

# THE HISTORY OF THE MISSION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS INSERTED IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION (1929-1952)

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## Introduction: “Cast in to the deep”

“Cast in to the deep” is the command of John Paul II at the beginning of the millennium. In fact, it is the command of Jesus to Peter and the other disciples, therefore, to the church for all times. At the same time, it is an interior urgency dictated by the Holy Spirit, which drives the church and its members to leave their places of security and go beyond all boundaries in places where the Good news should be announced.

The first article of the constitution of the FMA expresses this characteristic of the institute as follows:

*“Through the gift of the Holy Spirit  
and the direct intervention of Mary,  
St. John Bosco  
Founded our Institute  
as a response of salvation  
to the profound hopes of young girls.  
He endowed it with a spiritual heritage that had  
its inspiration in the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd,  
and imparted to it a strong missionary impulse”.  
(Const.1)*

The history of the mission of the FMA in Japan, therefore inserts itself in the history of the salvation of humanity and in particular to that page of history written by our founders.

## PART I

### 1. Strong missionary impulse

In 1958, Don Bosco founded the Salesian Society in Turin for the education of boys. In 1972, at Mornese with an equal thirst for the salva-

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tion of the young through education, Mary Mazzarello started caring for a group of young girls. This providential encounter with Don Bosco brings about the establishment of the FMA.

The purpose of the Institute as mentioned in the Constitution, is to “participate in the salvific mission of Christ in the church, by adopting a project of christian education based on the Preventive System”. This is what all the Salesian and FMA missionaries opted for at all times together with all the members of the Salesian family.

In 1875, Don Bosco sent his first missionaries to Argentina, and in 1877, a second expedition went to Uruguay. The first missionaries of the FMA accompanied them to start together the educational work based on the “Preventive System”. Therefore, after only five years, the FMA and the Salesians were collaborating and trying to strengthen their mission. Looking at the chronicles of that period we see the intensity of the missionary fervor that the letters of the first missionaries were creating that spurred the desire of many to want to leave for the Missions. Mother Mazzarello herself, had that desire but her poor health and the fact that she was the Superior of the Order prevented her from fulfilling this dream. However, through her letters to the first missionaries we see that she was living the mission in a unique manner, in the essence of the desire to “save souls”.

In 1925, on the golden jubilee of the Salesian Mission, the first missionaries headed by Fr. Cimatti left for Japan where they established their mission in the Miyazaki prefecture in the south of the country.

Two years later in 1927, Fr. Cimatti expressed his desire to have the FMA in Japan, to the Vicar General, Fr. Ricaldone, on the occasion of his visit to Japan. After having pondered over this matter, on 12 September 1928, Fr. Cimatti wrote a letter to the third superior general of the FMA, Mother Luisa Vaschetti, requesting explicitly for the missionaries to come to Japan. On 19 October of the same year, Fr. Cimatti who was responsible for the Region of Miyazaki, wrote again to the superior general and obtained a positive answer as noted in the letter of 22 November 1928.

Sr. Letizia Begliatti at 44 became the corner stone of the FMA in Japan. Her mature age made her well qualified. Mother Vaschetti from Nizza, responsible for the mission in Tortona, wrote the following letter to Sr. Letizia:

“In confidence between the two of us: do you feel that you have a vocation for the mission? Yesterday while praying the rosary, the thought of the in-

auguration of the missions in Japan crossed my mind, not having someone to head the mission, your name crossed my mind. What do you think? Pray and answer me in Turin, but don't try to tell me that you are not capable etc., etc. ...tell me simply yes or no. The rest is in the hands of the Lord and we shall see". Sr. Letizia's response is the following: "Mother, if you believe that this is the will of God, overlooking all the deficiencies of an unworthy subject, I recommend myself with all my heart to our Beatified (Don Bosco) here present in his relic and implore him for us, so that you will not make a mistake by choosing me an unworthy servant, and I give you from my heart, inspite of all my fears, my cordial, humble, yes!". I seem to hear the words of Mary. 'Let it be done unto me according to your Word'".<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Arrival of the FMA in Japan**

The first group of six missionaries destined for Japan was composed of the following: Sr. Begliatti, head of the expedition, and five young Sisters: Sr. Conte M. Giovanna; Sr. Gregorat Teresa; Sr. Mozin Sibilla; Sr. Reynaud Adele and Sr. Tomatis Maria. They sailed from Venice on 22 October 1929 with the third expedition of the Salesians consisting of three additional missionaries headed by Fr. Mario Marega. The journey lasted 54 days. On 14 December 1929, they dock at the port of Kobe, in Japan. Several days later, they arrived at their final destination at Miyazaki and were welcomed by the Salesians and many good native Christians. Fr. Cimatti was absent; he was in Italy for the beatification of Don Bosco. The welcome to the new arrivals was given in Italian by a young Japanese girl, Hana Hirate, to whom Fr. Cimatti had taught Italian and was preparing to become the first native aspirant of the FMA.

