

M. Pabla Bescos • Inheritance of Hospitality

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*Congregation of the Sisters
of Charity of Saint Anne*

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INTRODUCTION

A life cannot be improvised. Pabla Bescos Espierrez is a name interwoven in the twilight of every day; it is a story blended into the simple everyday.

A woman on the move. This is how we can define her. A bridge between the 19th and 20th centuries, a link between the first Sisters and all those who would later arrive, a platform to launch the Congregation towards horizons without limits.

M. Pabla lives the uncertainty of the change of century, political agitation, social questions, confrontation with the Church... She witnessed the birth of a new period of history. In these circumstances, God calls her to be a universal charity, chiefly to the poorest and the neediest, through the practice of hospitality to the point of heroism.

The historical framework is changing, words are changing but life remains and the need is always present. The poor are always among us. Today, as in the past, there is a face to bear witness to the Father's merciful love.

PART I

I

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A WORK

In 1848 the first railroad line is inaugurated in Spain, a blast furnace is installed in Mieres (Asturias); we can send, for the first time, a telegram. This is also the year in which Pabla Bescos Espierrez is born. On January 25th in Panzano; a small village, at the foot of the Sierra de Guara^{T.N.} in the region of Alto Aragón, province of Huesca.

Panzano has only one street, which leads to a small square. There, in the Casal de Campo lives the Bescos Espierrez family. Pabla is the seventh child of Jose and Maria; when she is born, her brother Jose is 17, Maria 11, Ventura 9, Antonio 7, Tomasa 4 and Miguel, 5. Still to come, three years later, little Sebastiana.

Her paternal grandparents, Narcissus and Maria, are also at home.

It happens with the years of the childhood like with the foundations of a work. You can't see them... but they support the whole building; we would like to know more, but what they support remains hidden...

Pabla grows, like the seed planted in good soil. Under the sun of a family of farmers, field workers.

Pabla learns from Jose, her father, attentive listening that makes it possible to speak the right word, the silence that welcomes, the firm will that waits, the confident audacity, a merciful justice.

From Maria, her mother, Pabla acquires a heart as wide as the fields. From both her parents she receives a strong faith. The day after her birth, she is baptized in the Church

T.N. Mountain range.

of Panzano. Since then, like her brothers and sisters, her parents initiate her in a faith that is expressed in everyday life. The blessing of the table, the prayer of the Angelus, the rosary of the Dawn, the pilgrimages in May... They teach them to love Saint Joseph and Saint Michael; the patrons of the hermitage, Saint Cosimo and Saint Damian; and above all, the Virgin of Arraro, patron saint of Panzano.

And she reciprocates so much love. Because we can only give what we have.

Grandfather Narcissus has lost his sight and Pabla become his particular guide. She accompanies him to the Church; she is with him on his trips to the countryside.

Grandmother Maria has a senile dementia. The old woman, close to little Pabla, is calm. And she lets herself be done with trust, as if she were the child.

Her mother also benefited from her care. Pabla keeps her company and occasionally prepares for her, her favorite food. Mother and daughter are inseparable. If all children are loved, Pabla was special in Maria's heart. They are united by a fragile health, an exquisite sensitivity, a compassionate heart.

In one of her many conversations, Pabla reveals to her mother her desire to learn. Why can't she go to school? There is a small school in Panzano. No girl attends it, not because it is forbidden by law, but because it is not considered essential for the formation of women. And besides, coeducation is not very well known in those times. Maria, Ventura and Tomasa, Pabla's older sisters, have not gone to school. However, the girl (Pabla) does not go to work in the fields due to her fragile health. And the day gets longer, although Pabla doesn't waste any time. Like her sisters, she is an "expert" in housework.

Maria has a conversation with her husband, and Jose, after thinking about it, talks to Mr. Manuel Gros, the teach-

er. Pabla goes to school and sits down, separated from her classmates, at a desk that Mr. Manuel has prepared next to his table. There Pabla learns. She is a student who combines very well the speed of an acute intelligence with a great capacity of work; she doesn't mind slow tasks. She is a consistent person.

Her classmates remember her for her modesty and openness. Her sound judgment and her closeness coloured by a certain reserved attitude. It is not about distance. Pabla is a sociable girl, outgoing but prudent. She shares her dreams and concerns with her two great friends: one is her sister Tomasa, the other Josefa Naya who will marry her brother Miguel. Her sister Sebastiana will also be the object of a special preference in Pabla's heart; she will be the first of the young women to enter religious life.

In her childhood, Pabla is a seed that already contained the great tree that she would become in the course of her life. It is the time of Nazareth. Like Jesus, Pabla lived these years without noise, incarnating the words of the psalm *when I was being formed in the hidden and woven in the deep*. It is a hidden existence. The every day kneads hiddenly and without noise the woman she will become.

II

AND WHAT DOES GOD SAY?

God is a present reality in Pabla's life since her childhood. What the Constitutions of 1824 state was true in her, *God is around us like the bird that flies is surrounded by air; the fish that swims and is surrounded by water on all sides.*

Pabla is not a weird one; in those times God is a relevant character in society. And we know that in the every day hiding of the Casal de Campo, God is saying a lot.

At the age of 11, she begins her catechesis in preparation for her First Communion. Her mother is her catechist. And Pabla dedicates herself to her instruction; every day, after returning from school and once the tasks are already done, Maria and Pabla meet. Pabla finds in her mother a companion on the path of faith. A simple woman who collaborates in God's action on her daughter.

Another important person in her process as a believer is the priest of Panzano, Mosen^{T.N.} Juan Monclus. He is the one who administers to Pabla the sacraments of initiation, baptism and communion; he will also accompany her in her vocational discernment.

For three years, she will be preparing to participate in the table of the Bread and the Word, which she has been attending since she was a child accompanied by her family. Mosen Juan knows that she is ready to receive communion, but she has to wait for the rest of her classmates. Pabla helps the priest in the formation of the little ones; in this way, they will be ready to receive Jesus sooner.

T.N. Mosen means Father (priest) in the regions of Cataluña and Aragon (Spain).

Finally, when Pabla is thirteen years old, the group receives First Communion.

It is at this time that she expresses her desire to follow Jesus. She is no longer a child but a teenager who feels called. That is what the vocation is. A call. Listening to a voice that invites you. And to respond.

No one in her house is against this desire. She is still young to enter the religious life. It is needed to wait. But Pabla is not satisfied with time passing; she is preparing herself for the day when she can enter some monastery. Mosen Juan teaches her Latin, and continues to explain the Word of God of each Sunday to her. Pabla prepares herself as she has done up to now, through prayer and daily life, profiting the small circumstances that can bring her closer to Jesus.

During this time, character traits that were perceived in her childhood and that will be characteristic throughout her life will be consolidated.

First of all, her "know-how to be". Pabla knows how to be one with everyone: she can be playing with the children in the square, helping her mother, talking to her sisters, praying in her room. She knows how to be a teenager, a young woman, a woman of God for others. She does not separate the belongingness she experiences in her heart from her everyday life; indeed, Pabla colours everyday life; in her presence, people feel at ease. Her sisters search for her company, she entertains Panzano's children with stories and tales, takes care of the house, cares for her parents.

Another distinctive feature is her eagerness to conquer freedom. For that she uses mortification; a word that today is outdated, that disturbs our ears, but whose meaning does not go out of fashion. *To mortify oneself is to free oneself for what is fundamental, for the only thing necessary. It is liberating freedom and bringing it into line with*

God's freedom. It is to leave one's own love, will and interest to enter into the interests, the will and the love of God. Pabla wants to shape her being in accordance with God's¹. Pabla wants to shape her being in accordance with God's. She is a born seeker of God's will and of the freedom of His Spirit.

Pabla is searching to be.

During these years, the Bescos family has been changing. The grandparents Narciso and Maria, have died; Jose, Maria and Ventura have married. In the Casal de Campo still remain Tomasa, Miguel, Pabla and Sebastiana.

In 1864, Pabla is sixteen years old. She can now apply to join a monastic order. She has always shown an inclination towards silence, prayer, solitude and penance. Letting God make her life a hidden seed.

She requests to enter the Cistercian Monastery of Casbas. We do not know what happened, but Pabla did not enter. Various factors could influence this; tradition has it that some people from Panzano stated that *she wanted to become nun in order not to work*. Pabla knows that she does not run away from anything. On the contrary, she was in search of a God to whom a lifetime is worth dedicating.

Now she doubts. People's comments hurt her but make her think; maybe Someone is putting his word in these circumstances. Pabla hesitates. She speaks to Mosen Juan, allows herself to be confronted and accompanied. They look together for what God is saying in that particular today.

Pabla waits. She knows that the dream that caresses her heart is not a chimera. The Lord has a place prepared for her from eternity, but where?

III

TIME OF THE ATTEMPTS

Mosen Juan has a sister at the House of Mercy in Huesca; her name is Maria Rosa and she belongs to the Sisterhood that, since 1807, has been in charge of the Hospital of Our Lady of Hope and the House of Mercy.

Why not go to Huesca and know them? Pabla makes that journey accompanied by her sister Tomasa. In Huesca, she meets a community of Sisters who are in tune with what she is looking for. She recognizes in them a style that can be her own: simplicity, joy, prayer, constant and small service. A life without noise dedicated to others. A grateful love that pours out without measure.

Tomasa and Pabla were struck by the welcome of the Sisters. They received them with care, but firmly insisted that the life of a Sister of Charity is difficult. It may seem appealing, but there is plenty of work and much prayer. Strong health and firm motivations are needed. They recommended them to return to Panzano. They will give them an answer. In spite of Pabla's fragile appearance, the Sisters have perceived the determination of her gaze.

Pabla returns from Huesca knowing that she is going to be a Sister of Charity. She does not understand how, but she is determined. This is how she communicates it to Mosen Juan and her parents. None of them have any objection. Mosen Juan knows the Sisterhood and knows Pabla; her parents, who now aged, only wish the happiness of their daughter.

The response of the Sisters is slow in coming. Pabla suffers. The wait is long. She does not want to insist because she fears that the Sisters of Charity deny her admission into the Sisterhood. Her sister Tomasa returns to Hues-

ca to speak to the community; she is distressed by seeing Pabla discouraged. She returns with an emphatic refusal.

This is not an easy time for Pabla. She knows that her health is not strong, that her appearance is fragile. She is conscious of her fragility; she has no merits to present. Moreover, the news that the Sisters of Huesca do not admit her is public; in a small village, any event is commented on. And everyone seems to have an opinion.

Pabla is uneasy. She recognizes the Voice that calls her, that invites her to follow Him. It is not imagination. It is time to wait and trust. It is the moment of faith. To go deep inside and ask the Lord what He is trying to say. Pabla prays. She remains in spite of moments of doubt and discouragement, convinced that the light will come, because this dream to be charity is not hers.

Refusals followed one after another. Finally, Mosen Juan intervenes by writing a letter to the community of Huesca where, at that time, his sister Maria Rosa is the Superior of the House of Mercy.

Why not let Pabla have an experience for a few days? Without any commitment on the part of the Sisterhood, the aspirant could participate in the life of the community and thus check her aptitudes.

The answer is affirmative. Pabla can do an experience of one month in the community of Huesca. She may go there whenever she wants.

IV

THE SISTERHOOD OF HUESCA

The community of Huesca is special. First of all, although it was founded with the intervention of Fr. John Bonal and some of the first Sisters who left the Hospital of Grace of Zaragoza, legally it is not incorporated into the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne.

Secondly, its existence reminds that membership is a reality of the heart. The Sisterhood of Huesca knows that it has a common spirit, not only because of its origins but also because of the contacts maintained during these years. Above all, the six-year stay of Mother Maria Rafols who, when she was exiled from Zaragoza, asks to be able to remain among the Sisters of Huesca.

Pabla, from the first day she is in Huesca, feels at home. The work is hard and constant, the sick and the children always have some need that the Sisters go on ahead to provide for, even before they realize it themselves. Love is always awake to serve promptly those whom it recognizes as its masters, because they are the same Lord. Although there is much work, the tasks are carried out *with full detail, with all affection, with the greatest love*. There is careful attention. What each Sister does is unique to her; whether it is caring for a sick person, giving a glass of water, sweeping the room, dressing the children, or preparing food.

Only sixty years have passed since its foundation; in the two communities, Hospital and House of Mercy, there are Sisters who have lived with Mother Maria Rafols. There are four of them: Sister Maria Miralles, Sister Maria Rosa Monclus, Sister Agustina Llado and Sister Manuela Rivera.

Sister Maria Miralles is at that time the Superior of the Hospital of Our Lady of Hope. She was a prudent, peaceful, charitable and exemplary woman. She was faithful in the fulfillment of the Constitutions and she saw to it that the Sisters were also faithful.

Sr. Maria Rosa is in charge of the House of Mercy. The Lord gave her a good heart and she responds to Him with a gentle love.

The weakness of Sr. Agustina is children. She is often seen with one or two in her lap or on her shoulders. She is a peaceful woman who transmits serenity to the little ones and educates them like a mother.

Sister Manuela carries out any work that is entrusted to her, always with a self-sacrificing spirit.

From the rest of the seventeen Sisters who make up the community, Pabla also learns. Each one of them expresses what she is in her daily life.

Sr. Maria Dolores has a great capacity for work and knows how to treat others, the sick and the people around her, so that they may perceive themselves as unique and special. Sr. Maria Rosa Alvira has a big heart; Sr. Maria always looks after the poorest,... the list would continue with all the Sisters of the community. With their life and their word, each one of the twenty-one, in the Hospital or in the House of Mercy, instructs Pabla in the matters of the Sisterhood. And she sees a project reflected, that is her own.

