fruitful, we must first and foremost take care of this place and this relationship, the communion between us. The social life in which we are immersed—beautiful and dramatic, violent and engaging, attractive and irrational—

represents an enormous challenge for a missionary catapulted into this country. Mexico is difficult in many ways. The warmth of the friendship experienced at home is an essential factor in ensuring that every missionary who arrives here can bear fruit.

So every day we wake up early to pray and meditate in silence: an hour and a half, every day, all together, to return to the origin of everything. In the small chapel of our house, together with the Blessed Sacrament, there are St. Joseph, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the Crucifix: they are the friends who support us. During the day, we return to the chapel to pray together again after lunch, before dinner, and at the end of the day. Looking back at my own history, I have always prayed with the people I loved, whether it was my family when I was a child, or my friends in CL during college. It is still the case today. The opposite is also true: I have learned to love the people with whom I found myself praying. For these two reasons, we pray together very often.

Every week we gather around the table for conversation. On Mondays, we talk about ourselves: sometimes we judge what we've been living recently, while other times we read and discuss a text by Fr. Giussani or Fr. Massimo Camisasca. Since I've been in Mexico City, the meeting of the house has sustained me greatly: here the truth about ourselves emerges: our limitations, the light of grace, our deepest desires. It is truly a sacred moment where I always rediscover that communion is nourished by communication.

On Tuesdays, we meet to discuss some aspect of the mission: the liturgy and music in the parish, the children's cate-

chism, ministry to the sick, the GS vacation. We try to share all our work, because sincere sharing with our brothers and sisters gives rise to joy in our missionary commitment. It is a time of building together, of mutual correction, of laughter and anger. How do we organize the Holy Week camp for the children? How did the last marriage preparation course go? How do we form the lay people who help us in the parish? What do we learn from them? What does what we are doing teach us? There are many points for reflection, but at the end of the day the same idea always emerges: no one fights alone in their trench. We serve a single mission, within the life of CL and the Fraternity of St. Charles, at the service of this Church, animated by the same love. Communion means understanding reality, because so many times we would take the wrong step if we were not together; but it also means energy to act, because certain challenges would kill the initiative of even the most willing among us.

Finally, we try to rest together. Every day, over a good lunch or dinner. Every week, we set aside extra time to go out together for a hike in the mountains or to visit a church or museum. Every now and then, we allow ourselves two or three days of silence in a monastery or in the country home of a friend of the community.

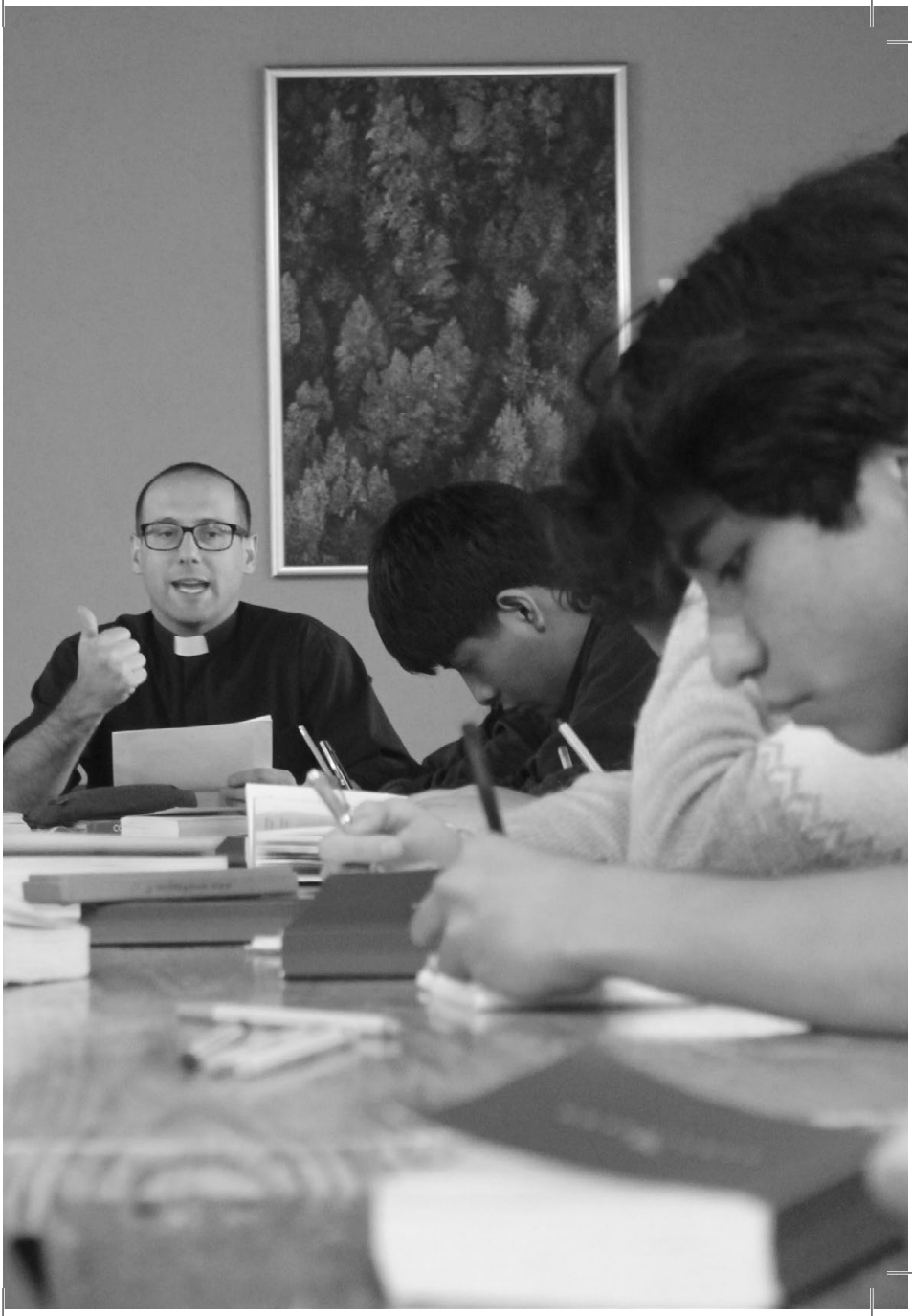
A game of cards, a board game, a movie: just like in a family (even here, there is no shortage of arguments!).

This is why the house exists: to preserve the unity that God has given us. "The men and women of the world, even if they are not aware of it, ultimately expect only this from us: unity. [...] Only if they see in our homes and in our per-

sons the dawn of this unity will they be able to believe in everything we proclaim in the name of Jesus."[4]

If it is true that everyone is waiting to find a home, a place where they belong and can give of themselves, it is also true that every person must recognize this deep desire and embark on a journey. It is beautiful to see how other homes are born around our communion: new friendships, small groups of young people, married couples who rediscover their marital vocation, families who begin to share their lives and accompany each other. In January, we began the "Families of John Paul II", a guided community with a rule of prayer and family life. We are proposing that they live like us and with us. After only a short time, they are already telling us about the changes that have taken place in their families. It's also wonderful for us to be with them, to enjoy their friendship and witness, to see firsthand that what has been given to us is truly for everyone. This beacon has been lit to illuminate the whole world.

[4] M. Camisasca, *Il nostro volto*, cit., 79-80.



The Revolution of Friendship

Denver, United States

When John Paul II came to World Youth Day in Denver in 1993, many wondered what was so special about that far-off corner of the American West. The seed sown on that trip bore many unexpected fruits, one of which was an invitation to the Fraternity in 2009 to establish a house in Broomfield, a residential suburb west of the city. In 2015, the Missionary Sisters joined to serve the community and the school of the city's only Catholic parish, Nativity of Our Lord, entrusted to the priests of the Fraternity.