Fr. Margiaria, one of the first missionaries who died several years ago, testified:

"The Sisters settled in a rented house given to them by us. They began immediately to study the language and helped in the church in all that they could... The missionary ardor at that time was certainly apostolic and it is wonderful to recall the memory. Miyazaki was only the springboard of the FMA work that would expand in the future. The situation at Miyazaki was not without difficulties..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf M. D. GRASSIANO, *La Montagna solitaria*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

Before proceeding with the mission started by the FMA in Japan, the following is a prospectus that shows the vitality and importance given by the Center to the mission.

PROSPECTUS OF THE MISSIONARIES

EXP.	YEAR	NAME	ORIGIN	NOTES
I	1929	Sr. Begliatti Letizia	Italy	+13/7/1963
		Sr. Conte Giovanna	Italy	+11/5/1960
		Sr. Gregorat Teresa	Italy	+14/1/1948
		Sr. Mozin Sibilla	Germany	Back to Germany
		Sr. Reynaud Adele	Italy	Back to Italy
		Sr. Tomatis Maria	Italy	+2/5/1997
II	1930	Sr. Fantoli Antonia	Italy	+24/5/1991
		Sr. Probst Margherita	Germany	+18/4/2003
		Sr. Carmela Solari	Italy	+28/2/1985
				(1957-1968 Korea)
III	1931	Sr. Gazzada Giuseppina	Italy	+18/10/1975
		Sr. Grossi Santina	Italy	+9/3/1978
IV	1935	Sr. Graf Teresa	Germany	+20/12/1987
		Sr. Quagliosi Ottilia	Italy	Back to Italy
		Sr. Scrivano Giovanna	Italy	+20/8/1990
V	1938	Sr. Bianco Margherita	Italy	+11/4/2001
		Sr. Motta Maria	Switzerland	+20/8/1990
VI	1939	Sr. Barone Angiolina	Italy	
		Sr. Morando Mafalda	Italy	Back to Italy
VII	1940	Sr. Baratto Annalisa	Italy	
		Sr. Pietrobelli Maria	Italy	(Provincial '58- '68)
VIII	1947	Sr. Pravisano Gioconda	Italy	Back to Italy
		Sr. Tarraran Angela	Italy	Back to Italy
IX	1950	Sr. Bertuletti Anna	Italy	
		Sr. Boni Rita	Italy	+21/8/1999
		Sr. Broccardo Francesca	Italy	Back to Italy
		Sr. Gindri Annita	Italy	Back to Italy
		Sr. Marcuzzo Margherita	Italy	
		Sr. Zaninetti Giuseppina	Italy	(Provincial '68- '74)
X	1950	Sr. Cardin Gina	Italy	
		Sr. Perossi M. Bambina	Italy	Back to Italy
XI	1952	Sr. Avoledo Nice	Italy	Left the Institute
		Sr. Gritti Ancilla	Italy	
		Sr. Marazzi Maria	Italy	Back to Italy
XII	1952	Sr. Righele Adelaide	Italy	+17/4/2001
XIII	1952	Sr. Morosini Giuseppina	Italy	
XIV	1953	Sr. Broccardo Maria	Italy	Back to Italy
XV	1955	Sr. Costa Maria		
		Sr. Rother Ruth	Germany	
XVI	1956	Sr. Aguilar M. Fanny	Columbia	1989 Bolivia
XVII	1960	Sr. Galli Teodolinda	Italy	
XVIII	1976	Sr. Gambato Marisa	Italy	



When it concerns the life of the FMA at the beginning of the mission, the author of “the solitary mountain” writes as follows:

“Quasi immediately started the disputes with the Sisters... Were they not for the service of the mission that is of the parish? But how? For what reason? In everything and for everything. And like the parish priest wanted as a right. However the superior had in her hand a small book, small few pages and yet valuable: it was called ‘the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians’ and it had the papal stamp”.<sup>3</sup>

Sr. Letizia who was in charge of the development of the young mission was determined to follow the course and not deviate from it, not only for her sake but also for that of the Sisters...