The Sisters also perceive this closeness. A short month has passed, but the community and Pabla are aware that they are notes of the same chord: love lived in hospitality. In their lives there are dissonances... As women they have the light and shade of life. Wheat and weeds. But the melody they desire to play is composed. They want to make Jesus Christ the reason for their lives; the Kingdom their project; and the poor, their masters.

V

SAINT ANNE'S SISTERS

The eighteenth century was fruitful in the birth of Fraternities that will give rise, over the years, to various religious Congregations.

In the Holy Cross Hospital in Barcelona there is a group of volunteers who are dedicated to the attention of the Hospital. A hospital from the 18th century is the shelter of all kinds of pain; let's not think about the quick hospitalization of our days. The hospital is a refuge for passers-by, a shelter house for orphans, a recuperative center for the sick, a place for the treatment of mentally ill, a shelter place for marginalized women, a maternity hospital for single mothers... As if all the social works we know today were concentrated in one place.

Attending to this puzzle of suffering we find a priest, Father John Bonal. Hospital Chaplain since March 2, 1804, he is coordinating the work of these volunteers who are committed to the affliction of others.

Barcelona is already exporting volunteers, three years after the first group is established in the Holy Cross Hospital. Love always meets the need because it experiences the pain of others as its own, and wants to make up for the lack and bring to fullness what is glimpsed. Love is always breadth. The hospitals of Mataro, Olot, Gerona, Figueras, Cervera, Tarragona and Valls have these small shoots that dream of being branches of the same tree; the project is to form a single religious Congregation.

In Zaragoza, the Board of Our Lady of Grace Hospital is looking for solutions to improve the attention of the House. We do not know for sure if it was Father John Bonal who offered the possibility of establishing a Fra-

ternity in the hospital or if the Board requested it. But on December 28, 1804, 12 brothers and 12 sisters arrive in Zaragoza to take care of the Hospital from January 1, 1805.

It was only three years later, in 1808, that the War of Independence broke out and Zaragoza lives the Sieges. The Brotherhood has disappeared; pressure from the paid workers, vocational instability, the lack of a unifying person are some of the possible causes.

The Sisters persevere. Living each day passionately, making the present moment unique, has been training them and when war, hunger, insecurity, fear and poverty arrive, these find them ready. Strong in faith, sure in hope, constant in love. Strengthened by the daily experience of hospitality, they are available to live it as an offering and sacrifice, in a continuous and heroic surrender, even to the point of giving up their lives.

When the war is over, twelve Sisters have allowed themselves to fall in the furrow, dying of exhaustion and hunger. There were twenty-one of them; nine women remain who will undergo, like so many others, the experience of being nobody, of not counting for anything. The urge to control and the attempt to separate the Sisters from two significant people, Maria Rafols and John Bonal, arrive.

Maria Rafols, in spite of her young age, came already from Barcelona as the person in charge of the Sisters' group.

John Bonal leads them to Zaragoza and has always accompanied them.

A prophetic man and woman who, attentive to God's calls, responded.

The Sisterhood seems to be broken down and the crisis comes. At some point, the Sisterhood is composed of only five Sisters; those who leave the Sisterhood follow one af-

ter another, uncertainty is very strong. It is the time of promise.

When the politics change again, the situation of the Sisterhood seems to be stabilized. However, there are several sick Sisters and the problems with the Sitiada, Governing Board of the Hospital, continue because it wants to interfere in the intimacy of the Sisterhood.

In contrast to this urge to constrain, during these years several young people join the Sisterhood and the requests for the Sisters to go founding come from different parts of the Spanish geography.

1824 is a happy year. The dream is fulfilled: they are a religious Congregation. The Constitutions are approved and four Sisters publicly profess their perpetual vows the following year. Three of them belonged to the founding group: Sister Maria Rafols, Sister Tecla Canti and Sister Raimunda Torrellas. Sr. Teresa Rivera had entered in 1806.

Maria Rafols is again elected as Superior of the Sisterhood. These are calm and serene years; it seems that the pain has passed, when it returns in a violent way. In 1834, Mother Maria is imprisoned and banished to Huesca; there is where, as we know, a community of Sisters of Charity who, since 1807, attend the House of Mercy and Our Lady of Hope Hospital.

The Sisterhood is well established; and the service done with every detail, with all affection, with the greatest love, continues. This is how Maria Rafols finds the Sisters, on her return in 1841. She is again in charge of the Foundling Home for four years, until in 1845 the Sitiada grants her retirement. Her life is fading away, consumed in giving herself to those who need it most. But her Lord grants her to see fulfilled the promise He made. The time of waiting turned into hope, generated faith and has made the living

of a love without frontiers possible. She does not know about the expansion of the Congregation, but she senses it through the last events she lived: the inauguration of her own oratory, the election of Sr. Magdalena Hecho as Superior, the vocations that come... A woman of certainties, she knows that love is always wide and that the Sisterhood is consolidated.

The surrender of the Sisters who attend, during the cholera epidemic of 1855, in addition to the Hospital, eighteen villages, makes the Governor of Zaragoza to request and obtain a Royal Order by which the Congregation can be extended. It is the year 1857.

The doors are open.

That same year, the Sisters go to attend the Hospital and Hospice of Calatayud; the following year, Tarazona welcomes them also for the Hospital and Hospice; the following year it is Borja. In 1861, the House of Mercy in Tudela is attended by them; in 1864 it is the locality of Caspe and in 1867, Estella.

In 1865, the Congregation is renamed "Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne", as a sign of the love that is professed since the beginnings for the mother of Mary of Nazareth.

On April 25, 1868, the community in Huesca is incorporated into the Congregation. Sixty years of separation does not mean sixty years of distance... because in the heart there is no distance.

VI

DOMUS INFIRMORUM, URBIS ET ORBIS^{T.N.}

Maria Espierrez accompanies her daughter to Zaragoza. It is not an easy journey; in fact, these are not easy times. On September 18, 1868, the squad of Admiral Topete has pronounced itself in Cadiz against the regime of Isabel II, and the Revolutionary Boards assume power.

In Zaragoza, the interim revolutionary Board that emerged from this 1868 revolution came to power in September. The result of the municipal elections in December, is a new City Hall with a large republican majority that has to face difficult and important problems, a high unemployment rate, unpopular taxes. The disorders are constant.

Pabla arrives in the city on these dates. She begins her postulancy on October 23rd at the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, House of the sick of the city and the world, a place where *charity is exercised in any language that is requested*².

Erected in 1425 on the initiative of Alfonso V of Aragon, it has since its foundation the universal character revealed by the motto *Domus Infirmorum, urbis et orbis*. In its premises, all kinds of sick people are welcomed, including those suffering from contagious diseases. It is also a shelter for pregnant women, orphans and mentally ill.

The Sisters begin working at the Hospital on January 1st, 1805, taking care of the women's wards. Very soon the infirmaries experience an improvement in the cleanliness of the sick and the cleanliness of the wards, a greater punctuality and diligence in the supply of food and medicine.

T.N. House of the sick, of the City and of the World in Latin.

The Governing Board of the Hospital, the Sitiada, entrusts the Sisters with the instruction of the children, the care of the House of Maternity, the main kitchen and the vestments of the sacristy. These tasks were carried out with the greatest accuracy, disinterest, efficiency and economy.

Their concern for a better service leads them to study and publicly examine themselves for phlebotomy, executing this operation with admirable success. They are in charge of this service until 1857, when the hospital's practitioners take over.

During the War of Independence, the Sieges of Zaragoza take place. On August 3rd and 4th, the French bombard the Hospital. The work of the Sisters is heroic. *They helped get the sick out of the midst of the shells; they led and sheltered them, assisted them and went out to ask for food from door to door to help them; they went to Torrero to beg the besieging general for provisions for his patients; they went, in the midst of the thick shrapnel, to heal the Spanish wounded in the same French field*³.

The sick people are accommodated in private homes, in the Audience and in the Town Hall. As the number of wounded is increasing, it is decided to transfer them to the Royal House of Mercy and the Convalescent Hospital. In this way, the headquarters of the former Royal and General Hospital of Our Lady of Grace is transferred to the Convalescent Hospital, to which the Convent of the Incarnation is added.

Because of the events that took place during the Sieges, *because of the trust they inspired and their unparalleled charity*⁴, the Hospital Administration successively entrusts them with new responsibilities: the main wardrobe, the washing and hanging of linen, the food distribution and the assistance to the mentally ill.

In 1850, they are entrusted with the totality of the general assistance of the Men's Wards, which they had begun in 1833; in 1854, the general pantry, which they keep with meticulous accounting; and, in 1857, the key to all the storerooms.

At Our Lady of Grace Hospital, the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne have always exercised charity. A charity without frontiers and without measure, which survives a long winter because love never fails. It always remains. It is the only thing that remains. Beyond historical events and the various entities that have governed this charitable establishment, Zaragoza has the grace of the presence of these women who serve out of charity and without distinction, who risk themselves exposing their health and their very physical life for the health and physical life of their fellow men.

Pabla enters this Congregation. She is willing to live the most heroic degree of charity: *No one has greater love than the one who gives his life for his friends.*

She arrives at the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace ready to walk a path of hospitality.

VII

A PATH OF HOSPITALITY

Not everyone is qualified to walk this path that starts with good health, much spirit and virtues, a special vocation. Presuppositions that are recorded in the Sisterhood by reliable reports.

Pabla has a strong spirit, abundant qualities and the call. Health is not strong... but that is not going to be an impediment. Furthermore, she counts on the endorsement of the experience in the community of Huesca.

She is admitted on trial. Dressed in a simple blue linen apron that protects her clothes, she is going to dedicate herself during six months trying *the most laborious and disgusting services*⁵.

She shares these beginnings with two other postulants, and Sister Antonia Pinen accompanies them. In charge of postulants at the age of fifty, she has twenty-four years of religious life. As a postulant herself, she had been at the Foundling Home with Mother Maria Rafols.

A woman of grace, she initiates the young women into the spirit of the Sisterhood, above all with the example of a life of silence, humility, work, experience of God and love to the poor. And she accompanies them with her simple, discreet, kind word.

She is the one who establishes the time that the postulants have to be in the infirmaries, instructs them what to do and accompanies them in the community acts.

Six months pass by quickly. Hours pass in a simple way, making of daily life a permanent surrender. In the Hospital, the postulants are trained and tested in the integral and direct attention to the people. Personal hygiene to the sick, care to those who are bedridden and convalescent,

making the beds, distributing food and medicine, washing the dishes and urinals, cleaning the wards and infirmaries. Twenty-four-hour service. In life and in death. They also beautify the death, they are responsible for shrouding the corpses.

Daily life is threshed in details of hospitality, of contemplation in action, of integral attention to the one who suffers. Such a life is only maintained from a deep experience of God. The whole day is marked by moments of encounter with Him, imbibed with the presence of God.

How is a day in the life of the Sisterhood?, how is the life that Pabla is trying?

The praise to the Trinity is the first thing they pronounced at four o'clock in the morning. Everything is for the glory of God.

They go to the Oratory for prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist and at seven o'clock, after breakfast, they are already in the wards.

At a quarter to eleven, in the middle of their day, they have a brief meeting with the Lord. It is the examination of conscience. They confront what the morning had been, ask the Lord's forgiveness and give Him thanks.

There is a time to eat, to meet and to rest. Except for the Sisters on duty who remain in the Hospital.

From two to three in the afternoon, they pray the rosary and have a time for meditation or spiritual reading. When they finish, they return to the wards, relieving the Sisters on duty.

They have dinner at about half past six or seven, returning to the wards to make the sick ready for the night.

At ten o'clock they go to rest. The Sisters on duty remain awake.

Another stretch of the journey has passed. Of a path of hospitality.

VIII

THE NOVITIATE

The Novitiate is a time of experience and initiation into the life of an Institute.

The year 1869 eight Sisters begin the Novitiate. The first batch is on May 5th; there we find Pabla Bescos, Francisca Gabalda and Concepcion Los Arcos.

Once the six months are up, the Sisters consider Pabla to be suitable for the life of the Sisterhood. She makes a general confession and is examined in doctrine by the Director of the Sisterhood, Fr. Antonio Ochoa.

She dresses the habit in the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception on the 5th May 1869. She kisses the hand of the Director and embraces all the Sisters starting with Sr. Magdalena Hecho, the Superior.

Pabla is going to spend a year in this school. As Formator of Novices, Sr. Martina Balaguer. *She was appointed as the Formator of Novices because she was the most suitable*⁶. She instructs them in the Sisterhood.

The purpose of the Congregation is Charity. Love expressed in hospitality. To give one's life is not learned by listening to great speeches but by imitation. Sr. Martina initiates her Sisters in all the tasks. She teaches them how to accompany the terminally ill women; to be, gradually, responsible for the wards; to get used to the smells of the Hospital and to the less pleasant and recognized services. The novices work in Sr. Martina's ward or in a nearby one. She visits them and, every day, they have a meeting in which they comment on situations, study and share. They walk a path together.

Life goes on between service to the poorest and the relationship with God. Contemplation and action. Learning

to look at the reality with the eyes of God; to be women with new eyes. Of newness made new every dawn.

The Novitiate is time to build the house on the rock of the experience of God, to live a communion of life in a hospitality without frontiers.