The parish welcomes nearly 3,000 families, many of whom are young and numerous. They are encouraged to cultivate and deepen mutual friendships that can support them in the challenges of daily life and to embark on a journey of faith.

The parish school welcomes 450 children aged 3 to 14 every day. Several priests and missionaries are personally involved in the education of these children through teaching, chaplaincy, pastoral guidance, and collaboration with the school administration. Others dedicate themselves to visiting and accompanying peo-

ple who are lonely, sick, or in need.

This is recounted in the pamphlet To Make You Feel My Love (2021), which published the diary of Sister Marilú Arbesú, from which we offer an excerpt. The story raccounted in these pages took place between November 2021 and January 2022, in a clinic in Broomfield where Sister Marilú, accompanied by Sister Jennifer, met Fred, a 70-year-old man who was terminally ill with cancer and had requested assisted suicide. The names of priests from the Fraternity and other friends of the community appear at various points in the text. It is, in fact, a shared story, in which many people, near and far, played a role in the last weeks of Fred's life. The free and sincere friendship that the sisters, priests, and many friends were able to offer him in those weeks, and thus the initial shoots of the experience of feeling loved in a community, finally convinced Fred to allow the Father to choose the hour of his encounter with Him. It was a true revolution in today's society, where the greatest value seems to be self-determination.

Monday, November 29

Monday of the first week of Advent
and first day of the Novena of the Immaculate Conception

Today Jennifer and I went to the clinic, as we do every Monday. Josh and Fred, his roommate, were there, and we already knew that Fred was seriously ill. Seeing that Josh was anxious, we asked him why, and he told us that Fred was planning assisted suicide. We assured him that we would re-

turn as soon as possible, and when we got home we told the other sisters what had happened and immediately called the priests.

Tuesday, November 30

Feast of St. Andrew

We returned to the clinic to see Josh and Fred, bringing them flowers. Fred thanked us, but he didn't feel like talking; he was nervous because the bureaucracy at the clinic was dragging its feet. He's a friendly guy; he likes to tell stories and make jokes. We asked him if we could come visit him, and he said yes. However, he added "I'm ready to die."

Wednesday, December 1

We called Father Vincent Nagle to ask for his advice. In the afternoon, I went with Sr. Teresa to visit our patients. Fred didn't feel like talking: the television was on, so I sat next to him and we watched a western movie together. I hadn't seen cowboys since I was a child, sitting next to my father. I confided this to him, and he replied that he also used to watch them with his father: at the time he didn't like them, but now he does. I still don't like them, but I didn't tell him that!

Tuesday, December 7

Saint Ambrose

Fred was awake and angry: "No one answers my calls! Everyone is busy and I'm here doing nothing!" These words made me think that perhaps part of the problem is that he feels lonely and useless. I told him the story of my grandpar-

ents, how they went from fearing death to embracing their illness and accepting it. Afterwards, we talked about everything and nothing, until he asked me if I liked Backgammon, one of my favorite games. Now Fred wants to see me again: something in my relationship with him has changed thanks to a game of Backgammon!

Wednesday, December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

Today, as I was about to leave, he asked me point-blank, "Have you ever found yourself unable to be completely honest with someone?" I replied that this is exactly what I am experiencing with him: I know he wants to kill himself, I don't agree with it, but I haven't been able to tell him that he won't find the peace he seeks in this way. He remained silent. He thanked me for my sincerity, and then he said to me: "The real question is this: what is there after death?" "Do you believe in God?" "Yes." Then I added that after death we would meet God. When he asked me if I think God welcomes those who commit suicide after death, I replied that if he killed himself, he would be sending God the message: "I don't want the gift you gave me: life." He replied that he had never considered his choice in this way, and that he gets chills just thinking about it. "But even if you're sick?" he added. "Yes, but that doesn't mean you have to live alone with this condition: we can accompany you if you wish." We were already starting to think of friends who can visit him. Meanwhile, many were already praying for him.

Saturday, December 11

Fred didn't want to talk; he wasn't feeling well. "Soon I'll be gone. I wanted to thank you for visiting me; it meant a lot to me. Come back tomorrow, but early, because on Monday, I'll be gone."

Sunday, December 12

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Gaudete Sunday

Today, the four of us went to the clinic. I went in to see Fred alone, while the others waited outside the room praying the rosary. He tried to downplay his decision to commit suicide: "You shared what you think, and I am grateful to you for that, but that is your truth. My death concerns only me." I replied that, just as we do not decide when and how we are born, we are called to accept death at the hour chosen for us by the One who created us. He can even pray to die if he wants, but not to kill himself. Fred cut off the conversation. I told him that the other sisters were there and wanted to see him. He was happy to let them in, and we said goodbye through tears. We were heartbroken, but we still entrusted him to God's mercy, placing our hopes in Fred's freedom.

Monday, December 13

Week of joy!

Jennifer and I went to the clinic together. Before returning home, we stopped by Fred's room, expecting to find it empty, but he was still there! He didn't want to talk. We told him we were very happy to see him, and he thanked us for stopping

by. Tomorrow I'll go back to see him to better understand what happened.

Tuesday, December 14

Week of joy!

On Monday, Fred finally changed his mind. "It's just a temporary decision: next time I won't even let you know when I'm about to do it, you'll come back here and you won't find me anymore." I'm still happy to hear that, at least for now, in his freedom he has chosen life. In fact, today was different: we listened to Bob Dylan, whom he adores; he told me about his work; he asked me questions about the Church, the Pope, the saints...

In the evening, I went back to Fred's, bringing our friend Kristen with me. She wants to start visiting him, along with her husband Nick.

Friday, December 17

Week of joy!

Fred hasn't been feeling well since yesterday, but we decided to go visit him anyway. The four of us entered the room together with Jonny, Holly, Joann, and Sally. We sang Bob Dylan's Forever Young, Country Roads, and In This Wonderful Night for him. He was moved and told us to come back and visit him whenever we want. Now that our friends know him, they can go visit him, especially since we'll be busy with the GS winter vacation in the coming days.

Sunday, December 26

St. Stephen

Today, my sisters and I are going to the mountains for a few days of retreat. Before leaving, I stopped by to say hello to Fred. I tidied up his room, and together with the nurse, we changed the sheets and blankets and cleaned the floor and the nightstand next to the bed. Once in bed, he burst into tears and said he didn't deserve all that care. He wants to be a better person, and lately he asks not to be left alone because he is afraid. He feels that he doesn't have much time left to live. While I was tidying up, I found some small gifts brought by our friends and his granddaughter to wish him a Merry Christmas. We know they will visit him on the days when we are not there: it's nice to know he's not alone.

Sunday, January 2

Fred was very confused and his room was dirty. He wasn't feeling well. At one point he started saying, "But I want to die; please, let me die!" I asked him something, and he looked at me as if I were interrupting him. He told me he wasn't talking to me, he was praying. I remained silent with my rosary and let him talk to the Lord. I, too, prayed for peace for Fred. When he was calmer, I said goodbye to him.