We notice that the agreement reached between Fr. Rinaldi and Mother General for the coming of the FMA in Japan was thus expressed in a letter by Fr. Cimatti:

“The first nucleus of Sisters came in 1929 with the understanding that they would be responsible for the nursery that is being built and the education of the young women from the city of Miyazaki”. In addition it is stated: “For difficulties independent of the Mission, the construction of the Nursery together with the house for the FMA, adjacent to the Nursery, had to be delayed”. Fr. Cimatti also asserts: “... it also seems to me that since then (1930) we lacked a perfect understanding, difficulties were arising perhaps from the incompatibility of character and views...”.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Miyazaki: Casa Maria Ausiliatrice**

In the book, “La Montagna Solitaria” from where I draw some ideas for my work, the author, Sr. Domenica Grassiano describes the first house of the Sisters as a “doll house”. In reality, from more recent studies, the house given by the Salesians was rather big and certainly spacious enough for six Sisters.

The chronicle of the Sisters notes that the first night, Sr. Begliatti pulled out from the suitcase the statue of Mary Help which Mother Vaschetti had given her, and placed it on top of a small table at the same time she took out the mattresses to sleep on in the Japanese style and entrusted to Mary Help the mission that was on its way.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf M. D. GRASSIANO, *La Montagna solitaria*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

As previously mentioned, Fr. Cimatti had prepared the young Hirate girl for the FMA, from the very beginning she helped the Sisters and often remained with them, on 24 February 1930, just after two months from the arrival of the Sisters, Hana Hirate moved definitely in with the Sisters and remained with them. That same day another important event took place; one of the rooms of the house, the most beautiful and spacious, was transformed into the chapel for the Blessed Sacrament.

The Sisters, in addition to their studies and their work for the Salesians, were surrounded by a group of girls who out of curiosity for the foreign Sisters would come and play in their property. Although the Sisters could not understand much of the language yet, they played with the girls and gave them medals and holy figurines.

They started a sort of Oratory and by April 1930 the Oratory consisted of 40 girls. Due to difficulties beyond their control, the Salesians and the FMA could not start a nursery school for lack of space, consequently their educational objective had to be delayed. The Sisters, however, were intensifying their preparation by visiting different nursery schools in the area for better understanding and inculturation of customs and traditions. In June of the same year, a second aspirant, Sugi Nakamura, entered the order and on 8 December, the young Sister of Hana Hirate, Hana Shizu, also joined the order.

#### **4. Building the new nursery school in Miyazaki**

When Fr. Cimatti invited the Sisters to Japan, he wanted them to run a nursery school for the children and young girls of Miyazaki. He believed, in fact, that where the Christians were a minority, the school would prove to be a suitable instrument to introduce the message of Christ to the families.

In spite of the struggles they were faced with, on 24 March 1931, ground was broken for the building of the nursery school and on 6 June, it was inaugurated with a simple ceremony during which Fr. Cimatti explained the meaning of the word “Myojo” that is, Morning Star. Fr. Cavoli, the parish priest became the founder figure, while Sr. Begliatti was made the principal of the nursery. Among the first teachers were Sr. Giovanna Conte, Sr. Teresa Gregorat, the aspirant Shizu Hirate and a lay teacher.

In 1933, the superior from Turin expressed her desire that the Sisters should be independent of the Salesians so that they could freely work on

their own. So the FMA purchased the school and the place where they were living. In 1939, however, the FMA decided to leave the Miyazaki's mission since there were too many schools there. They also became convinced that their mission would not expand and at the same time they were motivated by the prospect of starting a mission in Tokyo where they foresaw the possibility of a greater expansion. This move was brought about by the rising difficulties between the FMA and the SDB in regard to the responsibilities assigned to the Sisters. The conflict became prevalent in 1937 when a new Institute, more in conformity to the needs of the Salesians, was built. The presence of the FMA at that time became almost irrelevant.

## PART II

### 1. Works at the house in Beppu

August 1930 marked a decisive turning point in the life of the FMA in Japan. This new start for the FMA was the direct consequence of the visit of Adolf Tornquist, a Salesian and son of a rich banker from Argentina. Adolf became a Salesian after he was ordained priest and was given permission to visit the various missions around the world in order to study their needs and donate the money he inherited. He offered the superior at the Miyazaki mission 100 yen with the promise of further help.

The Miyazaki's chronicle of this event states:

"Fr. Tornquist in a very simple letter announces to the superior that the souls in purgatory and Mother Mazzarello suggested to him to donate this sum of money to Sr. Begliatti so that she could purchase a house in Beppu..." reporting in this chronicle the author of "The Solitary Mountain" adds: "two days later Sr. Letizia and Sr. Sibilla left for Beppu to look at the house. At Oita, meeting with Fr. Margiaria, they were surprised to hear that they had received an additional 4,000.00 yen for the house in Miyazaki".<sup>5</sup>

This was a huge three-story house built similar to a hospital, unfortunately the house was badly furnished and was in a place that lacked water. The idea of using it for a mission had to be abandoned and the house

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<sup>5</sup> Cf M. D. GRASSIANO, *La Montagna solitaria*, p. 22.

was put up for sale. The Sisters had to work very hard and concentrate all their energies to make up for the lack of water. The problem was finally solved when the American soldiers arrived and helped them.