At the end of her Novitiate year, Pabla is approved by the Sisters who have already the temporary profession. Although only God knows the heart of each one, the community has a word to pronounce about the novices before they take their first vows.

What to say about Pabla's life? Traditionally, we keep some small details.

Her knowing how to be. Always owner of herself, she transmits a peace that springs from the littleness of a poor soul. Her greatness is that God is everything. And that was a secret that her gaze and her gesture proclaimed loudly. Without wishing to, her presence led to God.

She was the first to care for the sick. The solicitude in the small details that make life more comfortable: fixing the bed's cover, stuffing a pillow, cutting the nails, washing the hair, caring for an oozing sore... Let's not think that it doesn't cost her any effort. Pabla is very sensitive. The pain affects her. Suffering does not leave her indifferent. And what she sees, touches, smells and hears in the hospital wards does not leave her indifferent either. But she knows how to remain and smile. Always it is possible to smile. Being a presence at the foot of the cross. Like Mary.

The Sisters love her. They look for her company because she helps them to see beyond the apparent. To grow towards God. Let us see what Sr. Cecilia Frances tells us. The long hours of night watches become a gardening session:

We went first to the tabernacle to offer a prayer to the Blessed Sacrament and ask his divine grace to make a beautiful bouquet of flowers during the whole night.

This bouquet consisted not only of the many works of charity offered to us during the night watch, but also of the way and delicacy of doing them, because it is not the work but the spirit that goes with it that has merit before God.

We proposed, therefore, not to separate ourselves for a moment from the presence of the Lord, we made a special effort to walk on tiptoe so as not to keep the sick awake, to bring them food with all punctuality, guessing their tastes and not sparing a single step to provide them not only any relief, but even the whims and oddities that illness brings with it; we were careful to clean the cups of broth carefully, so that the fat deposited would not repel them next time; with loving words we encouraged those without appetite; we were determined and we were going to take out immediately the services, to avoid bad smells, in short, we wanted and we tried to do everything in such a way that the Lord was pleased.

To these flowers of charity we added others of adoration, which consisted of frequent visits, even if they were quick to the tribune, constantly sending our thoughts to Him and making amends for the sins that were being committed in that very hour.

Other flowers of exquisite perfume, such as silence and holy joy, could not be absent from the bouquet either. And when the night watch was over, we tied the bouquet tightly with the ribbon of a firm resolution to pick up these flowers with more fervor and spirit every night, so much to his liking, and kneeling on the tribune we offered them to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin, and after asking them for their holy blessing, we retired to rest for a while until the community Mass⁷.

With the consent of the community, Pabla pronounces her vows. May 8th, 1870 is a day of grace and joy. In the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception, in front of the

Director Fr. Antonio Ochoa, kneeling and with a white wax candle lit in her right hand, her voice is heard serene and firm:

I, Sister Pabla Bescos Espierrez promise to keep poverty, obedience, chastity and hospitality for one year in the presence of God our Lord and His saints and the Director and Sisters of this holy house. Amen Jesús⁸.

At the end of the ceremony, the newly professed kiss the hand of the Director and Mother Magdalena Hecho who is the President. They pray a Hail Holy Queen and go in peace. In the peace of God. In the peace of his poor.

IX

AFTER ONE YEAR IN THIS SCHOOL

After her first profession, Pabla is assigned to the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. She stays in this House of the sick of the city and the world to serve Jesus Christ in the person of his poor.

Life, we have all seen, is woven of moments of light and shadows, of flat paths and dark glens. Just two months after her first vows, on July 12th, 1870, her mother died. Maria Espierrez leaves a void in the Casal de Campo that Pabla experiences with pain. Within a year, on September 16th, 1871, her brothers, Miguel and Tomasa, are to marry Josefa and Ramon Naya, respectively. Sebastiana has already expressed her desire to enter the Congregation. And Jose Bescos, who is a good man, knows that none of his children belong to him. God gave them to him as a gift. And what greater joy than for Him to call two of his daughters to live in His house.

Along with this concern, Pabla carries out the heavy works of the Hospital. And her health is affected. She falls ill. And she is distressed that the lack of health may prevent her from continuing in the Sisterhood.

That is right. Despite the effort to make Pabla heal, the days go by and she doesn't get better. Sr. Magdalena thinks it would be good for her to go home for a while to recover. Panzano's clean air, the rest from the work of the Hospital and seeing her family will do her good. She will return to the Sisterhood recovered in order to be able to serve more and better.

Pabla is uneasy. She is afraid. What will become of her? God is her life. She wouldn't know how to live outside the Sisterhood. What if she doesn't recover? What if the

Sisters won't take her back? What if...? All these are questions and concerns. A restlessness that does not exactly contribute to her recovery.

God comes at this time through the presence of Sr. Martina, her Novice Formator. A woman who went about doing good, she was known for her discretion and prudence and for her inexhaustible love.

Sr. Martina reminds Pabla that God is and that He always is; about her life which she is experiencing, in these moments, so fragile, God has already pronounced a word of belonging to her life. In these moments, Pabla must listen: *Do not be afraid, I am with you.*

Sr. Martina's words comfort Pabla. *A faithful friend is a balm of life*⁹. Some friendships are initiated when, in adversity, someone comes along to ease the pain we feel. This is how this deep friendship is born in Pabla's life and in Sr. Martina's life.

Pabla returns to Panzano. To the places and beloved people: the Casal de Campo, the Church, the orchard, the majestic landscape of the Sierra de Guara, her family. Pabla can rest from the rhythm of the Hospital, but does not remain idle. She is not allowed to help much... but there are always small gestures: attending to her father, answering Sebastiana's questions about life in the Sisterhood, listening to the preparations for Tomasa and Miguel's wedding... And praying. Because God is Everything to Pabla.

In Panzano, the mountain air and the thoughtful cares of Tomasa and Sebastiana are re-establishing her.

Soon she can return to Zaragoza, to her beloved Hospital, to her Sisters. There she will wait for Sebastiana, who was admitted to the Sisterhood in January 1871.

X

NURSE OF THE PILLAR

The situation of the Hospital is precarious; it lives on credit for two years and needs a series of reforms. The Charity Commission, in its report, already pointed out the need to fit out the wards that are already built and to construct others so that the patients could be more comfortable and, as it is often the case, not cramped in the wards or even accommodated in the corridors. In addition, there is a need for a bathroom department, a ward designed to receive convalescent patients and a better decorated, more spacious and more independent place for distinguished patients of both sexes.

Another pressing need is the construction of a drainage gutter so that the dirty water had an outlet and so that the muddy water deposits located in the center of the Hospital may disappear.

In the ward it would be convenient to have heaters that may maintain the temperature constant and fans that may renew the air continuously. In this way, patients would avoid those sudden changes of temperature that take place while cleaning the wards, and that contributed little to their early recovery.

Nursing work is hard and, sometimes, unrewarding. Sisters destined for this service must be understanding, kind, diligent, caring and with spirit of sacrifice.

In one of these wards, we find Pabla. At twenty-three years of age, she has been appointed in charge of the Pillar Ward. One of the women's wards, dedicated to general medicine, although there are also patients with tuberculosis and venereal diseases.

What does her work consist of? Pabla, as the Sister in charge of the ward, accompanies the doctor in the two

visits he makes in the morning and in the afternoon, while one nurse writes down the variations in the diet of the patients in the food booklet and the other issues the prescriptions.

Each day, at the least expected time, Jesus Christ can arrive at her ward in the person of a sick person¹⁰ and she is the one, who receives her and takes good care that, if her condition allows it, she takes a bath before going to bed and has a clean shirt. She also makes sure that the clothes on the beds are changed frequently and whenever there is a need.

Together with other Sisters, she is in charge of the order and government, the cleaning and neatness of the ward, the arrangement of the beds and the immediate care of the sick: distributing the food, the broths and the medicines prescribed for each one. A chart on each bed indicates whether the sick person is on a diet, ration or soup.

Pabla serves with promptness and detail, punctuality and love, knowing that she assists *her brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, and the same Jesus Christ who likes to be recognized and worshipped in his poor¹¹.*

This certainty is the motivation for her assistance in the ward. An assistance that is integral. The task of the Sisters is not limited to the physical care of the sick. The day is marked by small moments of prayer led by the Sisters and in which the sick women participate: the prayer of the rosary; an Our Father and a Hail Mary for the benefactors; when the clock strikes, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be are prayed followed by the prayer to the Virgin of the Pillar *Blessed and praised be the hour*, and the simple ejaculation *Hail Mary Most Pure*.

For Pabla, any activity is a means of evangelization, of witnessing simply and directly to God. And to bring that Charity that God is, to so many people who do not ex-

perience it. An experience of this God, who is Charity, is necessary to manifest Him to others, especially to the poorest and the neediest. An essential means of acquiring this experience of God is prayer. Besides the time indicated by the Constitutions, Pabla seeks other moments of intimacy with God. She leans out at either of the two tribunes in the Pillar Ward, which still exist today in the Church of the Hospital, and makes a visit to Jesus Eucharist.

And in the contact with the source of Charity, which is God Himself, she keeps growing and deepening her charism of Charity. Charity that is expressed in concrete acts of life.

The management of a ward involves continuous treatment, besides the sick women and the other Sisters, with the rest of the staff: doctors, medical students in training, maids and nurses. Pabla addresses everyone with timely and discreet words; combining firmness and kindness. She is learning, by keeping silent, the eloquence of silence. The testimonies that tradition has passed on to us allow us to define her as a woman of elegant humility. Humility that lets her know what her place is in every moment. Elegance that means distinction in her being and manners; good taste and pleasant treatment.

On April 24, 1871, she renews her vows for the second time, before the Director and the Sisters. Soon it is going to come another moment in her life in which she must reaffirm, in the depth of her heart, that “yes”.

XI

HOSPICE OF OUR LADY OF MERCY

Agreed by the Provincial Deputation in an extraordinary session on the 4th of the present the replacement of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent of Paul by the Sisters of Charity who, under the invocation of Saint Anne, have their Mother House in Our Lady of Grace Hospital; the Provincial and Charity Commissions, authorized to carry out that agreement in an extraordinary session on the 6th, disposed that I manifested to you their desire that you make the needful so that you may have chosen the necessary personnel to take charge of the services of that Asylum, understanding that although the term fixed for the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul for their transfer is two months, it may happen, however, that they do not wait to finish it, in which case it would be necessary to transfer that Community immediately, so that the service of the Establishment would not suffer, taking particular care that the personnel appointed for the Mercy House would be the best of that Community.

(Office of the Provincial Deputation to Sister Magdalena Hecho, February 7, 1872)

The asylum is the Hospice of Our Lady of Mercy. A charitable institution that dates back to 1669 and whose original purpose was to collect and assist all those who, for whatever reason, were begging for the city.

In 1842, the Municipal Board of Charity, in charge of its governance, addressed the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent of Paul in order to render their services in the House. They arrive at the Mercy in March 1845.

In 1849, the House of Mercy became dependent on the Provincial Board of Charity. Mr. Mariano Lezcano, a

member in charge of matters related to the House of Mercy, has the idea of integrating the Foundling Home into the building of the House, as the building of the former convent of Carmel, headquarters of the Cradle House, is not the most suitable. In 1850, when the Foundling Home is definitively installed at the House of Mercy, four Daughters of Charity are in charge to attend it, replacing the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne who had been assisting it since 1812.

The administration of the charitable entities becomes dependent on the Provincial Deputations through the Charity Commissions after the suppression, in December 1868, of the Provincial Boards.

The charitable provincial establishments were the facilities of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace (the Hospital for the Sick, the Mental Hospital, the Foundling Home and the Maternity House), and the Hospices of Zaragoza, Calatayud and Tarazona. The Congregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne was attending to all of them, except the Hospice and the Foundling Home in Zaragoza.

The first measure taken by the Commission is the elaboration of a Report, for the year 1869-1870, on the situation of the Provincial Beneficence of Zaragoza.

In this Report, when dealing with the Hospice of Our Lady of Mercy, the need for a regulation is pointed out. Among the reasons given are *the lack of unity in the jurisdiction and in the administration, the existence of a Director and a Lady Superior of the Daughters of Charity with undefined attributions. It is also pointed out: as for the reform of the administration and accounting, a model worthy of imitation, Your Excellency has it in the offices of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace where, with total reliability, it is run by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne and by the Secretariat*¹².

The Hospice was, in its administration and management, under the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. In April 1870, the Deputation agrees, in accordance with the opinion of the Charity Commission, to segregate the Foundling Home from the Hospital, joining it to the budget and governance of the Hospice House. Our Lady of Mercy thus has three departments: the Hospice, the Foundling Home and the Small Hospital, a department limited to 24 orphan girls.

The Charity Commission, as stated in the minutes of January 25, 1872, exposes the convenience of replacing the Daughters of Charity with the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Grace Hospital. It is agreed, because of the seriousness of this matter, to call the Provincial Deputation to an extraordinary session on February 4 at 11 a.m. By agreement of the deputies, it is a secret session; and, judging by the reading of the minutes, a session in which the spirits were high. The resolution of the Deputation, after reading the opinion of the Charity Commission and after the interventions of some deputies, is the substitution, by 27 votes in favour and 9 against, within two months, of the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent of Paul by the Sisters of Charity.