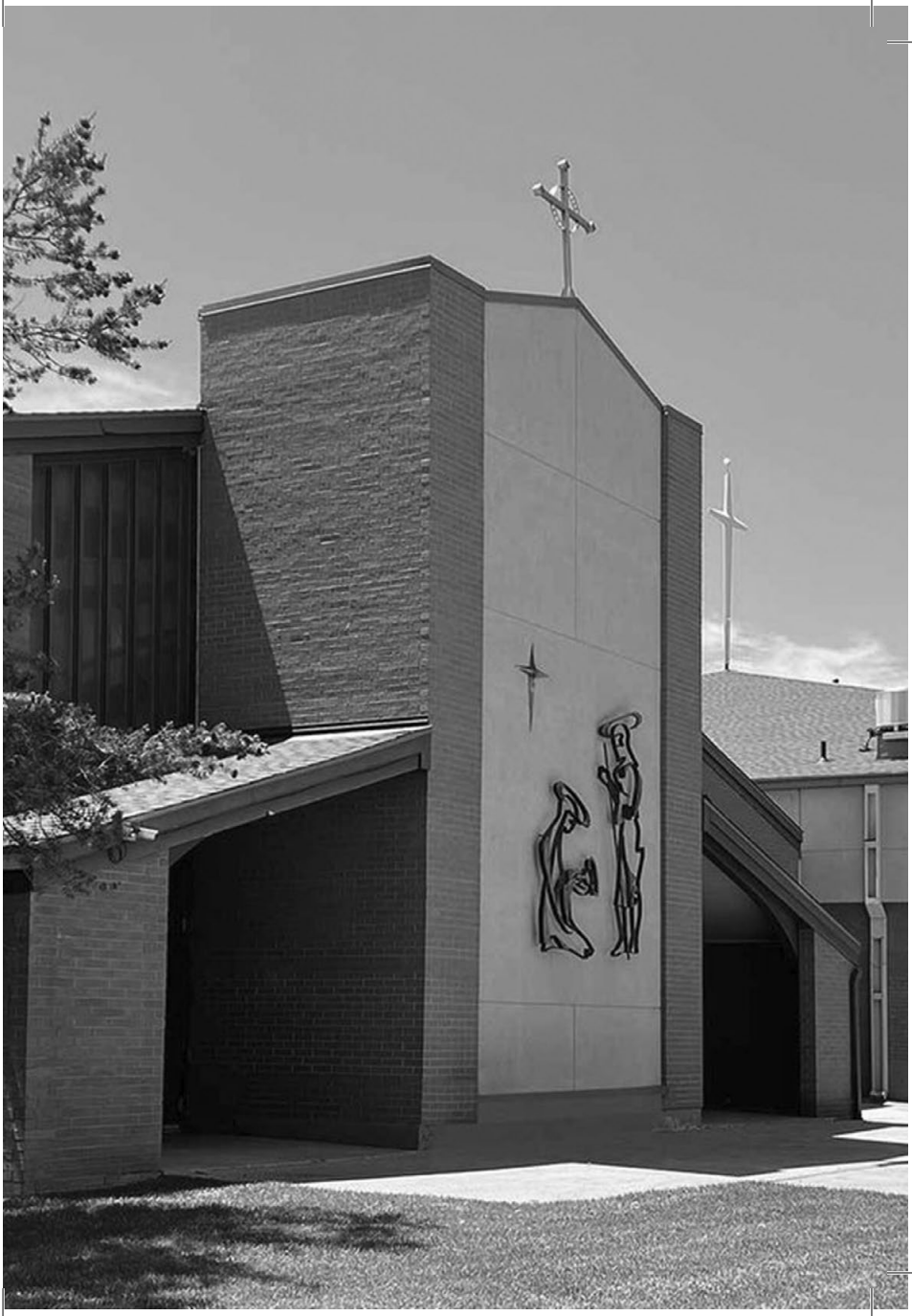
Sunday, January 9

Baptism of the Lord

Fred is dying. Kristen and Jennifer went to spend the morning with him, watching over him and praying for him. In the afternoon and evening, I went to visit him, too: there was

peace and a beautiful silence. Holding his hand, I thought about the great gift that the Lord has given me through him. During these weeks I have experienced in my heart a little of the longing that Christ lives for every soul, a longing full of desire.

Fred went to the Father's house on the morning of Monday, January 10.



A Visible Sign in the World

Grenoble, France

In the summer of 2019, thanks to the generosity of Monsignor Guy de Kerimel, then-bishop of the diocese of Grenoble, and the support of some friends from the Communion and Liberation movement, the Missionary Sisters opened a house in France. This is the first house the Sisters opened without priests from the Fraternity already present. The sisters live in Corenc, a small village on the outskirts of Grenoble on the slopes of the French Alps, a stone's throw from a church dedicated to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and next to a large diocesan high school. There they teach and are involved in the pastoral program offered to students. They also collaborate with the diocese through their presence at the public hospital and in the preparation for the sacraments of the many young people who ask for Baptism, a striking and unexpected phenomenon that has been taking place in France in recent years.

Recent French history has been shaped by a systematic attempt to make God invisible, inaudible, powerless, and irrelevant. Society is deliberately devoid of any reference to that which transcends man. In these first

few years, the Sisters have encountered many people thanks, in part, to the relatively small size of Grenoble, where it is easy to get to know many people. But above all, these encounters took place thanks to the visibility of a person wearing a habit: nuns and priests are called to be a visible sign of God's presence in the world. Thus, for those who encounter these lives given over to God, the hope of being able to meet Him is reawakened.

Every encounter, as Fr. Giussani says, can be an event, the beginning of a journey toward God who awaits every person. This is demonstrated by the two episodes narrated below, recounted by Sister Annie Devlin.

> On a clear July day, we decide to take a short hike in the mountains to celebrate Sister Mariagiulia's birthday. There are more of us than usual because we are joined by some sisters visiting from Italy. After lunch at the summit, we begin our descent, looking down towards the monastery of Grande Chartreuse, almost perfectly hidden among the folds of the mountain from which it takes its name. There are so many people on the trail: it is a beautiful day and the summit is close to an easily accessible refuge. Suddenly, we find ourselves in front of a little girl of about three years who is hiking up the mountain with her family. She looks up at that very moment and as soon as she sees six nuns she stands still, stunned. Although her parents gently tell her to move aside to let us pass, the little girl remains still and almost starts to cry. The parents flash us a friendly smile and pick

her up to let us pass. When we pass by, the little girl's father says to us: "Excuse us! It's the first time she's seen God."

***

It is a cold and sunny morning in Grenoble, and I am downtown running some errands. I leave a store, cross the street, and begin to unlock my bike. Behind me, I hear a voice coming from the left: "*Ma soeur*, can I ask you a question?" The tone is quite ambiguous, to the point that I think the person wants to make fun of me. So I reply half-heartedly, without looking up from the bike lock: "Of course." Then I look to my left and see a man, his feet planted on the sidewalk and his eyes fixed on me. He looks worn out by life, and I think he might be homeless, one of those people who, perhaps drunk, sometimes bother us in the downtown area. But the tone of what he says next is very serious, and the words leave no room for misunderstanding: "How can I know if God has forgiven me?" I stop, look at him, and he approaches. He is a man in his fifties; yes, a little rough, but with genuine eyes. "That's a beautiful question," I say. " Are you Catholic?" He looks at me again and nods, but then, from his downcast eyes and the shrug of his shoulders, I realize it would be better to rephrase: "Have you been baptized?" "Yes." "Then," I say, "it's simple. You have to go to confession." He listens to me, but a veil of disappointment falls over his face: "So I have to make an appointment with a priest?" In France, confession seems to be considered by many an outdated practice, even offensive by some. A priest told us about parishioners who were angry because the names of the priests

had been placed on the confessionals of a church so that the faithful could choose who to confess to. This was considered an act of clericalism. Seeing my surprise, the priest clarified: "Anyway, for these people, the confessional itself is a sign of clericalism." Outside of Lent, it is difficult to find times for confession, and people who want to confess usually have to track down a priest and make an appointment. For this man in front of me, it is clear that it would not be so easy to go. In the basilica of Grenoble, entrusted to a community of Emmanuel priests, however, there is always a priest present, who hears confessions morning and afternoon, almost every day of the week. At that moment, I thank God that there is a place I can point out to this man, a house of the Father that waits with the light on.