At the same time, due to the worldwide economic difficulties, Fr. Tornquist could not keep his promise of sending more money and the FMA found themselves with additional debts.

In 1931, the first Sisters who transferred to the new house, dedicated to Mother Mazzaello, were Sr. Solari and Sr. Reynaud. The following year, on August 1932, Sr. Begliatti left the responsibility of Miyazaki to Sr. Solari and came to Beppu. The house was planned as a house of formation but as for the missionary work, the Sisters were hoping for a sign from above... In the same year the aspirants from Miyazaki were housed in Beppu, thus the house became the place for formation. Fr. Cimatti immediately thought about contributing to the formation of the aspirants, unfortunately, it was not possible to have proper classes for the aspirants during that year. Fr. Margiaria began teaching the catechism for the aspirants and taught them twice a month. This shows that although the Salesians gave the Sisters freedom to start their own way in the mission, they felt the responsibility to continue to help and assist them in their spiritual needs.

The aspirants had their schedule adapted for each one according to their personal inclinations. Mother Mazzaello's book, translated by Hana Hirate helped in the spiritual reading. With the intention of increasing vocations, the FMA sent letters to all the parishes announcing the opening of their house of formation in Beppu and invited the young girls who had an inclination for the consecrated life to visit with them.

On 3 December, the first three aspirants started direct preparation for their novitiate and in August of the same year, Sr. Conte became the first mistress of novices in Japan. That same year, they received the visit of Mother Tullia de Berardinis, the Provincial and Superior of the Asian Province to which Japan also belonged. In 1938, Japan and China formed the first 'Visitatoria'. Several years later the China-Japan Province was formed under the guidance of Mother Elena Bottini who had visited Japan several times earlier.

## **2. Social Work Sayuri Aijen**

The beginning of this mission started in the following way: “Superior Begliatti during her weekly conference announced that on the following day a ten-month old child would arrive, this would be the beginning of the Holy childhood, that is the mission for the newly born”. In fact, the following day the baby arrived making this the first providential step towards their Social Works. The Sisters who lived that moment were convinced that the mission of the FMA in Japan was to serve the poorest of the poor and that Sr. Begliatti with her true pioneer gesture established the spirit of their mission then and this spirit is still vibrant today.

“Sayuri Aijien” meaning “Garden of Small Lilies” began on 8 June 1935. As time went on, the center accepted not only babies but also older children based on the circumstances and necessities of the time, particularly during the occupation of Manchuria by Japan.

In 1935, Sayuri had 37 newborn babies, 20 older orphans, 11 aspirants, and five novices. On 3 October 1935, the first three vocations to the order made their vows. By 1939, the children numbered 73 and the chronicle of that year notes 22 baptisms, 13 first communions, 11 confirmations, six baptisms and 18 aspirants.

After the war, on 8 June 1949, Emperor Showa visited the mission and left the Sisters with the following words: “Thank you for the dedication and zeal with which you work”.

In 1991, the mission had to be closed due to the demographic fall and the decline of the city, the number of the children in the center had diminished considerably.

## **3. The opening at Tokyo: The mission at Mikawajima**

At the beginning of May of 1935, the FMA went to the Archbishop of Tokyo, his Excellency Monsignor Chambon, to ask his advice on the opening of a novitiate. In response they received an unexpected suggestion that they open instead a center for Social Work in the poor area of Mikawajima where the Salesians were already working for the boys. He felt that the Sisters should be doing likewise for the girls. Taking the Archbishop’s advice as an inspiration from heaven, the Sisters asked the Salesians to locate a suitable property for them. This was accomplished in October of the same year. Actually the Sisters left for Tokyo only in

April 1939. The chronicle of Mikawajima notes: "...finally we can bring to realization the opening of our Social Work Mission in Tokyo...."

Sr. Begliatti, who until then was responsible for the mission in Japan, received the obedience to report to Shanghai. Before leaving, she entrusted the statue of Mary Help, which she had received from Mother Vascetti, to Sr. Grossi saying: "keep it safe because Tokyo will become the center for the mission of the FMA in Japan". The new mission in Tokyo was under the patronage of Our Lady and was given Her title: "House of Mary Our Help". This proved to be the beginning of a new dawn. Sr Begliatti remained in Shanghai for just one year.