Reasons? From the reading of the minutes, we can conclude that they are those given in the Report of 1869-1870. The poet Leon Felipe writes: *God has a new path for each man*¹³ For every religious Institute too. The Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, despite the Royal Order of 1857 and the diocesan approval of the Congregation, have a special bond with the Deputation by their birth, not by their will. The dependence and interference of the civil power in the historical development of the Congregation will be a fact until autonomy is achieved, when Pabla will be Superior General of the Congregation. But we are still waiting. For the time being, we find her among the Sisters assigned to the Hospice of Our Lady of Mercy.

XII

THE PATH OF MERCY

Sister Magdalena Hecho addresses the Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fray Manuel Garcia y Gil, requesting his permission to go to the Hospice and the Foundling Home. Before writing to him, she has made sure that the Daughters of Charity are not going to continue in the establishment and that, if they don't accept the proposal of the Deputation, they would be exposed to a great misfortune. The letter, written with Sister Martina Balaguer, is eloquent:

Sir: The agreement of the Most Excellent Deputation by which the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent of Paul must or have to leave, the House of Mercy and Foundling Home of this city, has been as sensitive and bitter for us as it could have been for our Sisters and for Your Honour. We have all done everything possible to avoid it, and this and our sorrow we have expressed to the Superior of the House of Mercy. We would have been much less affected if, in order to carry out this agreement, the Deputation Council had not remembered us, because it is not easy to replace the Daughters of Saint Vincent, nor is it pleasant for good and faithful religious to take the place of others.

But as it is a fact, and as subject to Your Honour, we come to beg you to free us from great conflicts and perhaps from the disappearance of our beloved Institute, by giving us permission to accept the invitation made to us.

Once the permission has been obtained, Sr. Magdalena answers to the Deputation. On the same day, February 8, Fr. Antonio Ochoa, Spiritual Director of the Institute and of the community of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, and to whom also Deputation had addressed an instance,

answers to the President of the Deputation of Zaragoza in his name and in that of the Congregation:

This Institute is not unaware of the great importance of the obligations that will be imposed on it when it takes charge of the Provincial Hospice and the Foundling Home that are to be entrusted to it, but it trustfully hopes that God Our Lord will deign to assist the Sisters with His sovereign lights and powerful aids for their exact performance and faithful fulfillment; this trust is already based on the prayers that the Institute unceasingly makes to the Most High for this purpose, and also on the zeal, hard work and careful care with which the Sisters will try to fulfill their duties and attend to the offices with which they are honored and which they have never requested or sought.

The following day, February 9, a committee of three deputies, Fr. Antonio Ochoa and Sister Magdalena Hecho, met in the Hospital's Board Room. In that meeting four points were agreed upon: the Sisters will cover the services of the Hospice and Foundling Home, to which the necessary Sisters will be assigned; the salary and the way they will be remunerated will be the same as for the Sisters of the Hospital of Grace; the authorization for the Congregation to increase the number of Sisters by ten novices, remunerated with the available allowance to the present five; finally, the Sisters will follow the Rules and Constitutions of their Institute, with the duty to conform themselves to the Regulations and better manage the establishment.

Twenty-seven Sisters are assigned to Our Lady of Mercy on April 11, 1872. Twenty to the Hospice, including Sister Pabla, and seven to the Foundling Home. At three o'clock in the afternoon, the Provincial Commission of Beneficence, the Vice President of the Deputation and other deputies go to fetch them from the Hospital. In the Board Room, the Sisters, Sr. Magdalena Hecho and Fr.

Antonio Ochoa were waiting for them. They go by car to the House of Mercy and go down in the main square, while the bells announce their arrival. In the Church of the Hospice, dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, the Sisters pray. They would surely entrust their mission to her. At the exit, the welcomed ones parade before the Sisters and the accompanying group. Next, in the Board Room of the Hospice, the President of the Charity Commission declares the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne installed in the establishment. The list of the Sisters is read out, with the tasks assigned to each one, and the deputies accompany them to their respective destinations, where they introduce the Sisters. Dinner time arrives immediately. And it is already served by the Sisters. The Chronicles say that with *the charity and care that is characteristic to them*. Let us know their names.

PROVINCIAL HOSPICE

Sr. Martina Balaguer	Superior
Sr. Concepción Villar	In charge of the Small Hospital
Sr. Vicenta Ochoa	Head of the Junior School, 7-11 years old
Sr. Maria Balaguer	Head of Middle School, 11-18 years old
Sr. Antonia Miranda	Head of Middle School, 11-18 years old
Sr. Lorenza Sestao	Head of Senior School, 18 years and older
Sr. Marcelina Garatea	In charge of the kitchen
Sr. Juana Osés	In charge of Replenishing
Sr. Micaela Goñi	In charge of the Refectory
Sr. Josefa Cusola	In charge of the Laundry

Sr. Francisca Cebamanos	In charge of the General Wardrobe
Sr. Adelaida Fernández	In charge of the Women's Wardrobe
Sr. Pabla Bescos	In charge of the Men's Wardrobe
Sr. Sebastiana Bescos	In charge of the Men's Dormitory Cleaning
Sr. Casiana Berdonces	In charge of the Women's Dormitory Cleaning
Sr. Francisca Escorihuela	In charge of the Men's Infirmary
Sr. Maria Gorostidi	In charge of the Women's Infirmary
Sr. Casilda Martínez	In charge of manufacturing sales in the Lonja
Sr. Basilisa Huarte	For the monitoring of the Women's Department
Sr. Carolina Ruiz	For the monitoring of the Women's Department

FOUNDLING HOME

Sr. Antonia Barbera	Older sister, in charge of the lathe and the books.
Sr. Jorja Ubalde	Kindergarten school
Sr. Escolastica Ibarraz	Kindergarten school
Sr. Lucia Iraizo	Wardrobe
Sr. Estefanía Almoz	Care of wet nurses
Sr. Antonia Sese	Kitchen
Sr. Silvestra Imas	Washing and cleaning

In the Hospice community, there are seven Sisters with oath of stability, seven with temporary vows and six novices; three have only had three months of probation and the following were exempted. As Superior, Sr. Martina Balaguer. She is 36 years old and is the oldest of the group. The youngest, 18. Some of them were experienced. Sr. Francisca Cebamanos and Sr. Francisca Escorihuela had been in the hospice of Tarazona; Sr. Josefa Cusola and Sr. Concepcion Villar in the one of Calatayud; Sr. Lorenza Sestao at the House of Mercy in Tudela.

In the community in charge of the Foundling Home, the Superior and only Sister with oath of stability was Sister Antonia Barbera. There are four Sisters with temporary vows and two novices; one of them, Sr. Silvestra Imas goes as surplus. Without salary.

Twenty-seven women who have obeyed *with promptness, simplicity and joy*¹⁴, as stated in their Constitutions of 1824. Resolved to admit new tasks and to try to carry them out as well as possible. They know that it is not going to be easy. It was not.

But they are willing to *expose their health and their very temporal life, for the health and physical life of their neighbours*¹⁵. To live charity in its most heroic degree. And these are not just words. Buried like grains of wheat in the furrow of the House of Mercy, of that first community, were left Sr. Micaela Goñi, who will die in 1877 of tuberculosis. She was 29 years old. Sr. Basilisa Huarte, who died in 1882, says her obituary, of *chronic illness*. She was 33 years old. Or Sr. Antonia Garatea, who died in 1906, having given all her religious life as a gift, thirty-four years, to the Hospice.

The Regulation for the internal regime of the Provincial Hospice in its different departments was approved by the Provincial Deputation in the session of 4 June 1873. The daily life of the Provincial Hospice, Our Lady of Mercy, is

developed in this Regulation. What is not revealed is the situation of scarcity that the House is suffering from. Two days after its approval, on June 6th, the Charity Commission states that the situation is so precarious, due to the lack of funds, that it is necessary to give 4000 pesetas^{T.N.} to the Hospice to cover the most urgent needs. And in October, the Commission says that the delay in receiving the provincial budget is going to make them consider the probability of closing the doors of the hospices. The needs are rated as imperative. And the Hospice receives a new income of 15,000 pesetas.

In this situation of scarcity, the Sisters are responsible for the domestic service of the establishment and for the direct care of the children of the Foundling Home and the girls of the Small Hospital and Hospice.

The domestic service departments they are responsible for are the kitchen and pantry; the laundry; the general wardrobe and the two private ones for women and men; the cleaning of the bedrooms, for women and men; the dining rooms; and the manufacturing sales in the Lonja. In the more direct care of the sheltered girls, there are four Sisters in the three classrooms of the Girls' School; one in each infirmary (for women and men); one in the Small Hospital; and two, for the supervision of the women's department.

In the schools, the teaching is in accordance with the programme of the schools in Zaragoza: reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as classes in home economics, sewing and embroidery of all kinds. In the school of the small girls, more time is always devoted to teaching.

Every year there are exams, and prizes are distributed as determined by the Deputation, usually an extraordinary

T.N. Peseta: Currency in force in Spain at that time.

meal. Also, for the most studious and well-behaved girls, the Deputation grants places as assistants of the director of the Schools. These young girls are of great help to the Sisters; under their supervision, they are in charge of caring for the youngest of the girls during the recreation periods, of accompanying them to mass and the rosary, of going with them on walks and whenever they leave the house. Some of them are appointed by the Sisters as Head Wardens of the Women's Department, collaborating with the Sisters in charge of that Department.

Among these assistants, some are appointed by the Charity Commission, to pursue a career as a teacher. And more than one, upon completion, will enter the Congregation.

The Sisters suffer a lot in the first months. They were already aware of the work that would be involved, of how they would be received by the girls and of the great fortitude and charity that was needed. Sr. Martina is a very talented woman, attentive to the needs of the House and, especially, of the children. The chronicles say that *she did not omit any means or sacrifice so that the order of the house would leave nothing to be desired, both for the spiritual and temporal good of those sheltered there*. As Superior of the community, she suggests some modifications to the Director of the Hospice. With his approval, she has keys made, and establishes on-duty services and night watches. At night, the Sisters distribute soup and see to it that the little ones get up to go to the bathroom so that they do not sleep wet and their clothes will not decay.

Love in detail. Hospitality. Integral welcome of the person. To the presence of Jesus in the little ones.

And Pabla?

On Ascension Day, 9 May 1872, she renews her vows for the third time. And on the 11 May 1873, for the fourth time.

At the Hospice, she is assigned to the wardrobe of the Men's Department. The boys wear uniforms. In winter, cloth jacket and trousers, a kind of tight-fitting doublet made of a woolen cloth, woolen socks and a cap. In summer, jacket and pants made of paten cloth, cotton or thread. And the shoes or espadrilles that they wear are those made in the shoe shop of the house.

On Saturday afternoons, she gives the wardens in the boys' department the clean clothes for the boys. And, almost every morning, a boy comes to the wardrobe who needs his uniform altered. But the work is monotonous and unattractive. Very different from the nursing work Pabla has done since she joined the Sisterhood.

She is not happy. It is not just the job. She has also noticed changes in prayer. The joy she experienced has given way to emptiness. It seems that God is not there. God, who for her is everything, is moving away. Pabla goes back to meet God with more effort, but it is useless. And her very desire to find him makes his absence more painful.

No one suspects her crisis. Pabla does not let her state of mind affect her work or community life. She does not even comment on her situation to her sister Sebastiana or to Sr. Martina. But there comes a time when she doubts her vocation. At this time, the monastery of Casbas, that possibility of a contemplative life goes echoing in the heart of Pabla. Would she be wrong to enter the Sisterhood? What she has lived so far is not a dream. Pabla has been very happy. It is true that there have been moments of difficulty, even of suffering, but God was there... but now...

Pabla is afraid that this situation would continue. She must not hide it any longer. She decides to talk to Fr. Antonio Ochoa, the Sisterhood's General Director; he knows her since she entered. Antonio Ochoa y Arenas is a man of great spiritual insight who will be appointed, in 1879, as Bishop of Sigüenza. Pabla trusts him. We do not know

what conversation they have. But years later, to a Sister who wanted to leave the Congregation to enter a contemplative order, she said: *When I was young, too, at the Hospice, when I was entrusted with the men's wardrobe, I was strongly tempted to retire to a cloistered convent; but Father Ochoa, who was then my director, dispelled that cloudiness. One can do so much good in our beloved Institute! Never again have I been plunged into such a nightmare*¹⁶. A nightmare that is dissipated after the conversation with Fr. Antonio, as if by bringing to light her fears, they lose all her strength. And so it was.

The restlessness of her heart and spirit disappears, but she is affected by a skin rash all over her body, accompanied by a high fever. The Sisters' infirmary is not yet prepared, so Sr. Martina decides to send her to the Hospital of Grace. There she will be better attended. For her transfer, one of the stretchers of the sick is brought, a piece of canvas with two sticks. When Pabla sees it, she feels a great repugnance. But she says nothing and lies down.

At the hospital, doctors visit Pabla and prescribe an ointment. It is administered immediately, but she does not improve; on the contrary, it is very itchy and she gets the skin raw. In addition, the fever is getting higher. The Sisters call Mr. Liborio de los Huertos, Dean of the Provincial Charity Medical Body and physician of the Hospital. Seeing her condition, he asks the Sisters what they had applied to her. When they show him the ointment, he realizes that it is not the prescribed one. What happened? The pharmacist at the Hospital has made mistake with the prescription of the physician. The doctor is amazed at how she had been able to endure the intense pain she undoubtedly had to suffer.

Pabla is very serious. Critical days pass until the patient goes experiencing a slight improvement. But she is very weak. The Sisters visit her every day and try to satisfy her

every need, however small it may be. Pabla will always remember the delicacy with which she was treated during her illness and the care that was given to her.