"Not necessarily," I reply. "Do you know Sacré-Coeur Basilica, next to the station? There is a priest there who hears confessions every day: he is there all the time, waiting, and even if no one comes, he stays there and waits anyway. You can find him." I see this man's eyes tear up. "I pray every night and ask God to forgive me. But I never know if I am forgiven." He is looking me in the eyes. It is a moment of precious truth. I tell him that he needs to pass by the basilica and that he will find the timetable there, then I think of reassuring him: "Don't worry if you don't know how to do it or what to say; go there, tell him you don't know what to do, and he will help you. It is not he who forgives you, he is a poor man like us, but it is Jesus who listens to you, who forgives you through the person and through his words of the priest. You will realize it." Then I ask him his name. "Pascal," which

comes from "Easter". The very meaning of his name is rooted in the mystery of salvation that he seeks. And at the same time, it consists in the fact that Salvation itself is seeking him. I tell him my name and he smiles at me: "Thank you, Annie. Thank you." Without adding anything else, he leaves. This dialogue lasts no more than three minutes. I get on my bike and leave, too, in the opposite direction, entrusting Pascal to God and giving thanks for the incomparable experience of being a visible sign of His presence among men.

A Village Within the City

Magliana (Rome), Italy

The presence of the Fraternity of St. Charles in the Magliana, a neighborhood on the southwestern outskirts of Rome, began in 1997. That year, the Vicar General of Rome, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, entrusted to the Fraternity the parish of Santa Maria del Rosario di Pompei, located towards the base of the large hill on which the neighborhood is built. In 2007, due to the demographic expansion of the area, a new church was built, personally consecrated by Pope Benedict XVI and named Santa Maria del Rosario ai Martiri Portuensi, where our priests now live. On that occasion, the Pope said that "the care we rightly show for the physical building is a sign and stimulus for a more intense care in defending and promoting the temple of the people, formed by the parishioners."

The social context in which the priests work is that of a working-class suburb, lively and marked by many different family and personal circumstances. Their commitment to education is intense and is carried out in various parish activities, aimed especially at young people and children. The encounter with families still takes

place largely through the request for the sacraments: baptisms, catechism classes for First Communion and Confirmation, and marriage preparation courses. However, the introduction of some new proposals, combined with a growing desire to spend time together, has allowed some families to become more deeply involved in the life of the community. Once a year, a vacation is organized for families, a proposal which rests upon the pillars of silence and conversations on the education of children. The "Fraternity of Husbands and Fathers" is a monthly meeting where the men come to support one another in being more present to their families. There's also "Family Sunday" when, after a relaxing lunch, the adults meet to discuss the challenges of parenting while the children play. In addition, the living nativity scene, the annual "Family Festival," and the opening of the summer pub "Il Santo Bevitore" [The Holy Drinker] always attract many families who find in these proposals an additional opportunity to gather, share stories, and discuss the challenges they face.

In addition to the priests of the Fraternity, in 2007, the parish territory saw the arrival of a house of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, who look after the old church and carry out intense apostolic activity in the neighborhood. Every day they open their house for activities with children, families, and the elderly, characterized by the desire to offer a place of companionship, where faith and life come together. For example, three Saturdays a month, about twenty

children accompanied by their parents or grandparents meet to cook together after a time for dancing and singing. Twice a week, children aged 7 and under are welcomed together with their mothers to spend the morning together in prayer, song, and arts and crafts. These activities arise from the desire to meet even the youngest children and their families.

In addition, just as the dads talk with the priests, the sisters meet for the "Moms' Dinner" with a small group of mothers from the parish.

Some young women who feel called to take their lives seriously and seek help in discovering their place in the world also live for extended periods with the Sisters. For this reason, they agree to live for a set amount of time with the Sisters, leading a simple but demanding and orderly life that resembles a family.

The houses of the Fraternity and the Sisters in the Magliana are part of a small village hidden within the streets of the city. They are familiar presences united by the same passion for people and the same encounter with Christ that changed their lives. In this "village", the different vocational forms enrich each other mutually, supporting each other's mission.

This is what Marco, a parishioner and father of a family, recounted in a witness given in
Milan in May 2024. Here are his words:

> Two years ago, the experience of the parish family vacation had an unexpected outcome. I want to tell this story because

Providence works in curious ways.

We were on vacation in a retreat center for large groups. The food was bad (barely edible!) and the schedule was very strict. The nuns who ran the house had imposed a "curfew": everyone had to be in their rooms by 11pm. It's summer, you're on vacation with friends, you have children... Putting everyone to bed at 11pm is a bit much to ask! So, led by Fr. Michele and Danilo, one of the other fathers, on the fifth or sixth day, the men of the group decided to organize a mutiny. We spent the afternoon searching for supermarkets where we could stock up on good food. The idea was to meet up after dinner with salami, cheese, and homemade bread and eat properly. The military regime had brought out that masculine spirit of protest that made us say, "No, tonight we're going to stage the Mutiny of the Bounty."

Last but not least, it seemed like a space where we men could finally have our say. Men normally don't open up much in the community gatherings. It's the wives and moms who speak up. Everyone was intrigued by the thought of having a space where we could be alone over a good salami.

Thanks to the intercession of the priests, we managed to convince the nuns to give us a room, provided that we shut ourselves in and didn't cause any trouble.

Perhaps it was the thanks to the joy of doing this almost childish thing (a little outside the rules), or perhaps the convivial atmosphere of camaraderie that after eating well and finding a friendly face to talk to, one of us said, "Fr. Michele, Fr. Paolo, what should we talk about tonight?" We couldn't just go to bed... No one had prepared anything, yet it was a

wonderful evening.

At 1:30am, one of the nuns arrived and said, "We gave you two and a half hours. That's enough. Time to go." We were so happy we could have stayed until dawn: with full stomachs, among good people, with that need to search for the meaning of life. We went to bed, but that evening the "Fraternity of Husbands and Fathers" was born.

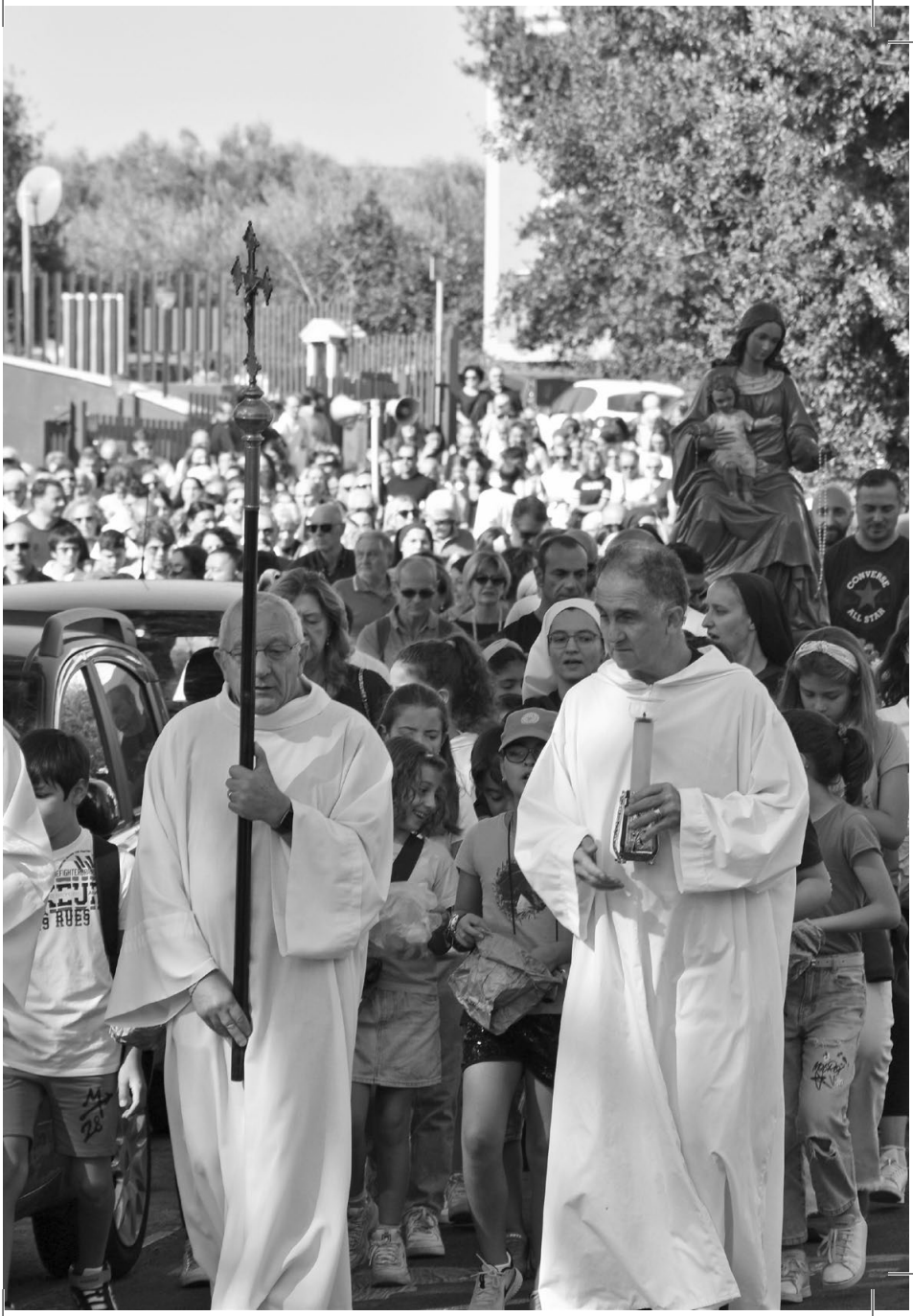
For two years we have been meeting once a month in the restaurant owned by one of our members, on the day in which it's closed. It is a third space, neither home nor parish, which has allowed many fathers and husbands to overcome the preconception that the only thing you'll hear in church is the boring homily of the priest.