The Sisters occupied the second floor of the Salesian parish until the house in Tokyo was ready. Later on with the increase in the number of Sisters and aspirants they moved into two houses. There, their activity began by helping the Salesians in their work at the nursery school and teaching various classes in the evening with the expectation of beginning their own work as soon as the building became available. On 31 January 1940, the feast day of Saint John Bosco, the Sisters went to the then Archbishop of Tokyo, Monsignor Doi, to give him their report. He was satisfied, but added: "you need benefactors and people who can council you". Bishop Doi introduced them to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, through them the FMA were able to contact people who would give financial help to their young mission.

After many ups and downs, on 9 March 1940, the foundation stone for the new house was laid; by December, the structure was completed, all this was made possible with the help of many benefactors. The house was called "Seibi" Morning Star. The mission started immediately with the kindergarden and nursery school and very quickly became quite crowded.

Sr. Santina in writing about those initial days states:

"At 4 o'clock as soon as the children of the nursery school are dismissed, the halls fill up again with the boys and girls of the elementary school for the early evening session, towards 8 o'clock, the young women arrive for their classes in needlework, singing, music and language. All the classes for religious instructions were also very well established and divided in various groups. The good that was being done for the young and the mothers was great".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

World War II had broken out, the food for the children became progressively scarce. The Sisters were advised to subscribe to the Federation of Social Works in order to obtain a subsidy. The Government who was interested and appreciated the work being done by the Sisters granted the subsidy. To respond to the needs of those difficult times the Sisters began to accept children for both food and board.

In 1942, the USA began to bomb Tokyo.

For a time, the work went on normally even though the number of children was increasing considerably. In July of the same year, the municipality suggested the evacuation to a safer place. The Sisters began to look for a safer place to evacuate to. The danger was imminent. In 1943, the situation was critical. Life in Tokyo was too dangerous. Fr. Lucien Adolphe Delahaye, the parish priest of Shimizu in Shizuoka and a member of the Foreign Missions of Paris, offered to accommodate the Sisters and the children in exchange for some contribution to the parish.

At Mikawajima in the midst of many problems and difficulties the work with the day students and several of the Sisters continued. Meanwhile, an order was issued that all foreigners had to be interned; they were looked upon as potential spies. In spite of this, the missionaries in Tokyo were allowed to continue their work, which had become very fruitful; the number of the aspirants had increased and so did the responsibilities of the young Sisters. On 10 March 1945, during a bombardment the house caught fire and burned out completely.

The chronicle of the house described the event as follows:

“At midnight as soon as the alarm sounded, flames of fire like hailstones began to hit the house. We all got out and began to throw our belongings out of the windows. Many neighbors came to help and for a short time we managed to put off the fire, soon after, another attack followed without forewarning, the noise of the planes and exploding bombs was everywhere, again we tried to put out the fire although the danger was tremendous. We were anxious to save our beloved house that cost us so many sacrifices and had become the admiration of many. In spite of our determination and effort, the house burned down and with it thousands of houses around us; we were engulfed in a sea of fire. With broken hearts we saw our house disappear before our eyes...”.

The house was gone but the work continued. We evacuated first to the house in Shimizu and later to the one in Fujieda that had been opened to accommodate the increased number of children. Due to the famous earthquake of Tokyo and its environs in 1944, the buildings that housed

the children in Shimizu became uninhabitable. Consequently for the sake of the children and their security we transferred the mission to Yamanaka, in the prefecture of Yamanashi.

## PART III

### **1. House of the Sacred Heart in Beppu**

Going back to Beppu where the mission for the newly born and youngsters was, we noticed that the Salesian family had increased greatly as a result of the war, the number of orphans had multiplied, at the sametime the mission began to accept the illegitimate children born from the union of American soldiers and Japanese women. It became necessary to look for a larger place and also to divide the mission in two. The Mother House “Mary Mazzarello” and a second branch. The responsibility fell upon Sr. Carmela Solari who with the help of the native Sisters, by then, well schooled in the FMA charisma, and a group of benefactors after considerable difficulties finally found a large property that would satisfy their needs. The property was only a 20 minutes walk from the existing mission and they had permission to occupy it. The property called “Mantetsu” served as a hospital and convalescence home for the military and was still operable.

After the necessary documentation, the House of the Sacred Heart was built and immediately a number of young children were transferred there. Later on, the very young ones were kept in the Mother House while the older children were sent to the new branch where they could attend kindergarten and elementary school. As a matter of fact, in 1947, Sr. Carmela was given permission to start kindergarten and elementary school also for day students; the school was also named “Myojo” after the Institute for Social Work. In 1948 Junior and Senior High were included.

Sr. Carmela Solari became the first principal and the first teachers were the young native Sisters and the aspirants. They taught during the day and assisted the children during the night. Their work was accomplished with great sacrifice, but encouraged by the faith of their principal, the love of God and the children they overcame all obstacles still keeping a generous heart.