Sr. Magdalena Hecho and Sr. Martina decide that a short period in Panzano will help her to regain her health. She was there little time. She returns to Zaragoza and the doctors indicate the convenience of going to a health resort. Panticosa?, Paracuellos de Jiloca?^{T.N.} We don't know.

The truth is that the rest and the health resort favour her recovery, and she can rejoin the Hospice community; Sr. Martina proposes to her to take care of the cleaning of the boys' department. This service will allow her to rest in the afternoons, and to do all kinds of works, such as an artistic embroidery frame that is preserved today in the General House.

The days go by. The date of her perpetual profession is getting closer and closer, and the doctors send her back to a health resort. Pabla sometimes wonders if her Sisters will admit her definitively to the Congregation because of her poor health.

On May 15th, five years after her admission to the Novitiate, three Sisters made their perpetual profession in the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception at the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace: Sister Pabla Bescos Espierrez, Sister Concepcion Los Arcos and Sister Francisca Gabalda. Each one, placing her right hand on the image of Jesus Crucified and the Gospels, promise to remain all their life in the Congregation. Then, they renew their vows.

I, Sister Pabla Bescos Espierrez, promise to keep poverty, obedience, chastity and hospitality for as long as I remain in this Sisterhood in the presence of God our Lord

T.N. Panticosa (Huesca) and Paracuellos de Jiloca (Zaragoza) are villages with health resorts.

and His Saints, and of the Director and Sisters of this Holy House. Amen Jesus¹⁷.

Fr. Antonio Ochoa, Sister Magdalena and the Sisters who were able to attend accompany them in their joy and prayer. May it be so. As they promise today. May God help them to fulfill what they offer. Always for the greater glory of God and the good of the poorest and the neediest.

After her profession, Sister Pabla collaborates in the care and vigilance of the girls outside of school hours. The Regulation of the Hospice indicates that the Sisters in charge of this task must be persons of character.

Certainly, character was needed. A character whose qualities were patience, joy, generosity. And above all, charity.

Pabla loves the girls very much. Her great sensitivity allows her to empathise with each one from the first moment, and to understand that their personal situation is not easy. At the Hospice, there are only orphans and girls whose parents can not look after them properly. Pabla, who knows about suffering, discovers suffering and she makes herself present there.

To get close to girls, she becomes a girl. After breakfast, the littlest ones go out into the courtyards while the others go to class or to the workshops. Pabla accompanies them. If necessary, she plays with them, organises new entertainments and is always attentive to what they need.

With the older ones, she uses the testimony. In the ironing room, there are two heavy irons that everyone rejects. Pabla, when she accompanies the girls, chooses precisely those ones. Without words, her life speaks.

Without pretending to, she goes gaining their respect, their love and their trust.

This is Pabla's first contact with the world of education. She discovers what a lot of good can be done in teaching.

It is going to be a passion to which she will unleash very soon.

XIII

ALCAÑIZ

On 23 May 1878, the Provincial Deputation, in accordance with the opinion of the Provincial Commission of Beneficence, authorises the foundation of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne in the Hospital of Saint Nicholas of Bari in Alcañiz. Previously, the Town Hall of this city had approached the Superior General, M. Dolores Marin, to request such a foundation and to know what the necessary conditions would be to carry it out. She sends to them a copy of the agreement with the Caspe^{T.N.} Town Council.

On June 3rd, M. Dolores Marin and a Sister from the community of Caspe go to Alcañiz to visit the Hospital and see what was needed to establish the community. It is necessary to work on the Sisters' premises and to buy some utensils, all *as economically as possible*.

On June 27th, the deed of installation of the Sisters in the Hospital of Alcañiz is signed at the notary's office of Mr. Angel Maria de Pozas y Escanero. The terms of the contract, similar to those in force in other municipal councils, are signed by Mr. Genaro Casas, provincial deputy, representing the Provincial Deputation; Mr. Joaquin Escanilla, deputy mayor of the Alcañiz Council; and M. Dolores Marin, Superior General of the Congregation.

There are five Sisters who were transferred to Alcañiz. Four are on the payroll and one as surplus, this is to say, without salary. As Superior of the community, M. Pabla Bescos. The other four are Sisters Concepcion Los Arcos,

T.N. Caspe: Town of the Province of Zaragoza.

from the same batch as Pabla; Nieves Lopez, in temporary profession; and Andresa Bornau and Rufina Manzana, novices.

On the 2nd of July they leave Zaragoza for Alcañiz. They are accompanied by M. Dolores Marin, Sr. Antonia Pinen, Vicar General, and Fr. Antonio Ochoa, General Director. At three o'clock the next morning, they arrive in Alcañiz, where they are received by the City Hall and the priests of the city. The delegation goes to the Chapel of the Solitude in the Church of Santa Maria, where they celebrate the Eucharist.

On the 4th, the new community is officially installed in Saint Nicholas of Bari. A solemn Eucharist is celebrated in the Church of Saint Francis, in whose ex-convent the Hospital is located, and then it is handed over to the Sisters in a symbolic act. The door of the Hospital is locked and Mr. Jeronimo Blasco, Mayor of Alcañiz, hands the keys to Mother Pabla, who opens the door of the establishment.

In the afternoon, in the Church of Saint Francis, the Rosary is sung, Fr. Antonio Ochoa preaches and the acts ended with the Hail Holy Queen.

The Sisters are received with joy and enthusiasm by the people of Alcañiz. They are also happy. M. Pabla, senses that Alcañiz is going to be a good school of charity for the community, helping them to grow in the only objective that the Congregation has: *to serve and to assist. In Alcañiz, there will also be the opportunity to serve and assist without fearing the dangers that contagious diseases bring, promising to expose one's life in the service of one's fellow men whenever the occasion arises, for the greater glory of God and the relief of the afflicted*¹⁸.

The Hospital is located in the former convent of Saint Francis, a building more than 300 years old located in the

Arrabal neighbourhood, in the southeast of the city, far from the centre. Although reforms have been made, the need for improvement is evident. Since the arrival of the Sisters, the Hospital undergoes a rehabilitation. We can guess their suggestions for better attention, suggestions which, in many cases, as recorded in the town hall minutes, are taken into account. The iron beds of the Hospital are renovated, the toilets are reformed, clothes and utensils are bought, and an anonymous donor gives the Sisters, for the Hospital, eight rolls of canvas and eight dozen towels and napkins.

When the Sisters move in, no more non-medical personnel are considered necessary than a male nurse and a female nurse. The reception, the kitchen, the administration and the infirmary become the responsibility of the community.

M. Pabla, as Superior of the community, supports and fosters zeal and charity among the Sisters, aware that *mutual charity, peace and union make the biggest works and efforts*, which were many in the Hospital, *bearable, easy and even enjoyable*¹⁹. Years later, she herself will describe the work they had to do in the beginning as very big. M. Pabla, encourages the life and mission of the community through *the example, which is the most effective doctrine and exhortation*²⁰. Besides being in charge, as Superior, of the administration of the Hospital, she supervises the work of the Sisters and helps them in the attention of the House. If she goes to the kitchen and sees Sr. Nieves with a lot of work, she stays to help her in whatever is needed. At night, stealing hours of rest, she cleans the toilets, fills the jars with water, sweeps and scrubs the stairs, lights the fire and prepares the chocolate for breakfast. All this is done before the four o'clock bell in the morning, which wakes up the Sisters and starts a new day.

The night duty comes every four days. Sr. Rufina is very young, nineteen years old, just a few days after her arrival

in Alcañiz. When she has to stay in the care of the sick during the night, M. Pabla waits for the community to go to bed and tells her: *Go, go to bed, Sister Rufina that the young Sisters are always sleepy, and sleep very quietly that I will take care of the sick and I will call you a little before the community so that no one will know*²¹. And she does not do it only with her, she also substitutes the others on many night duties.

Winter in Alcañiz comes early and M. Pabla asks the Town Hall for blankets or mattresses for the Sisters' beds. They give her seven. In this way they can withstand the intense cold. Recalling those days, Sister Pabla told that *many times, when bringing up the water for the toilet, we were left freezing cold. Even the aprons*²² *on which we placed the jugs were frozen. But we suffered everything with joy.*

At the end of December 1879 and the beginning of January 1880, Alcañiz suffered a frost and ice storm that made it impossible for the farmers to work in the fields. The Town Hall decided that the Sisters, without neglecting the Hospital, would be in charge of cooking and distributing food to the needy. The food had to be cooked outdoors because there was no suitable place, and there were times when at three o'clock in the afternoon they were still distributing meals, with great zeal and diligence, as the Town Hall acknowledges in an act of 5 January 1880 in which it thanks the Sisters.

Love always meets the need. Whatever it may be. And education, from her experience of the Hospice, is a reality that has taken deep root in the heart of M. Pabla.

It was also taken note of the letter dated 23rd October, presented by the President of the Sisters of Charity established for the Hospital, stating that, at the request of several charitable people who have offered to pay for the expenses, they ask for permission and premises to establish a free school for poor girls from the Arrabal in the

hospital, without this being to the disadvantage of the service of assistance to the sick entrusted to them, and taking into account what has been said, as well as the offer to be the community available for any other charitable service provided by the Town Hall.

(Minutes of the Town Hall, 1st November 1880)

The Dominican Religious had a free school in Alcañiz. But the premises were not large enough to accommodate all the girls who wanted to attend and it was far from the Arrabal. There was another school, Our Lady of Solitude, but families had to pay for the girls' education.

The new school is set up in one of the wards of the Hospital, a large room, separated from the rest of the building, and with a separate staircase. Some benefactors pay for the work to prepare the place and the material needed for the classes. M. Pabla asks for some Sisters from Zaragoza, and a teacher, Sr. Teresa Galvez, to teach in the first free school of the Congregation.

At 6 pm on 8 December 1880, the Immaculate Conception School is inaugurated. The local Board of Instruction, presided over by the then Mayor, Mr. Estrada, attended it and he gives a speech. Fr. Mariano Bordas, Archpriest, and M. Pabla, reply, thanking the Board for granting the necessary permits for its installation and making the new school available to them. The inauguration ends with refreshments.

The Immaculate Conception is born to serve preferably the less fortunate girls of the families living from the Square of the Constitution to Saint Francis and the adjacent neighbourhoods and country houses. And if there are any students from affluent backgrounds, they will also attend the school free of charge. M. Pabla is in charge of admission and enrolment, up to one hundred girls, and does not want any distinction between them.

In 1882, Fr. Manuel Gil y Gil, assistant priest of Santa Maria Parish, passes away, bequeathing an amount of money to the school's Board of Trustees. The Immaculate Conception is managed by the Congregation, but there is a Board of Trustees formed, in the early years, by Mr. Faustino Camprovin, Mr. Jeronimo Blasco, Mr. Gregorio Franco, Mr. Antonio Montañes, Mr. Pascual Ardid and Mr. Valero Estrada, who collaborate from the beginning to support the school financially. This same year, the Board asks for the moral support²³ of the Town Hall and in its name, as members of the Board of Trustees of that school and in the name of the Directors and Teacher Sister of the same, they agree that this educational Establishment may be visited and inspected by the appropriate person, not only with regard to morals and hygiene, but also with regard to the teaching and its results, all with the aim of making the new school useful to the Town Hall.

The subjects of first class and all kinds of sewing work are taught from 8 to 11 in the morning and from 2 to 5 in the afternoon.

The age to start attending is from six years of age; younger children are not allowed to attend. The answer is a nursery School which is established provisionally on 16th May 1883 in the premises given by Mr. Antonio Montañes and Mrs. Vicenta Abinaja until the school is opened. The school? M. Pabla desires to make of education a possibility to everyone. Girls from the villages near Alcañiz could have access to education if the Sisters had a boarding school.

Said and done. At least in her heart, because it is already known that for the one who loves nothing is impossible. The community, besides the collaboration of the gentlemen already mentioned, counts for this new enterprise, with the sensibility of two women: Mrs. Vicenta Abinaja and Mrs. Victorina Forcada. The first is the wife of An-

tonio Montañes and a great admirer of the work of the Sisters in Alcañiz, so much so that she did not hesitate to send her daughter, leaving aside prejudices or murmuring, to the free school for girls. It is she who gives the first premises for the nursery school. Victorina Forcada gives the Sisters a house of her own; and these buy an adjacent small house *to give more width and uniformity to the new house*. The two buildings, which in times had been a single building, are demolished and a new school is built, paid for by the Congregation and the donations from different people.

On 8 December 1883, the cold and snow do not prevent many people from attending the inauguration of the Immaculate Conception School. The hall on the second floor is decorated and illuminated with simplicity and elegance. The event begins with speeches by Mr. Mariano Bordas, Archpriest of Alcañiz, and Mr. Antonio Montañes, Mayor of the city. This was followed by a group of young people singing and performing different pieces of music; the one that receives the most applause is *Charity*, by Rossini.

The Nursery and the School of Alcañiz are the first foundations that M. Pabla carries out in the field of education. For her, the school is not only a means of transmitting knowledge, it has an unquestionable social projection and is a great platform for evangelization. When she would become Superior General, one of her objectives will be the presence of the Congregation in the rural world through the foundation of small schools, often poorly retributed.