Now there are fathers and husbands who discuss real life. First we eat, then we talk about ourselves, about our vocation as husbands and fathers.

At the beginning, it all started as a demand for a space for us men—so much so that we were tempted to call it the "Union of Husbands and Fathers"! But soon that group revealed itself for what it is: a fraternity. Fraternity because we recognize ourselves as brothers, sons of a Father who called us here seemingly at random, an unintentional and unplanned community. We want to follow someone, a Father who, through companionship, can teach us something and help us on our journey as "families in the trenches," which also includes fatherhood and being a husband. It is no coincidence that a similar group has also been created for our wives.

Along with the many initiatives in the parish, there is an attempt to create a village of families where you can breathe

freely because you find people like you, where you can recharge and start again. When everything is going wrong and my wife and I are in crisis, seeing another couple who may have already overcome that crisis and are enjoying their newfound communion is a confirmation that I am still on the right path. Then I start again and can once more take my place "in the trenches."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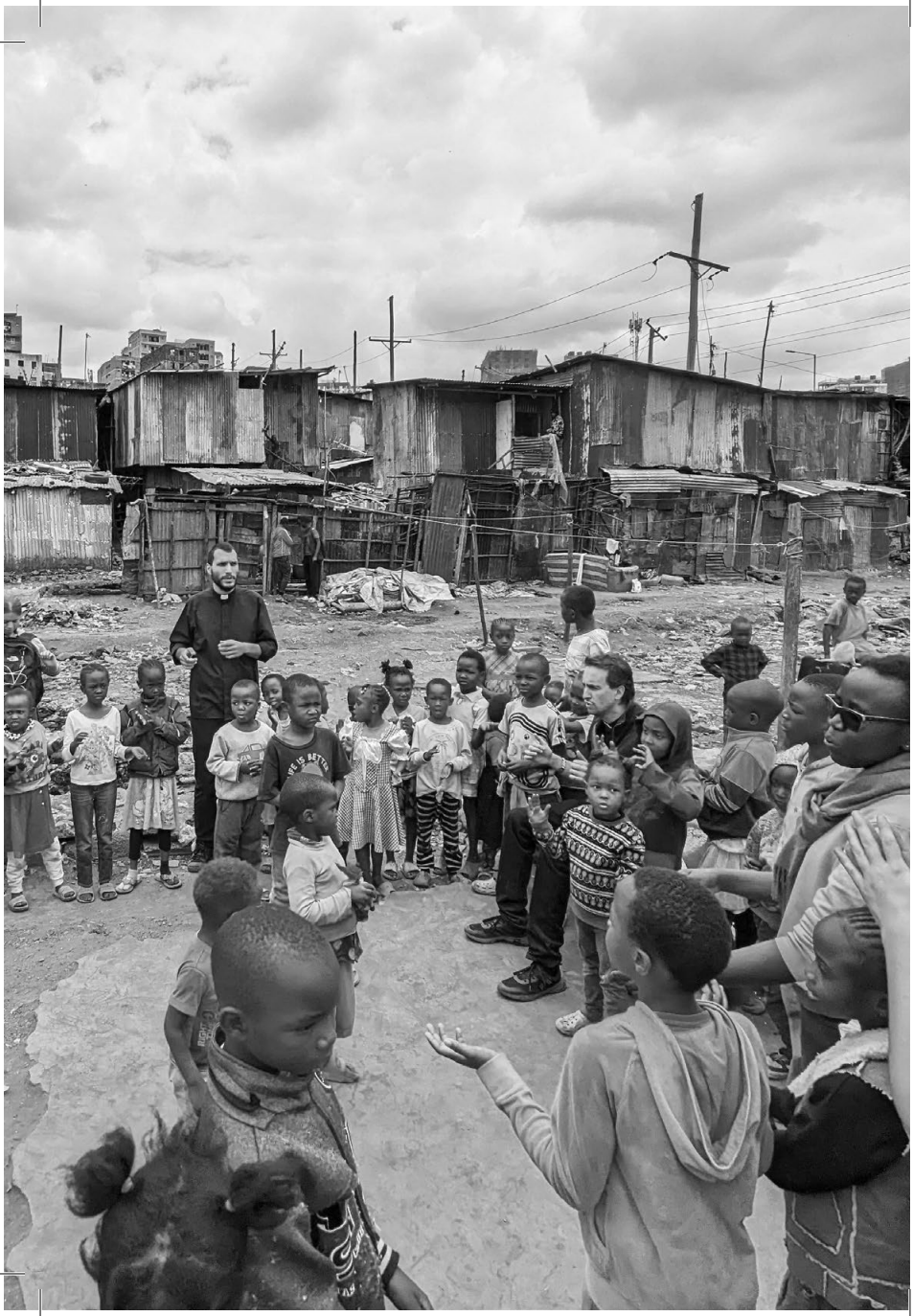


Responding to Man's Needs

Nairobi, Kenya

The house of the Fraternity of St. Charles in Nairobi officially opened in 1997, located on the outskirts of the city. In 2009, the new parish church, St. Joseph Catholic Church, was consecrated. The parish was built on the border between a wealthy residential neighborhood and a more working-class area, which was developing but still had pockets of extreme poverty. This part of the parish is known as Wendani, which in Kikuyu means "let us love one another". The name was chosen by a group of families given adjacent plots of land, who wanted to build a community full of peace and joy.

Over the years, various educational and charitable works have sprung up that now animate and support the life of the parish and the local community of Communion and Liberation: the Emanuel Mazzola Nursery School, the Urafiki Carovana Primary School, the St. Kizito Vocational School, the St. Joseph Health Center, the Meeting Point and Ujiachilie, dedicated respectively to AIDS patients and children with disabilities.