To testify to the tenacity and daring of our Sisters, the Summer Camp



for the children started in 1950. Many of the children physically and psychologically tested by the war were in dire need of spending some time away from the pollution of the city in open spaces, benefiting from the fresh air. The Sisters were able to overcome additional obstacles and with the help of the American Army, they procured an area near the sea at Ozai in the province of Oita. In 1952, the house in Ozai became the House of St. Joseph of Oita which houses young girls who have completed Middle School and do not continue with higher education. The first Sisters housed there were Sr. Gazzada, Sr. Marcuzzo, Sr. Tashiro, Sr. Iwamoto Kumi and 15 girls who would be taken care of and at the same time be schooled in agriculture.

## **2. House Mary Help Tokyo-Akabane 1946**

We have already mentioned the work being done at Seibi Gakuen when the house burned down. The Sisters and students that were housed there were hoping to return and were waiting to find a new place. It behooves to mention at this time, that the ways of Providence are infinite and they manifest themselves to us in the most unthinkable manner.

Having evacuated to Yamanaka, the children continued to attend the public school of the town. The entire Seibi family however, lived in unimaginable meager means. It was soon after the war, food and all basic means for survival were lacking all over. The Sisters then looked upon the occupying forces in the country to receive some aid.

Although somewhat lengthy I must report the experience as narrated by the author of "The Solitary Mountain":

"...Sr. Letizia called Sr. Angiolina and spoke to her thus: 'go to Kofu, at the headquarters of the American General. Ask to speak to the General in person, explain to him the work we are involved in with all our limited means and necessities and ask him: Could you kindly give us permission form to obtain from a factory a number of clogs so that our children can attend school across town; they are in desperate need of them.' Sr. Angiolina left for Kofu accompanied by Sr. Santina and Sr. Monica-Hana the latter were going to Tokyo to look for land....

The American General, Mr. Braibanti received her immediately, listened to her story without blinking an eye and answer thus: «But, Sister you are educators. Why don't you teach your orphans». He rang a bell and an officer appeared at once, the General asked for the necessary papers that would authorize the Sisters to open a school.

Sr. Angiolina with much delight returned to Yamanaka with the application forms, instead of the clogs. Sr. Letizia was not at all happy by this development. They lived in three small wooden houses plus the Summer Home of the University: there was no space for classrooms, there were no desks, nor teachers, nor money. She sent Sister back to return the application forms accompanied by all her sincerest thanks and begged again for the clogs.

General Braibanti, listened again with much patience... The farmer sows when it's time to seed and concluded-this is the time-therefore-start sowing!

With the application forms Sister once more returned to Yamanaka and related the General's message. Sr. Letizia remained silent for a long time: she was praying.

On the third day, a third encounter with the General-Our Superior says that we will start teaching, however our children will take their year-end examinations at the public school— No. You are capable. So, start working!

The application forms were filled and the process went along. Obviously, with the application completed the clogs also arrived”.

That was how the school in Yamanaka began, it can also be considered as the starting point of the educational activity of the Institute in Japan. Meanwhile, in Tokyo the Sisters were scouting for land with buildings that could house the children. After long days of wondering the streets of Tokyo, through the help of a relative of the Hirate Sisters who was an ex-member of the Japanese military, (the military had been dissolved by the occupying powers) the Sisters were directed to a complex of ex-military barracks in Akabane. They were able to obtain the complex on loan, therefore allowing the children to return to Tokyo and to start a school. The barracks became the houses for the Sisters, the children, the classrooms, and the chapel.

The name House of Mary Help was given to the new house, and it became the Mother House of the Institute of the FMA in Japan.

A Sister remembering those early days attests:

“We all worked till very late at night. Having survived the hardship with all its consequences, it was easy and natural for us. We all got along well and we were all serene and full of life. We worked very well indeed”.

The school was also recognized by Tokyo's Authorities and gradually, all its academic levels were also approved: Middle School and Senior High. In 1948, we had 300 boarders and the enrollment of day students also increased.

A great deal of help came from the American soldiers, not only economically but also with physical labor. It was through their effort that

the hill of Akabane was put in order. Even on this matter there is a lot to be said, but for lack of time and space, I cannot add more.

The post-war religious activity was also flourishing thanks to the collaboration of the Salesians particularly Fr. Crevacore, who became the chaplain. During that period there were many baptisms among the students.

The Novitiate for many years that was in Beppu was transferred to Tokyo in 1948 and slowly all the various levels of formation were also housed in Tokyo.