Alcañiz is a decisive place and time in the life of Mother Pabla. To look at certain aspects of her inner experience in these eleven years requires delicacy, amazement and insight. Delicacy because it means looking at the intimacy of a person, at her experience of God. We can listen as addressed to us: *Take off your shoes, for the place you are*

stepping on is holy (Ex 3:5). Amazement at the diversity of God, who reveals Himself in different ways according to the times and moments, always to make Himself close and understandable. Insight so as not to remain on the surface, to remain in the apparent, in the forms and ways, but in the depths.

For M. Pabla her poor health continues being still a reality. In Alcañiz she is affected by numerous headaches, which on two occasions are diagnosed by doctors as meningitis. Testimonies from Sisters say that *the nerves in her neck were shrinking and a lump the size of a walnut was forming*²⁴. She also suffers from a severe lack of appetite and needs to rest, from time to time. She never hides her state of health; when the Sisters ask her how she is, she answers with simplicity.

On the spiritual level, already since her arrival in Alcañiz, M. Pabla appreciates that, as in the Hospice, peace is moving away from her heart. And again, it seems that God is absent. She desires to speak to the Director of the community, Fr. Faustino Camprovin. However, she notices in him a certain disregard that she does not know what to attribute it to and that makes her feel stifled precisely when she needs someone to advise her. M. Pabla asks Fr. Faustino to make a general confession to reveal to him the state of her mind and her personal life. It takes humility to open one's heart to those we perceive as distant. And to have faith. M. Pabla believes that if Fr. Faustino is the Director of the community, he is the right person to accompany her spiritual life. From her experience, she will always advise the Sisters to be humble and transparent women with the Superior and the confessor.

Fr. Faustino, surprised and admired, from that moment on rectifies his behaviour and becomes the spiritual director of M. Pabla, accompanying her regularly until 1887 when she moves to Alcorisa. Described as *a man of great*

*prayer, very knowledgeable in matters of the spirit, austere and penitent to the highest degree, perhaps something too rigid*²⁵ he approves of M. Pabla's use of discipline as a means of mortification. The Constitutions of 1824 state that *the obligation to work and the quality of the work to be done do not allow for any other external mortifications. In these, although so convenient that the flesh does not rebel against the spirit, they must proceed with great discretion, lest by way of mortification they imprudently disqualify themselves from fulfilling their obligation, which is the foundation of true devotion; and, therefore, no one should practice any external mortification without the specific approval of the confessor who directs their spirit.*

But neither mortification, nor the direction of Fr. Faustino, nor prayer bring her back to peace. M. Pabla is going through her dark night. And the apprehension, ever more profound, of being separated from God does not go unnoticed in community.

*I was still very young*²⁶ *and was in Alcañiz when something very extraordinary must have happened to the Mother in her spirit. She called herself a great sinner, she thought herself unworthy of being with the Sisters, and not daring to enter into prayer with the others, she stayed on the stairs of the choir. Some time later, she was again among us.*

Sr. Petra Perez, then a novice assigned to the community of Alcañiz, describes this stage in the life of M. Pabla which took place between mid 1883 and early 1884. It is precisely at this time that the school is inaugurated and the Sisters, especially M. Pabla, enjoy great appreciation and admiration. The contrast with her inner situation is such that the Sisters remember her exclaiming: *I am not the one they believe me to be, but a great sinner!*²⁷ And, as she said it, tears rolled down her cheeks.

Despite her anguish, she continues her life as usual. She does not abandon the life of prayer, the community and

the mission. She remains encouraged by the hope that like any night, this situation will not be eternal. This is how it was. At some point the dawn breaks. The light breaks within herself to take her now around Alcañiz and its region during the outbreak of the cholera epidemic of 1885. This is an infectious disease that causes serious intestinal lesions, often resulting in death. In some countries, it is endemic, and is going to invade Europe in epidemic outbreaks throughout the 19th century.

The heroic charity of the Sisters had already been shown in the outbreak of the cholera epidemic in 1834 and 1854-55. The new outbreak of 1884-1885 is going to confirm their audacity.

Panic is everywhere. In Zaragoza, the Health Board had published, on the 7th of September 1884, a Booklet of Popular Instruction that contains hygienic precepts and preservative means against cholera. In it, it is stated that *it is important that the public spirit may be raised and do not be discouraged by an exaggerated feeling of fear.*

The Sisters of Charity of St. Anne assist the sick from the very beginning. Moreover... they "demand" to care for them, because they have entered the Congregation *to serve without exception contagious or infectious diseases*²⁸.

And when care in the cities is organized, they ask Mother Dolores Marin, Superior General, to allow them to go as volunteers to care for the sick in the villages, where everything is limited. That she may enable them to live the fullness of their vocation, of their call. Even at the risk of their own lives. The Lord takes them at their word which they gave Him one day and ten of them died attending to the sick of cholera.

The Town Hall of Alcañiz declares the city invaded on 19 July 1885. In the Hospital de Saint Nicholas, two premises had already been set aside for those affected by cholera

and all the departments of the establishment had been cleansed.

The main causes of the spread of the epidemic are the consumption of contaminated water and direct contact with the sick. The nauseating smell of diarrhoea, the vomiting of bile, the greasy sweat covering the sick and the panic of contagion make very few people help the cholera patients. The chronicles say that *not even at a high price did people want to assist anyone for fear of being infected.*

In addition to the disease, panic must be combated. Mother Pabla is convinced that many of the sick die of pure fear. With her great inner serenity, she quickly and efficiently organizes the care of the sick in the Hospital or in their own homes. All the Sisters are necessary and she does not want to deprive any of living the most heroic degree of charity: *No one has greater love than the one who gives up her life for her friends.* The school is entrusted to a lay teacher and the Sisters are scattered throughout the city. A chair at the door of the houses indicates to them that their presence is needed. They wash clothes, boil water to drink and place it in clean earthenware jars, clean the sick and disinfect the basins and glasses at night. It is not only material assistance. They encourage and comfort everyone. They accompany many at the moment of death.

No rest or truce.

Mother Pabla knows that in the nearby villages they are also needed. She divides the Sisters into small groups and puts herself in charge of these quick expeditions. In one of these villages, at Castelseras, Sr. Antonia gets seriously ill. Two other Sisters have been infected in Alcañiz. Neither of them die. Mrs. Victorina and her maid Maria have cared for the Sisters because there was no time to cook. Mother Pabla, remembering those days, said to the Sisters: *Mrs. Victorina was a saint. She and her faithful servant Maria took care of us; if not for her we would have*

*succumbed. We did not have a moment of rest. Day and night we were on the streets taking care of cholera patients, and the Hospital was also full, how many hundreds died!*²⁹

Many. In about two months, 247 people died from the cholera epidemic and 80 from gastroenteritis, typhus, dental disorders or rickets.

Since the beginning of September, the epidemic seems to be in remission. Finally, on the 24th of that month, a Te Deum is sung in Santa Maria as a thanksgiving for the end of the epidemic.

The Town Hall, in an ordinary session on 26th October, recognises the work of those who cared for those infected and rewards them with different amounts of money. The Sisters are not named. Until 16th November, when, *at the proposal of some of the town councilors, the many good services rendered by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne in the choleric invasion were made noted, both in the Hospital and in the private homes of the sick who had been infected, and consequently, that they were also worthy of the same considerations and remunerations as the others, who had been gratified. Once the matter was discussed, it was agreed that the Sisters of Charity would be paid five hundred pesetas for their services.*

Charity was highlighted by some and by others, in dispute. The episode seems a small cloud of no importance, but it foretells the storm that is about to break over the community of Sisters and, especially, over M. Pabla.

The installation of a Beneficence Branch in Alcañiz was an old aspiration that is fulfilled when, on 25 April 1885, the Provincial Deputation of Teruel and the Alcañiz Town Council agree to establish a Beneficence Branch in Alcañiz. At the end of that same year, the provincial architect of the Provincial Deputation of Teruel goes to Alcañiz to carry out a study on the possibilities of that

building in the remaining premises of the former convent of Saint Francis. These premises are owned by the Town Hall and the latter gives them to the Deputation exclusively for this purpose and under a series of expressed conditions: that a Municipal Hospital has to continue there, that the service of the Branch House may be organised on the basis of the existing staff of the Hospital, and that the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne may be in charge of the new charity service.

At the end of September 1886, works begin. Some rooms have to be vacated, others have to be fitted out, patients and equipment have to be moved, and the Hospital has to be attended despite the inconvenience and hustle and bustle. The Sisters' rooms are required and the wards of the sick are definitely located in a small part of the building that was reserved. What was not reserved in the new construction were the Sisters' rooms.

Was it at this time or before that *the abuse of a delicate nature that had in the Hospital*³⁰ takes place? M. Pabla is aware that her word can compromise them, given the importance of the people involved, but her responsibility and sense of justice make her pronounce on that issue with firmness and clarity and *she cut the matter off at the root, as it was in her power to do it*³¹. As she had foreseen, a campaign of discredit and slander is unleashed against the Sisters that M. Pabla could have avoided with her silence. A silence that comes now when, even in the Hospital, people dare to revile them. Her eloquence is the absence of words. M. Pabla is silent and her only response, *love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who slander you*³², further angered her persecutors who, using their anonymity, published a leaflet that circulated throughout Alcañiz.

Not only the personal dignity of the Sisters, especially of M. Pabla, but also their professional work at the head of

the Hospital is questioned. Taking advantage of the circumstance of the opening of the Branch House of Beneficence, it is intended that the Sisters abandon Saint Nicholas of Bari. Politics is not unrelated to this situation, as the Branch House was dependent on the Deputation and the Hospital, on the other hand, was dependent on the Municipality.

In the midst of these circumstances, the Congregation entrusts to M. Pabla the formation of the novices, appointing her as Formator of Novices on the 4th of September 1889. M. Pabla has to abandon Alcañiz and move to Zaragoza, precisely when her presence is most needed. During the last months of 1889, her charity and patience help to keep spirits from becoming even more radical.

In 1890, the new Town Hall of Alcañiz, in accordance with the wishes of the Deputation of Teruel, decides that the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent of Paul should be responsible for the service of the Branch House of Beneficence.

1333 signatures support a petition addressed to the Provincial Deputation, on 16th March, in which the need for the municipal Hospital to continue to operate and for the Sisters of Charity to continue to serve in it is explained and argued:

In view of the above, we plead Your Excellency, the city of Alcañiz, to entrust the service of the Branch House of Beneficence in this city to the worthy Congregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne or to organise the service in such a way that this Congregation may continue to run the municipal Hospital at the lowest possible expenses³³.

The Deputation, in a session held on 8 April, rejected this petition *because it means a change in the living conditions of this city's municipal Hospital³⁴.*

On 5th May Fr. Agustin Pardo, Canon of Zaragoza and special delegate of the Cardinal Archbishop of Zaragoza, Francisco de Paula Benavides, arrives in Alcañiz. He is accompanied by the ecclesiastical notary Mr. Ignacio Martinez. His mission is to *investigate the facts that have taken place regarding the change in the conditions of existence of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, established in this city in the municipal Hospital*³⁵.

In the Report that he presents to the Archbishop on May 14, we read:

No real charge has been possible to present against them (the Sisters) by the few persons interested or committed to cooperate in changing the conditions of their existence and the only charge made by the majority of the Town Hall was of having six Sisters residing in the Hospital instead of five far from being charged is a recommendation to the Sisters themselves, because without increasing the cost to the Town Hall or receiving any gratification there has been a greater number of Sisters to have the service of the Hospital better attended to.

Throughout our stay in Alcañiz, neither before nor after, we have heard the least complaint from any of the Sisters against any person who might appear contrary to their stay and good reputation. On the contrary, we have contemplated with great edification, portraying in their countenance, the tranquillity and serenity of the just person and the dignity and fortitude of the martyr.

In spite of these words and the final conclusion of the report that is pronounced in favour of the Sisters, the Archbishop Francisco de Paula Benavides considers it most appropriate that the contract be terminated and the Sisters leave the Hospital. It was so. On May 27, the Mayor of Alcañiz, Mr. Mariano Poblador, addresses the Superior General to inform her that the contract is terminated. The Sisters do not wait until the end of the two months au-

thorized by the contract to remain in the establishment. On the 16th June, *an official document of Sister Pabla Bescos, Sister of Charity of Saint Anne, was read, informing that she is at the commands of the Town Hall to hand over the Holy Municipal Hospital as well as its equipment and furnishings, according to the timely inventory*³⁶.

On the 31st of that month, the Sisters abandon the Hospital. Many people are waiting at the door to accompany them to the School. It is not going to be a farewell. A popular subscription is opened, which covers the salary that the Sisters were receiving at the Hospital, and from the 6th of December, two of them are dedicated to the home care of the sick and two others to the free school for girls.

And in 1892 they will return to the Hospital... Without reproach. That love does not take evil into account. It only loves.

XIV

FORMATOR OF NOVICES

Mother Pabla Bescos.

On this date you are appointed Formator of Novices of our Congregation.

I pray the Lord to give you the graces you need to carry out such an interesting and difficult task.

Zaragoza, September 4, 1889

The Superior General

Sr. Martina Balaguer

M. Pabla Bescós Superior of the Hospital-Hospicio of Alcañiz³⁷.

Formator of novices for new times. When M. Pabla goes to Zaragoza in September 1889, the Congregation is pouring wine into new skins. On the 13th April, Leo XIII has promulgated the Decree of Praise, which is considered to be a first step towards the approval of the Congregation, which wishes to be recognised as of pontifical right. Together with the Decree of Praise, a series of orientations that the Congregation of Bishops and Ordinaries had made to the Constitutions of 1887 are received in Zaragoza. These observations or objections will be taken into account in the drafting of the Constitutions of 1889, which will come into force on 24 March 1890 and will be the ones that M. Pabla would teach her novices.