In 2012, the Missionary Sisters opened their first house outside Italy in Nairobi. They are involved in

teaching in several schools and assist the priests in the parish, teaching the children catechism and accompanying the many young people who belong to the parish.

In the following article, previously published under the title Under The Mango Tree ("Fraternity and Mission," November 2023), Fr. Mattia Zuliani recounts the beginnings of this story:

> The mango tree has a lush canopy, under which people take refuge during storms or when the mud-brick classrooms are unavailable and the children have to attend school. Its colorful fruits, suspended between heaven and earth, are a symbol of the beautiful season in Kenya.
>
> Our church was born under a mango tree because some Catholics wanted a place to pray, read the word of God, and share their experience of faith. They did not wait for others to prepare a place for them. They began to meet, and everything that happened after grew out of that.
>
> After a few years, given the increasing number of Christians, the cardinal of Nairobi (now Servant of God, Maurice Otunga) granted permission for a parish to be created for them. Fr. Alfonso arrived from Uganda, while Fr. Roberto and Fr. Valerio were already in Nairobi. They were the pioneers of the Fraternity of St. Charles in Africa. It was 1998.
>
> On September 17, 2023, under a clear sky and inside the "big church" that can accommodate 500 people, our parish celebrated its first 25 years of existence.
>
> The church was dotted with many colors, depending on the uniforms and clothes of the people who had become part

> of this story: children, young people, Catholic women and men, the disabled and AIDS patients, schoolchildren. The founders were seated in a row, simply being present, as they had been in the beginning. Just like the long line of priests, seminarians, and missionaries who accompanied and nurtured this mission: simply present, to serve the people of God.
>
> Thinking back to the mango tree, these 25 years have truly borne much fruit in works and people changed by their encounter with the Lord. One might say that living in this mission is always a bit like feeling suspended between heaven and earth. Like the mango: in the midst of the people, sharing their existence, but rooted in God who brings to completion what he has begun.

As mentioned above, one of the defining features of the Nairobi mission is the abundance of initiatives that have grown up around it. It is the passion for men and women, the desire to respond to their deepest desire, the thirst, whether conscious or not, for Christ, that has moved the priests and sisters to meet the concrete needs of the people by building schools, clinics, and shelters.

The sisters are primarily responsible for the charitable work for disabled children and young people and their mothers, called *Ujiachilie*, "let yourself be made" in the Ki-Swahili language. It was founded in 2007 by Fr. Alfonso Poppi, as a gesture of hospitality and charity for people abandoned and marginalized because of physical and mental disabilities.

Every Tuesday morning, under the portico of the

old tin-roofed church in Kahawa Sukari, three sisters, a few volunteers, and about 25 mothers with disabled children meet to spend time together. The meetings include moments of prayer, singing, games, and catechesis for parents and children. This commitment has opened the doors of many poor families' homes,offering the chance to hear their stories and to propose the Christian community as a place of renewal and hope. Many of these children and young people are baptized. One of the mothers, describing *Ujiachilie* to the new arrivals, said: "This is a home for our homelessness."

Sister Monica Noce tells us one of the many stories of faith, hope, and love that animate this charitable work.

> Among the most faithful friends of *Ujiachilie* was Daniel, a friendly young man with Down syndrome. Smiling and very sweet, he knew how to win everyone over with a smile. Of robust build, he moved slowly and walked with some difficulty. He spoke little and it was difficult to understand his words, but he was very aware of what was being said and happening around him. He had the heart and sensitivity of a child. He loved to color and was tidy, he loved moments of celebration with singing and dancing. The eldest of four children, he was loved by his mother and siblings. His father, however, had left home and remarried when he realized that his son's condition was permanent. At birth, doctors had given him only a few days to live due to a serious heart defect, but Daniel managed to overcome the critical first few months and many subsequent challenges, reaching the age

of thirty. Every time the doctors said he would live for only a few weeks more, his mother put everything in the hands of God, who had very different plans for Daniel.

Ujiachilie was like a second home to him. In the morning, he liked to linger in bed, except on Tuesdays and Fridays, the days of *Ujiachilie*: then he would wake up early, have breakfast, and head to the bus stop. He would sit and wait patiently. If, by some chance, the bus did not arrive, he would wait all morning anyway, until the owner of the shop next door took him back home.

When he did not come to *Ujiachilie*, it was because he was ill. Once when he was hospitalized with a stroke, I went to visit him and he greeted me with a huge smile. He asked me what time the bus would pass by there and then started humming the Ujiachilie song, which he loved very much.

At *Ujiachilie*, he loved to color, often with another boy of about the same age, who also had Down syndrome. When lunchtime approached, he would tidy up his crayons and go sit outside, waiting to say grace. When he had finished eating, he would collect his plate and those of his neighbors, taking them to the kitchen, then he would sit and wait for the bus that would take him back home. He loved children and often approached the younger ones, eager to cuddle them. His mother, too, when she was not working, would join us, making Daniel very happy. She was a simple, Christian woman. She was not Catholic, but she had a sincere faith in God. She had always welcomed this special son as a gift from the Lord entrusted to her and taught her other children to love and care for him in the same way. The abandonment

by her husband caused her a lot of pain, but she lived courageously and trusted in the Lord's help. She worked as a teacher to support her family. Daniel loved her very much, just as he loved his brothers and sisters.

This is a story of faith, love, and forgiveness. Shortly before Daniel's death, his father returned, asking to be reunited with the family. His wife did not welcome him into the home, but she allowed him to have contact with his children. When Daniel's condition worsened and the doctors discharged him from the hospital because there was nothing more they could do, he spent his last days surrounded by the love of his family, including his father, with whom he was able to reconcile, granting him his forgiveness. In the last moments of his life, his father was by his side. On the day of the funeral, his mother asked for the song Ujiachilie to be sung: "Because for Daniel," she said, "Ujiachilie was a second home, a place where he was welcomed and loved in a special way, a place where he belonged."


PUMA

To Bring Christ to Others

Novosibirsk, Russia

The Fraternity of St. Charles established a house in Novosibirsk, in the heart of Central Siberia, in 1991. When our missionaries arrived, after decades of communist rule, the few Catholics still present were mostly descendants of Germans who had settled near the Volga River, close to the border with Kazakhstan, at the end of the 18th century. During the years of Communist rule, many of these Germans were deported in waves to Siberia and the surrounding regions, and although unable to profess their faith and forced to live without priests, they managed to secretly preserve their Catholic faith. Many of them were scattered among small communities of one, two, or more families in isolated villages, some of which had not seen a priest for more than 60 years. Thus, the priests of the Fraternity of St. Charles have always been committed to visiting these people, celebrating the sacraments, and supporting their faith.

In the fall of 1993, they seized the opportunity to purchase the abandoned construction site of a café, and after much work finally built a church, now the parish of the Sacred Heart in Polovinnoe. A few years later,

thanks to a Catholic girl from Reshoty—a village 230 km from Novosibirsk—who had gone with her mother to a church in Novosibirsk, it became known that there was a small community of Catholics in her village where no priests had been for decades. From that moment on, the missionaries began to guide this community. In the following letter, dated September 8, 1997, Fr. Francesco Bertolina tells Fr. Massimo Camisasca a moving story that took place in the village. This episode highlights an important aspect of the priestly ministry: an immense gift received through ordination is the ability to perform the same gestures of Jesus, objective signs of his presence and power. Thanks to the sacraments, man can encounter God in the concreteness of the Eucharist, baptism, and marriage. So much so that a woman from Reshoty exclaimed: "You know, Father? Every time you are due to arrive, we wait for you as if we were waiting for God."