### **3. Shizuoka: House of the Sacred Heart and school**

As mentioned earlier, the children of Seibi had been evacuated to the Parish of Shimizu, Shizuoka. At that time, however, the parish priest, Fr. Delahaye in addition of giving hospitality to the children and due to the new laws regarding the schools, asked the FMA to help him in obtaining a large sum of money in order to be able to continue with the school he had started, adding that one day he would turn over the school to them. Sr. Begliatti, who was responsible for the FMA in Japan, came to the conclusion that the time had arrived for the Sisters to start seriously their educational mission. She procured the money from a benefactor who also agreed that one day the Sisters should take over the direction of the school.

Since 1944, Sr. Shibayama Setsuko had been teaching in the school. When the Sisters and the students left to go to Yamanaka, she remained to continue teaching in Shimizu together with Sr. Aikawa Kiku. Unfortunately, this school was also burned down during the war so they too had to find refuge in Yamanaka. At the end of the war however they were requested to return and resume their work and of course they gladly accepted; this happened on 2 October 1945. The new scholastic laws forced difficult solutions. It was necessary to find new property that would accommodate the new school with the new objectives.

In 1947, The FMA took over the management of the school and gave it the same name as the school in Akabane, which is Seibi Gakuen. They have the school, as an Institution, however they lack the building and the necessary land.

In 1948, some property was found not too far from the parish. To purchase this land the cooperation, sacrifices and prayers of the parents,

students and aspirants were decisive. Sr. Begliatti who could not dispose of such large sum of money decided to proceed with the plans hoping that the expenses would eventually be taken cared of. A new community was started that consisted of the Superior, Sr. Conte, one aspirant and two FMA teachers, Sr. Shibayama and Sr. Shizu Hirate. Sr. Begliatti became the principal and Sr. Conte the vice-principal.

As always, the economic problems were great, however with the help of benefactors and the formation of Parents Union, a collaborative system was put in place and still has its roots today.

Contrary to the other schools in Shizuoka, we started first with the upper classes (to continue the work of Fr. Delahaye) and later added the lower classes. It was also necessary to say that in a town where most of the students were children of farmers there was no great need for a private school for children. Among the various activities of the house it was necessary to mention the mission on behalf of the orphans that continued till 1996 and was similar to the one in Beppu and also called "Seibi Home".

In 1953, there was a request from the community to accept children for room and board. The first to be accepted were a brother and sister whose father had been ill for seven years therefore, their mother was forced to work leaving the children home alone. The FMA saw this as a sign and a call from Divine Providence. The following day a girl from Junior High asked for shelter and so began the Social Work mission, that initially was subsidized by an American benefactor, Miss Margaret Benedictus, employed in the Marines Aircraft carrier at Oriscany. For this reason, the mission was named the "Oriscany Home" as a tribute to the contribution received from the personnel of the carrier. However with the approval and subsequent subsidy of the State, the name was changed to "Seibi Home".

#### **4. Osaka: House and school of Mary Immaculate**

After the first experience of the FMA at Miyazaki, for a certain period, with the exception of the brief interval at Mikawajima, the FMA did not work along side the Salesians. However, our contacts remained active particularly with Fr. Cimatti and others. As a matter of fact, at Akabane, the Sisters obtained as a chaplain a Salesian and also in Shizuoka. The Salesians continued in providing for all our houses their spiritual assistance and teaching in the formation of the young FMA. They also had

expanded their missions in many localities and together with the FMA the Salesian charisma had fruitfully spread throughout Japan.

In January 1949, the Salesian director, Fr. Margiaria from Osaka sent the following request to the FMA: "The Salesian Fathers are about to open, by next year, a school for boys and they invite the Sisters to do the same for the girls". In reality, not only the Salesians, but also Tamatsukuri responsible for the elementary school of the parish, wanted the Sisters to take over the management of the school. The Bishop of Osaka, Monsignor Taguchi had written a letter expressing his desire that the FMA would open a school on all academic levels in his diocese.

The FMA arrived in Osaka on 29 September 1950, welcomed by the Salesians, they proceeded to the parish church for mass and to ask God's blessings on their new mission. They initiated their work taking over the administration of the nursery school "Garashia" named after a Japanese martyr, keeping always in mind, however to start as soon as possible their own mission. Their first objective was to find a suitable piece of property, which they found adjacent to the parish. As a result of the war, it was in terrible condition, but they foresaw a great future by developing it. They started to work immediately to open the nursery school and gradually completed an entire school complex all the way up to secondary school.

Meanwhile, the Salesian charisma was developing through the many Oratories and catechism classes in the various parishes. In a relatively short time we had two vocations: one was sent to us by the Salesians, another was the young lady responsible for the youth of the parish, additional vocations came later.