On the 3rd May 1889, M. Martina Balaguer has been elected Superior General of the Congregation. And in October, Fr. Domingo Lamolla is going to knock at the doors of the Novitiate, where M. Martina lives, to ask her Sisters to go to Venezuela *to care for Jesus in the person of his lepers*. M. Pabla will accompany the first expedition to Barcelona, which will leave Zaragoza on the 2nd of August 1890.

The Congregation needs a zealous, prudent, affable and discreet Sister, to carry out the interesting and difficult task of accompanying the novices. *Interesting and difficult task...* Interesting is the task of helping incarnate Charity in the life of those young women who feel called. Difficult to open paths to Love, with gentleness and constancy.

The Novitiate of the Congregation is located at number 66 of Mayor Street since May 1883. The community is maintained, except for the ten novices assigned to the Hospital and who are paid half pension by the Provincial Deputation, with the dowry that the young women bring when they enter, 250 pesetas plus the clothes they wear, and the needlework they prepare in the Novitiate.

Mother Pabla is going to be Formator of Novices for five years, accompanying 208 novices. The first Sisters she accompanies are a group of six young women, whose dressing of the habit is presided over by the Cardinal Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fr. Francisco de Paula Benavides, on the 27th October 1889. It is the first *vestition* that takes place in the Novitiate, because although Rome has not said anything about this matter, the majority of the Congregations carry out this ceremony in the Novitiate House and M. Martina and M. Pabla decide that it is the most convenient. The ceremony is beautiful, the Sisters sing accompanied by the harmonium and the new novices are radiant with their white veils and crowns.

Sr. Dolores Barduzal is one of those novices. She is only fifteen years old and the habit weighed heavily on her, in the words of Mr. Juan Irazo, the doctor of the Novitiate. Sr. Dolores was also weighed down by sleep and prayer at four o'clock in the morning. In prayer, M. Pabla is inflexible. For her, *it is the most essential thing for the religious woman*. She never lacks time to talk with her novices about how the prayer was spent, even if it is anonsense, like the day when Sr. Dolores' prayer consists of making drafts in the paintings of the choir screen.

She is inflexible about the Constitutions and the tradition of the Congregation. Convinced that the one who is not faithful in small things is not faithful in great things, she instructs the novices in obedience to the Lord, who came to do not his will but the will of the Father. In the same way, she goes making the Sisters be *exact in the obedience*³⁸, not out of an urge of control but so that they may be exercised and their hearts be ready to work not for their own interests but for the interests of others.

In the same way, she acts with the novices when necessary, correcting them with great kindness and gentleness. Sister Dolores herself recalls: *on one occasion, she corrected me for a fault I committed without knowing the seriousness of it because I was very young, and before telling me anything she began to cry like a child; I, while seeing her, was touched and also cried*³⁹.

Without passion, she seeks only the glory of God and the growth of her Sisters. For this reason, her fraternal corrections do not move the novices away from her; on the contrary, they increased the love they have for her.

In the Novitiate, M. Pabla instructs the Sisters in the spiritual life and also in the knowledge they will need to carry out their mission later on. The timetable of the Novitiate includes this double formation.

At four o'clock they get up and half an hour later they are in the chapel for morning prayer. They thank God for the benefits received: *I thank You for having created me, redeemed me, made me a Christian, called me to the religious life and preserved me in this night*⁴⁰, and they offer the day to Him: *I offer and consecrate to Your honour and glory all my thoughts, words, deeds and works*⁴¹. They do half an hour of mental prayer and pray a part of the Rosary.

They participated in the Eucharist every day, receiving communion on Sundays and feastdays, and on Thurs-

days. If the confessor grants it, they also receive communion, on another day.

At seven they have breakfast and until 11.45 they clean the house and study: reading, writing, geography and arithmetic. They also learn to do needlework.

At 11.45 they gather in the chapel for the examination of conscience. At 12 o'clock the bell rings and, in silence, they go to the refectory where they eat while listening to the reading from spiritual books.

After lunch, recreation. And the rest. At two o'clock, they pray the Station to the Blessed Sacrament and in the balcony they meet to make needlework until seven o'clock. The afternoon is the time for the half hour of spiritual reading, and the simple prayer of the ejaculatory prayers. To the rhythm of the stitch, the heart is kept in the presence of the Lord, helped by those little darts that are the ejaculatory prayers.

It is also the time when M. Pabla takes the opportunity to speak to them and to instruct them in the life and mission of the Congregation.

From seven to eight, the evening prayer. Half an hour of mental prayer, a part of the Rosary and some private devotions. After the prayer, and until nine o'clock, dinner and recreation. At that time, in the chapel, with the general examination of the day and the reading of the points for the next day's meditation, the day ends. Throughout the day, M. Pabla, according to the testimony of Sr. Dolores, has always been with her novices: *She did not leave us for a moment; like a zealous teacher, she instructed us in what we should do and practice during the day of which she asked us to account for every night before we go to sleep.*

Every day she asked the Lord for the necessary graces to carry out her task. *A formator of novices must be a person of prayer, so that, dealing often with God in the things*

*of her responsibility, she can draw upon herself the lights and the graces she needs to carry out her task*⁴². At her forty-one years of age, her spiritual journey is consolidated. And her example is, for the novices, the best word.

In her desire to open up ever wider spaces for God, mortification continues to be a means, always under the guidance of her Director, Fr. Faustino Camprovín, *a very penitent priest, whom the Mother loved as a saint and to whom she submitted in every way*⁴³.

Along with the formation of the novices, M. Pabla is a member of the General Council since 1892. The General Chapter has elected her as General Treasurer of the Congregation on May 29th of that year. The rest of the Council is made up of M. Dolores Marin, Vicar; M. Filomena Loras, Admonitor, and M. Casilda Martinez, Secretary.

On 1st October 1892, M. Martina moves her Residence to the Novitiate. The new Council is determined to obtain the definitive approval of the Congregation, on both the civil and ecclesial levels. As far as the former is concerned, this is achieved with the promulgation of the Royal Order of 9 November 1893 by which the Regent Queen Maria Cristina of Habsburg grants to found in all the provinces of Spain.

At the ecclesial level, the Council takes various steps: it asks reports of all the Bishops of the dioceses in which the Congregation is present to submit them to Pope Leo XIII; it requests Cardinal Benavides to recommend the Congregation to the Holy See; and M. Martina writes directly to the Pope asking for definitive approval.

Meanwhile, daily life goes supporting these requests. In the winter of 1893-94, the Melilla war takes place and the Sisters offer themselves to assist the wounded. The Deputation agrees to support six Sisters in order to render their services in the blood hospitals of Melilla or any other town where they may be needed.

On 29 November, M. Pabla, Sisters Maria Minguez, Osoria Palacios, Josefa Laceras, Valentina Martinez and Rosa Saun leave for Melilla. In a hospital in Malaga, from where they will return on 23 January 1894, they attend to the wounded coming from Africa, going through many troubles, sleeping in the room of the organ and eating on the floor because they had nothing else.

On her return to Zaragoza, M. Pabla witnesses, concerned, to Mother Martina's lack of health, which becomes more evident with every passing day. On 23rd August, several Sisters accompany her: her sister Sr. Maria Balaguer, M. Felisa Burruaga, M. Teresa Ibarz, M. Casilda Martinez and, of course, M. Pabla. The agony is slow and peaceful.

I heard perfectly that Mother Pabla told the dying Mother to pray to God Our Lord to accompany her also in her transit journey, and the dying Mother answered: You have to stay many years still on earth to do what both of us have planned and to suffer many bitternesses hidden to others. And if you are satisfied with this, I will die peacefully⁴⁴.

Mother Pabla bent down, kissed M. Martina's hand and told her in tears: I'll do what you command me to do and I won't be envious when I see you go to heaven.

There she leaves at nine o'clock in the morning. Heaven opens up for that woman who, from the age of seventeen until the age of fifty-eight when she left, wanted to bring heaven to those who needed it most.

PART II

I

THE TRAP WAS BROKEN AND WE ESCAPED

On November 11, M. Dolores Marin convokes the Sisters for the General Chapter in order *to elect the Superior General, vacant position due to the demise of the Rev. Mother Martina Balaguer and to review the summary of position and date of the accounts of that foundation.*

In the afternoon of the 17th the Chapter begins, attended by all the local Superiors, with the Spiritual Exercises led by Father Lluviat, S.J., Director of the School of El Salvador. The Exercises end on the 23rd, and that same afternoon, presided over by Fr. Mariano Supervía, Auxiliary Bishop of Zaragoza, the election of Mother General takes place. *All the Sisters who form part of the Chapter then cast their votes, and once the votes received from the Overseas Superiors had been counted, made the scrutiny, Rev. Mother Pabla Bescos was elected, with the majority of the votes.*

M. Pabla is the new Superior General of the Congregation. What feelings would pass through her heart? Until that evening it was a possibility. She was not unaware of the feelings of many Sisters. *When Mother Martina Balaguer died, all the Mothers said that the General who was to replace her was already at home and that all of them had thought of Mother Pabla Bescos, saying all together that she was very talented, but that she had much more humility¹.* Now it was a reality. A reality of what she does not consider herself worthy of, as she states in the letter of notification of her election that she addresses to the Archbishop of Zaragoza, who had approved her appointment on the very 24th:

Although the most unworthy of the Congregation, I have been elected Superior General. I beg you to Your

Reverend Excellency to ask the Lord to give me light and success in carrying out this difficult task and with the help of the Lord and the protection of such a worthy Prelate I hope to fulfill my task to the best of my ability for the honour of God and the good of the Institute.

The new Council is practically the same. As M. Pabla is elected General, the only novelty is the election of M. Isabel Lopez, the Superior of Calatayud, as the new General Treasurer. And of M. Felisa Burruaga as the new Formator of Novices.

The Council goes on, in continuity with the steps taken by M. Martina, with the procedures to achieve the definitive approval of the Congregation. On 1st February 1896 it is agreed to write to Cardinal Verga, asking him to activate the procedures for the definitive approval of the Institute. An indispensable condition is that the election of the Superiors in the Asylum of the Provincial Deputation of Zaragoza is not made by vote and in the presence of a deputy appointed by the Provincial Commission of Beneficence. This matter had already been the object of animosity on the part of Rome in the Constitutions of 1887, and therefore disappeared in the new 1889 draft. What has happened? That the Provincial Deputation did not want to give in on this matter and the Sisters gradually consented to it, fearing that the Deputation may carry out its threats to dispense with their services. *We cannot even talk about this with the Deputation, they refused completely, and the threat of throwing us out of the Hospital and the other Houses of Beneficence is there. Where are we going?*²

M. Pabla knows that it is necessary to resolve this matter definitively and she knows that the words most repeated by the Lord in the Gospel are: Do not be afraid. On 21st March she writes a letter to the Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fr. Vicente Alda, so that when the Commission of Beneficence comes, *he would make them aware of the incon-*

veniences of the election of the Superiors. Fr. Vicente Alda's intervention is decisive, as in the special dispositions of 1887, with which the Deputation governed the election of Superiors, it is stated that *all difficulties, doubts or questions that may happen in the elections would be resolved exclusively by the Illustrious Prelate of the diocese.*

The election of the Superior of Tarazona is going to be the auspicious occasion for M. Pabla, accompanied by M. Casilda, Secretary General, to meet in that city with Mr. Candido Labamana, President of the Beneficence Section. We do not know the content of that conversation, but its outcome. The Provincial Commission, in a session held on 10th January 1896, authorises the Commission of Beneficence *to manage with the Prelate the modification of the conditions established for the appointment of the Sisters of St. Anne to head the provincial asylums.* It will be necessary to present the resolution to the plenary session of the Deputation; in the meantime, the election that was to be verified in January is suspended.

In April of the same year, the Council decides to write to the Deputation requesting that the appointment of Superiors be made by the Superior General in agreement with the President of the Beneficence Section.

In December 1897, the Deputation answers ending the suspension of the election of Superiors and determining that they would be carried out within the established time limits. The situation is tense. But it is not possible to give in. The January 1898 Minutes of the General Council contains the answer: *It was agreed to work hard to remove the elections of the Superiors of the Provincial Asylum, as the Holy See prohibited it.*

M. Pabla's steps are multiplied. Accompanied by M. Casilda, she meets several times with the President of the Provincial Commission and the President of the Beneficence Commission. The answer is always the same: as it

is an agreement taken in a plenary session of the Deputation, it is very difficult not to comply with it. This is not the answer the Congregation needs. M. Pabla, with a firm heart and a determined will, continues to look for ways of solution. Mr. Jose Otis, Secretary of the Beneficence Commission, advises them *to obey for this time and to explain in the April sessions that the Holy See forbids it*. M. Pabla disagrees. They cannot wait until April. She then addresses the Vice President of the Provincial Commission, Mr. Mariano Aladren, to whom she explains the inconveniences of voting and *she clearly told him that since the Holy See was forbidding it, she cannot comply*. M. Pabla is adamant. There is no turning back. *She reproaches him for not having followed up on the request of April 1896 and for not having gone to discuss the matter with the Prelate*. Mr. Mariano Aladren, in view of the clarity and truthfulness of the Sisters, *did not know what to respond*. He requests to see the observations that Rome made in order to be able to tell the Deputies that they could not disobey the Church. He leaves convinced that the Sisters are right and in the first session that takes place he makes this point present.