Dear Don Massimo,

The day before yesterday I was in Reshoty. It is located on the main road that runs from Novosibirsk down to Karasuk. Winding along the road, Reshoty is indeed a very long village. It is part of the province of Korcki, which in Russian means "small bridge". It is no coincidence that the roads of this province are full of potholes of all sizes. Since mid-May, I have been coming to this place once every three weeks. There's always a family waiting for me, a mother and her three children: Viktor and Natasha, who study in Novosi-

birsk, and Aleksander, the eldest, who is married to a girl named Olia. Aleksander and Olia have an eight-month-old baby whom I baptized the day before yesterday. This small village, like the many small villages in this boundless land, is not the best place to live and is not particularly attractive, yet even now, as I sit here writing to you, I have the distinct feeling that this village is the most beautiful place in the world.

I confess that I am beginning to grow fond of these people. I often think of them and repeat the words that the Lord once said: "May they also be where I am." The last time a priest visited these places was way back in 1968. It is said that he arrived at dusk and left late at night. Unfortunately, no one remembers his name. At that time, any form of religious gathering was forbidden. In fact, they told me that they had to be careful even within their families, because teachers at school asked malicious questions so that the children would out themselves as Christians. The teachers were very cunning, and to trap the children, they asked them questions such as: "Yesterday was Christmas. Did any of you celebrate this holiday with your family? What did you do?" I remember in this regard that, about six months ago, a woman who was born here after the deportation of 1941 told me that while recently watching a religious service on television, she suddenly remembered something similar that her parents used to do late at night when she was already asleep in bed. Back then, as small as she was, she did not understand that her parents were praying in their room. Just think, dear Don Massimo, this is the atmosphere that these poor people have lived in for years.

> The first time I arrived in Reshoty, a woman told me that on that night in 1968 when that German priest came, her fianceé was not in town, and so she couldn't get married. It was only many years later that they were finally able to receive from me the long-awaited matrimony. I remember they brought out the rings they had guarded so jealously for so long and made their dream come true. She was radiant with joy, and he was visibly moved. Their honeymoon was simply the walk home from the church on foot. After the ceremony, I offered to drive them in the van, but they decided to walk, saying, "This way the journey will last longer!" Since that day, every time I go to Reshoty, despite the very modest pension she receives, she leaves offerings for the church and for the Holy Masses I am to celebrate. Each time I tell her it's too much and that I cannot accept it. And every time she tells me not to worry and insists I not say anything to her husband.

After more than 30 years, the mission hasn't changed: long hours are still spent driving through the Siberian steppe to visit communities in the villages.

In 2023, after four years of construction, the community of Berdsk finally celebrated the consecration of the Church of St. Joseph, which Fr. Francesco Bertolina and Fr. Alfredo Fecondo still serve alongside the Catholic communities of Resurrection in Krasnozersk and St. Augustine in Akademgorodok. It is the beauty of a life given to God in the service of His people, as reflected in the words of Fr. Stefano Tenti in an article written

for the Fraternity's monthly magazine after a visit to the house in Novosibirsk (*Lives Offered in Silence*, "Fraternity and Mission", March 2025):

> One of the greatest privileges of my current role as the Fraternity's treasurer is getting to know our missions around the world. One important journey I took in recent months, together with Fr. Romano, brought me to our mission in Novosibirsk, the capital of Siberia. It's a large city with about two million inhabitants. In an apartment inside a honeycomb-shaped building among a thousand others like it live two of our priests: Fr. Alfredo and Fr. Francesco.
>
> The morning after our arrival, we got in the car with Francesco. Every week for the past 33 years, Francesco has driven over 400 kilometers across the Siberian steppe to reach the parishes he serves in two small villages. He is there from Thursday to Monday. Then he gets back in the car, crosses the steppe again, and returns to Novosibirsk where Alfredo awaits him. Every week, for more than thirty years: the same 400 kilometers, back and forth. We arrived at the first village after five and a half hours, having crossed endless stretches of birch trees. The parish building was purchased by one of our priests 33 years ago. It was originally meant to become a cafè. Over the years, week after week, Francesco transformed the building, literally constructing the little church, the small parish hall, and the rectory.
>
> The cold, the absence of any social life, the jet lag, the long journey, and the darkness made us want to go to sleep. I had already taken off my shoes when Fr. Francesco knocked

on my door: "Want to come see the stars? The sky is wonderful tonight." I put my shoes back on, we got in the car, and drove to a completely dark spot. Stepping out, I was stunned. The Milky Way was radiant.

There were so many stars that I couldn't even recognize the constellations. Francesco pointed out Cassiopeia and told us it looked like an 'M', for Mary. Then he invited us to pray the Angelus. Meanwhile, we were freezing. "Sometimes," he said, "when I have dinner at a family's house, I like to walk back just to look at the sky." "Francesco, come on, we're freezing out here!" "Yes, but the air is dry here, so you don't feel the cold!" he replied. In a place like this, you need a bit of healthy madness to survive.

We spent the next morning preparing cookies and tea for a little reception with the parishioners. Francesco had told them we'd be there and wanted us to share a bit about ourselves after Mass. Only two babushkas (elderly women) showed up for Mass. One of them was deaf. After Mass, they left. I ate a cookie with a hint of bitterness. "Stefano, here we play man-to-man, not zone defense!", Francesco said with a smile.

The next day, as we were driving back to Novosibirsk, Francesco told us that during seminary, a friend, Agostino Molteni, had given him a note that read: "We are clowns, but we have encountered something." He added: "If you look at us, we're laughable, but we've seen something. I see something that makes being here worthwhile." I never once sensed from him, in the few words he spoke, even a trace of complaint or disappointment.

When I think of a missionary, I imagine thousands of encounters, many baptisms, countless pastoral successes. But it can also happen that the fruit of 33 years of mission is just two elderly ladies. And yet, someone is offering their life for this land, for this people. I'm certain that this silent and faithful sacrifice contributes more to the building of the Church than the great successes many of our priests experience elsewhere.

One day, the true value of these lives offered in silence for the salvation of others will become clear. If one's gaze is fixed on that moment, then it becomes possible to freely give one's life, regardless of the outcome. I think this is Francesco's joy, a joy I desire for myself.

To Bring Others to Christ

Taipei, Taiwan

In 1544, Portuguese sailors sailing in the Far East passed a large island and jotted in their naval logs the name it would carry for centuries: Ilha Formosa, 'Beautiful Island'. Located 180 kilometers off the coast of China, the island of Formosa is today known as Taiwan.

In 1949, after the Chinese Civil War, General Chiang Kai-shek and his nationalist army took refuge on the island, fleeing Mao Zedong's communist revolution. Since then, the Taiwanese people have lived under the constant threat of invasion by the People's Republic of China, which still refuse to recognize the island's autonomy.

Catholics make up only about 150,000 of Taiwan's 23 million people—less than 1%. The main religions are Taoism and Buddhism, along with a strong presence of traditional Chinese religion and ancestor worship, a belief that deceased family members can influence the destiny of their descendants, either positively or negatively. Even so, the missionary zeal of Communion and Liberation soon reached Taiwan: in 1991, a small CL community took root around a young married couple

from Rimini. In 1997, they invited Archbishop Joseph Ti-kang of Taipei to the Rimini Meeting. There, he became acquainted with the Movement, beginning a relationship of mutual esteem that culminated in the invitation to open a house of the Fraternity of St. Charles on the island.

The house in Taipei was officially established in September 2001 by two newly-ordained deacons of the Fraternity. Over the years, the mission has grown, and our priests are now entrusted with two parishes: St. Francis Xavier in Tai Shan and St. Paul in Xin Zhuang.

Both parishes are near Fu Jen Catholic University, where the missionaries have had the opportunity to teach Italian from the start. Over the years, this role has allowed them to meet many young people and witness first-hand the miracle of many conversions. Today, the house in Taiwan has five priests.

In the article below, Fr. Paolo Costa recounts one of the many episodes of conversion that began in the university classroom. His testimony reveals how the fundamental task of a priest is to accompany people to a personal encounter with Christ, which finds its fullest and most complete expression in the sacraments.