Once again, the procedures to obtain the necessary permissions to build schools and the economic hardship became our daily concern, but our faith in Mary Help Of Christians and our love for the youth of the country made everything possible. Here too, the Sisters opted Seibi for the name of the school, however since there was already another school by that name, they chose "Josei", "jo" meaning castle in honor of Osaka Castle that was near by the school and "SEI" meaning star that symbolizes the Blessed Mother.

The school compound developed in very short time. The student enrollment soon became numerous. The prediction of the development became a reality.

## PART IV

### **1. The foundation of the FMA Province in Japan**

So far, the Japanese Mission was dependent initially on the Oriental Province, and from 1930 on the Sino-Japanese Province with its headquarters in Shanghai. During this period we witnessed the devastating war in Europe as well as in Asia.

To summarize, therefore, by 1952, the Japanese mission at Akabane, we had Mary Help of Christians House, which served as the mother house; the nursery; the social work for needy boys and girls; and a scholastic complex that covered all the various level of education from kindergarten to senior high. At Beppu we had: the mother house (Mary Mazzarello); the day nursery; and the social work “Sayuri Aijien”; in addition, Beppu also had the Sacred Heart House with the social work and a scholastic complex. At Shizuoka, we had the Sacred Heart House and a scholastic complex. At Osaka: the Mother house, Mary Immaculate and a scholastic complex. The missionary Sisters sent to Japan till 1950, numbered 30 and the Japanese professed Sisters were 39 plus two Korean Sisters. At that time an even larger expansion was anticipated not only for Japan, but also for Korea.

It became appropriate at this time to establish an additional Province. Sr. Teresa Merlo became the Provincial of the house. Sr. Merlo was one of the first six missionaries who were sent to India, although she never learned to speak Japanese, she would remain in the memory of the Sisters for her goodness and her innate leadership qualities.

The Japanese Province thus became independent and took the name selected by the Center as ‘Alma Mater Province’.

By now, the work of the FMA in Japan was solidly underway, progressing along the path traced by the spirit of our founding Sisters. With the social and economic changes of the time, the increase in available personnel, and the freedom of action of the mission, the works of the FMA multiplied. It was indeed a period of great expansion in this fertile land.

In 1957, the work of the FMA reached Korea. For twenty years, Japan and Korea worked in unison till 1976, when the Province was divided.

## **2. The present time**

For a missionary outlet outside of the Orient, after repeated requests from both the Mother Provincial of Peru (Mother Maria Lucia Beccalossi) and the Mother Provincial of Bolivia (Mother Eunice Mesa), a first Missionary Sister was sent in 1989. She was soon followed by two additional missionaries in 1990. They were needed to work among the many Japanese of the Okinawa and San Juan Colonies. They were also needed among the girls of Japanese origin who were studying in the boarding school run by the FMA. It is well to note, that, when the request for missionaries arrived at the Provincial House, many Sisters immediately volunteered to go, proving that they had reached the full maturity of the FMA spirit, that is: the shedding of egocentric thinking that leads to courageous sacrifices in the giving of one self.

In 1992, to answer the needs of the new Japanese society that received many immigrants from the Philippines, two missionaries, Sr. Anita Miranda and Sr. Violeta Tuason, came to Japan to work among their nationals who were and still are in need of pastoral, social and economic help. Since then, the collaboration among the Sisters continued and now the Sisters from the Philippine are three: two work in Tokyo and one in Osaka. At the same time, in 1993, a Sister from Japan went to the Philippines as a bridge to the strong relationships between the two provinces.

Today our mission does not aim any longer at its expansion, rather it is urgent to restructure our works because of the reduction in personnel, but the call “*da mihi animas*” is even more imperative.

“Cast in to the deep” in the past could have been the call to expansion. In the present time, we are facing a period of discernment.... It is not easy.... We know however, that as always we must be open to new ways that are in consonance with the unexpected situations that are arising. At times, they could be very uncomfortable, but they must be faced with both a spirit of humility and also audacity to spur the prophetic vision.

## **Conclusion**

This year, our Province is celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the FMA mission in Japan. For this reason, a book has been written containing our history from its inception up to the present, the title of this book is: “Nel

Divenire il Monumento Vivente di Riconoscenza a Maria”.

As Don Bosco said, we are always more and more convinced that it is “Mary who has done everything”.

In order to continue to become “the living monument of gratitude of our Founder Don Bosco to Mary Help of Christians”, we are called to live in a renewed and conscious way the charisma that was given to us.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This report is based on the book: “Seibo e no Kansha no ikita kinenhi to natte” (“Becoming the Living Monument of gratitude to Mary”) on the History of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Japan written in Japanese on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Arrival of the first Sisters in Japan (1929-2004).