> Raffaele Xu had been one of my Italian students. He wasn't one of those who didn't know what to do in life—he had clear goals. After graduating, he continued his studies with a master's program, first in Taiwan, then in Italy. During his studies, he began teaching Italian at some of the island's

high schools. His students loved him. He had recently found a job at the offices of the Italian delegation in Taipei and was dating a lovely girl, Clara, also one of our Italian students.

At the end of January, I received several phone calls saying that Raffaele had been hospitalized. His sister told me that just days earlier, while in the car with her, he had collapsed over the steering wheel. He recovered briefly but then relapsed: his heart had stopped. Now he was in a coma, in intensive care, kept alive by an artificial heart.

When I arrived at the hospital, his sister told me she believed Raffaele was a Christian. She said that while studying in Italy, he had bought a ring with the Lord's Prayer inscribed on it. She had seen him praying at night, holding that ring. She wanted him baptized before the machines keeping him alive were disconnected. His parents and twin brother were also at the hospital. I explained to them what I was about to do. For a Taiwanese family, a child becoming Catholic is a serious matter—almost like losing them forever. A Christian child, they fear, will no longer fulfill the "spiritual" duties toward their parents, such as performing the necessary rites for the dead so that they may survive worthily in the afterlife, sustained by prayers, food, incense, and money.

With the parents' consent, I entered the ICU and saw Raffaele lying in bed, unconscious and with a breathing tube. His condition was truly critical. I baptized him, administered confirmation, and the anointing of the sick. A few days later, I returned with the whole family. The doctors had said there was no hope. In my heart, I kept hoping Raf-

faele would wake up, sit up in bed, and speak with us—but perhaps God had other miracles in store.

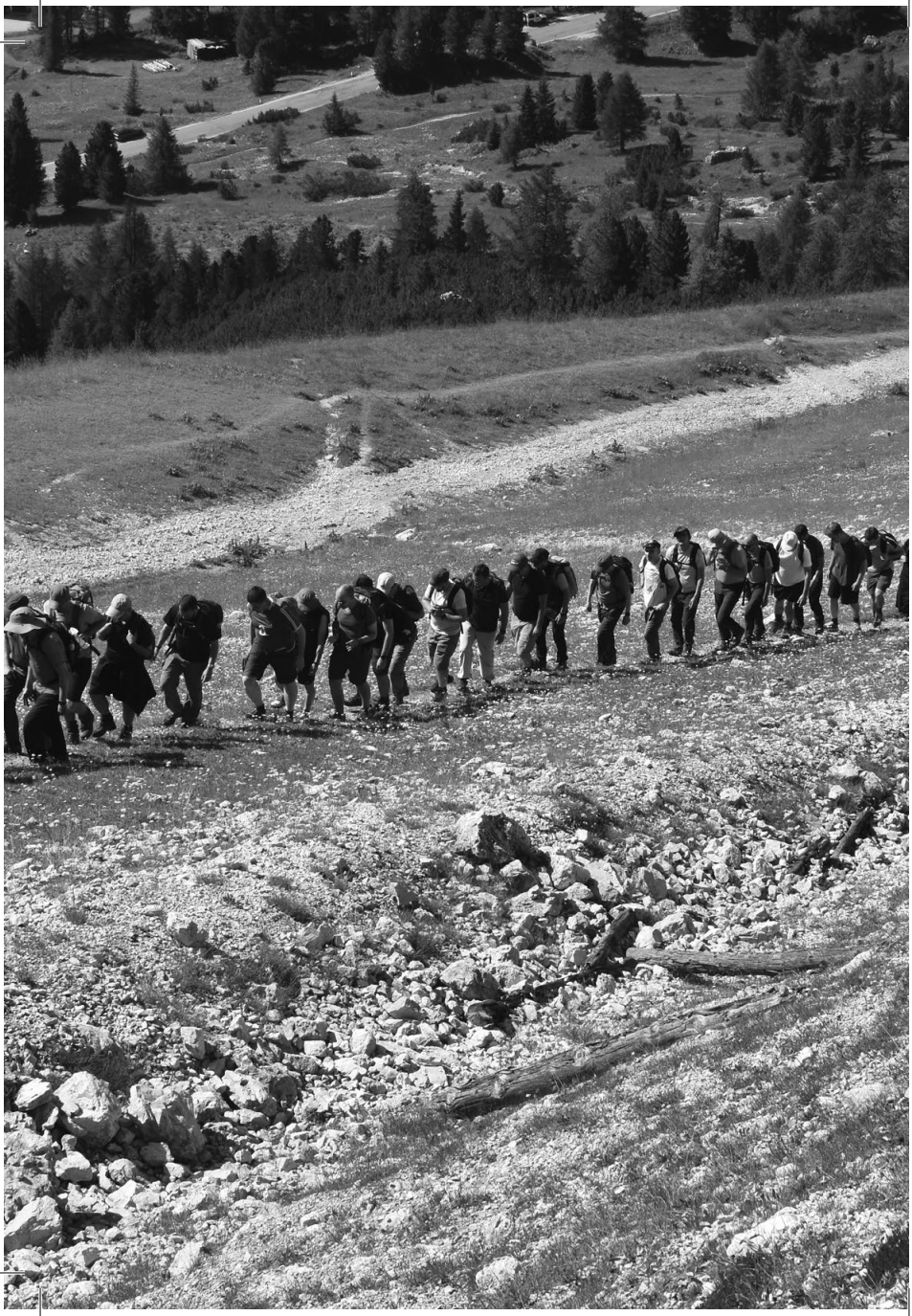
The moment came when Raffaele began to slip away. We prayed the rosary together. His mother especially could not bear the silence—it's a remnant of their religion, where death is met not with silence but with a torrent of ritual formulas, to ensure the soul finds its way and does not wander the earth.

I've seen many deaths in my years as a parish priest, but watching Raffaele's parents, sister, and twin brother say goodbye to him was hard even for me. I asked God for the strength to be a sign of hope for this family. We scheduled the funeral together, which was held in our parish of St. Paul, even though the family lived in another city on the coast.

That day, to my great surprise, the church was full. The choir was all there, representatives of the Italian office came, and alongside the family were many friends, Italian language students, and professors. The homily was the hardest part—just a few words: life isn't measured by achievements or by how long it lasts. In the world's eyes, Raffaele's life was too short—only 28 years—we would have liked more time with him. But in God's eyes, it was complete. And in the end, he received the greatest gift a man can have: baptism and eternal life.

It seemed like the story had ended with that funeral. But soon after, I received a message from Raffaele's sister: his mother, to remain close to her Catholic son, had started going to church. She attended Mass and took part in catechism. She was baptized with the name Lucia. I was moved

to tears. I replied that it was a sign her son was truly in Heaven and from there was changing the lives of his family. It is the miracle that God continues to work through Raffaele's life.



On September 14, 1985, Monsignor Massimo Camisasca, together with six other priests, founded the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo. The members of the Fraternity live together in houses of three or more. Their communal life is meant to sustain them in the daily work of mission, guide them on the path of conversion, and serve as the primary form through which they live out their priesthood.

Currently, the Fraternity has 152 permanent members and 31 mission houses spread across four continents, in addition to the House of Formation in Rome.

In 2013, Fr. Paolo Sottopietra was elected Superior General.

The experience of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo began in 2005, when Rachele Paiusco moved to Rome with several other young women. Welcomed by Monsignor Camisasca and under the guidance of Fr. Paolo Sottopietra, they desired to live a consecrated missionary life shaped by the charism of Communion and Liberation.

Currently, the Missionary Sisters number 25 definitive professed members, living in 4 mission houses and the House of Formation in Rome.

In 2013, Sister Rachele Paiusco was named Superior General.