On 3 February 1898, the Beneficence Commission requests a copy of the Constitutions, which M. Pabla sends the following day, reminding that *I am willing to please the Most Excellent Deputation and Beneficence Section in whatever way I can contribute to the good functioning of the Provincial Asylums*.

The deputies meet with the Archbishop, Fr. Vicente Alda, who reaffirms M. Pabla's position: no vote can be taken without disobeying the Church. On the same day, hours before the deputies arrive, M. Pabla has gone to the Archbishop's palace to inform him of the last steps carried out and to inform him of the deputies' visit. M. Pabla knows that the conversation of the deputies with Fr. Vicente Alda is going to be decisive. The Archbishop promises

to defend the Sisters with tenacity and energy. When the deputies arrive, *with great prudence and as if he was ignorant of what was at stake, he made them see that without being religious women the community would not have life, as they would end up lacking vocations, which they considered not to be an inconvenience, it would be a success*³.

Despite the fact that the Prelate's words persuade them, the definitive solution is delayed until April when the Deputation meets in plenary session. But God had other plans and some shortcuts... On 16th February the Decree of definitive approval of the Institute as a Congregation of Pontifical Right is received in Zaragoza. It is not possible to submit to the plenary session of the Deputation a reality that has already been established. *The present Decree approves and confirms the Institute as a Congregation of simple vows*⁴ *under the government of the Superior General.*

What has happened? Parallel to the proceedings with the Deputation, M. Pabla and her Council manage the approval of the Congregation as a Pontifical Right. We already know that in February 1896 she writes to Cardinal Verga requesting him to take the necessary steps to obtain this approval. That same year, she sends to Rome a personal, economic and disciplinary Report of the Congregation *in order to obtain the definitive approval of the Institute.* In it, M. Pabla communicates to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars that *in all the houses of this Institute the regular discipline and the Constitutions are observed according to the prescriptions that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars deigned to give on the 16th April 1889.*

On 8th January 1898, she requests Pope Leo XIII to appoint Cardinal Francisco Segura as Cardinal Protector of the Congregation. Two days later, the Holy Father holds an audience with the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation

of Bishops and Regulars, Cardinal Serafin Vannutelli, in which he approved and confirmed *the above-mentioned Institute as of simple vows (...), delaying the approval of the Constitutions for a more opportune time.*

The Decree is signed at the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Religious on the 14th January and is received in Zaragoza on the 16th February. It was long awaited news, in a waiting of eighty-three years. Surely from the heart of M. Pabla would flow the words of recognition of the psalmist: *If the Lord had not been on our side... We escaped like a bird from the hunter's net, the net was broken and we escaped.*

II

FOUNDATIONS

The Congregation had already begun its expansion, thanks to the Royal Order of November 1893. However, it had not been published in the *Gaceta*^{T.N.} of Madrid, which caused the Sisters difficulties in opening new foundations.

M. Pabla requested the publication of this Order on 1st February 1897, *so that it could be known and shown the permission contained in it to all the authorities*. A month later, on the 1st March, the Royal Order is published in the *Gaceta* of Madrid, authorising the legal existence of the Congregation in all the provinces of Spain, with the prior permission of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

At the death of Mother Martina, the Congregation exercised charity in 51 foundations and 65 ministries. M. Pabla, making real the words of St. Leo the Great: *If God is love, charity can have no frontiers*, the expansion of the Congregation is going to continue. Foundations follow one another, and to tell the history of each one, throughout this six-year period and her generalate, is impossible. In the Book of Life, the names of Sisters, benefactors and people who have been served are inscribed. In this one, we must be satisfied with a few small brushstrokes of life.

M. Pabla opts, in line with Charism, for a presence among the poorest and the neediest. The rural world, through the Hospital and the School, is going to be one of those simple places that will welcome the presence of the Sisters. In August 1896, M. Pabla accompanies eight Sisters to Ig-

T.N. Periodic publication in which commercial, administrative, literary or other news are given.

Iglesuela and Cantavieja, towns in the province of Teruel. In Iglesiasuela, a community of four Sisters takes charge of the Saint Michael Archangel Hospital and she will open a small nursery school; in Cantavieja, another community of four Sisters and another nursery school, the Saint Anne School. Both communities are entrusted to the protection of Our Lady of Loreto, in the hermitage along the way.

The mission that the Congregation receives from the Church to collaborate in the proclamation of salvation through the service of charity is the reason for establishing new communities. M. Pabla does not allow any other reasons and does not accept the foundation of Busot (Alicante) requested by the Marquis del Bosch because it *did not have a charitable character*. On the other hand, when she knows that the presence of the Sisters is going to bring some good, she does not hesitate to offer the Congregation. M. Pabla *thinks it appropriate to remind the Town Hall of the advantages that the Hospital in that town could bring, placed in the hands of the religious women of the Congregation that she directs*. This is how the community of the Cariñena Hospital is founded, on 1st July 1898.

They are small communities... almost always. On April 12, 1897, the Dowager Countess of Bureta, the Queen's private lady, writes to M. Pabla, exposing the Queen's wish that the Sisters may take charge of the new Hospital of Saint John of God in Madrid. On the advice of the Archbishop, Mother Pabla accepts the foundation.

On 16 September, ten Sisters accompanied by M. Pabla leave for Madrid and, one day later, nine others begin their journey. They remain in the Rosario Sanatorium, the community that the Congregation had in Madrid, until September 23 when, at four o'clock in the morning, they are transferred to the new hospital. They are not well received either by the sick women or by the employees. The Hospital lacks almost everything, *which caused the*

Sisters great inconvenience⁵ and hardship. They had to suffer a lot of contempt.

M. Pabla does not separate from the community:

It was my turn with M. Pabla, to make the foundation of Saint John of God in Madrid, where we had to suffer a lot; it was admirable how the Mother encouraged all the Sisters, even the Superior who was M. Veremunda. She was in the front line of danger and exhorted us with her words to bear that suffering with patience and resignation, telling us to trust in the Heart of Jesus, that He would help us in everything and that the storm would soon pass, as it did, because after eight days tranquillity and calm began to reign. We all attributed it to the prayers of our Mother who never ceased to ask the Sacred Heart of Jesus for her daughters, remaining for hours at the foot of the tabernacle, while we went around taking care of the sick and watching over the healthy who went around the house doing their own thing and nothing good⁶.

During her stay in Madrid, the Regent Queen Maria Cristina of Habsburg calls M. Pabla to express her satisfaction at having accepted the foundation, *promising that she would help the Sisters in all the difficulties they would encounter.* M. Pabla also visits the Infanta^{T.N.} Mrs. Isabel de Borbón, *who was extremely affectionate.*

She returned from Madrid on the 11th October, *after having left the Hospital of Saint John of God in a state of being able to continue working with the Sisters for the good of those who were sheltered there.*

T.N. Legitimate daughter of the king not direct heir to the throne.

It is not only the good of others what impels M. Pabla in the opening of new foundations. The welfare of the Sisters is very important to her. This makes her accept a Torre^{T.N.} in Garrapinillos *because it was absolutely necessary that the Sisters of the Hospital go out into the field even once a year.* From the beginning, the Sisters had enjoyed a few days of rest in the Torre of Abejar, but now a community of Brothers of St. John of God, caring for the insane, has been settled there. On 9 August 1896, M. Pabla attends the inauguration of the Torre, which has a chapel with worship open to the public. In Garrapinillos a community of three Sisters is installed, one for the care of the house and two to attend the class of infants that is inaugurated on 4th November.

The discreet presence of the Sisters is a blessing that the simplest people recognize and appreciate. The new building of the Asylum of La Inmaculada, in Valencia, is bought by the Sisters with the help of many people. Among them, Maria, a servant who *gave 14,000 reales^{T.N.}, the fruit of many years of savings.*

Thanks to another woman, Mrs. Sotera de la Mier, M. Pabla is going to be able to begin the work of a new Novitiate during this six-year period. During the visit of M. Pabla to the School of Portugalete on the 28th of July 1897, Mrs. Sotera, on learning that the Novitiate in Zaragoza lacks the indispensable hygienic conditions for the novices to continue in it, offers M. Pabla 3,000 duros^{T.N.}. In this way, they will be able to buy the adjoining houses and expand the Novitiate. On her return to Zaragoza, they begin the process of buying the house at 19 Saint Laurence

T.N. Torre: Country or recreation house, or farm with orchard.

T.N. Real: Currency in Spain at that time.

T.N. Duro: Currency in Spain at that time.

Street, *the most necessary one for this purpose*. After many procedures and not finding the owner, the project does not go ahead.

On 1st January 1900, the Council agrees to buy the Orchard of the Craft, which is owned by the guild of rope makers. They lived in small houses scattered around the land, working in the shade of the many trees of the place. They had an Oratory in which the Our Lady of the Rosary was venerated, an image that they gave to the Congregation and which, at present, is in the Saint Joachim's gallery in the General House. The deed is signed on the 8th of March of the same year for eighty thousand pesetas. On the same day, the Deputation is informed of the Congregation's intention to build a new Novitiate on that property.

There is not enough land, and it is necessary to buy an irrigated orchard owned by Mr. Jose Aznarez, who *it was feared would not want to give up the land*. Through the mediation of Mr. Santiago Clavero, brother of M. Maria Clavero, Superior of the Foundling Home, Mr. Jose is asked if he wanted to sell the orchard in order to build the Church of the Novitiate. Mr. Jose, at the moment, does not accept, but wishes to meet with M. Pabla who, *without wasting time, visited him and explained with simplicity and clarity the truth of the case: that she was in the difficult situation of building a new Novitiate and lacked land to build the Church*. Several times Mr. Jose asks M. Pabla if the request for purchase has to do with the interests of the Deputation; and the Mother always replies that the *purchase is exclusive to the Congregation and for the purposes expressed*. Mr. Jose agrees to sell the property, and makes a clear statement:

I sell the property to you for the same amount it cost me, and if it weren't for something like the one you tell me you're going to occupy, I wouldn't sell it even if I got

double the amount; but it's enough for what it is, when you want it, we'll do the registration.

On 14th July 1900, Mrs. Sotera gives M. Pabla, who is visiting Portugalete, two thousand duros to start the work on the Novitiate, telling them that *it would be something else afterwards.*

Meanwhile, in the Mayor Street, the formation of the novices and the residence of the General Council continue. At the end of October 1896, Mr. Vicente Alda has appointed Fr. John Buj, Director of the Saint Charles Seminary, as confessor of the Novitiate. M. Pabla, always referred to him as a *holy man*. Thirty-nine years of service to the Congregation makes him well deserving of a separate chapter.

III

LIKE THE STAMP ON LETTER

His father was a miller in Orrios (Teruel) and John was born there. In the Orrios Mill, one January afternoon. It was the year 1863. It must not have been an easy birth because the midwife baptised him "in extremis"^{T.N.}, a baptism that was ratified the following day, 27th January, by the parish priest.

His parents, Fermin and Quiteria, educate their children in peace, joy and good sense of humour. And, in their humility, they know that God is the best wealth that their children can inherit.

The family moved to the Allepuz Mill, which John leaves at the age of fourteen to take a competitive exam to study Humanities, Philosophy and Theology at the Seminary in Teruel. He passes it in October 1877 and is granted half scholarship. Every year he obtains the maximum qualification of *Meritissimus*^{T.N.} and in behaviour, the qualification of *exemplary*.

Music is one of his hobbies. He had studied the summers in Villaroya de los Pinares, moving from Allepuz, where Fr. Jose Aguilar taught him music theory and organ. In the seminary, while the others were at recreation, he practiced on the harmonium. *My music is for You, Lord*. And, in the morning Eucharist, John Buj plays the best musical compositions.

T.N. Latin locution that means "In the last moments of a dangerous or compromising situation".

T.N. In Latin, very worthy of something.

In addition to teaching music to the seminarians, in 1884, the Bishop appoints him, at the age of 21, as professor of Physics, Chemistry and Natural History, and prefect of the community. He shares this last post, until 1891, with Manuel Agustin who remembers his love for the schoolchildren, his care for the community and his companionship.

In 1886, at the age of 23, he is ordained a priest. Time had grown long for him. One afternoon in November of the previous year, while walking through the cloister, he confessed it to Manuel Agustin: *I really want to be ordained to preach God's doctrine, and the time I am taking is endless!*⁷

From the day of his ordination, he promotes and intensifies devotion to the Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Conception, preaching, spiritual direction, dedication to the sacrament of penance and daily communion. The pastoral care does not take him away from his studies, and in June 1891 he obtains his degree in Theology, in Valencia. That same year he moves to Zaragoza where, on 20th October, Archbishop Fr. Francisco de Paula, has appointed him Director of the Seminary of Saint Charles.

And at the end of October 1896, another Archbishop, Fr. Vicente Alda, appoints him Confessor of the Novitiate of the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne and beneficiary of the Church of St. Gil Abbot.

In Zaragoza, he is going to carry out considerable social and spiritual activity. The Catholic Social Action, the Apostleship of the Cross, the Circle of Patrons and Workers, the Social Youth, the Union of the Needle, the Work of the Blouse, the White Hall, the photo-engraving workshop *The Light*, the School of Women Workers, The Immaculate Savings Bank... And publications such as *The Echo of the Cross*, the weekly magazine *Light and Shadows*, and books. Titles as *The White Witch*, *Memoirs of a Socialist*, *From my Charterhouse and from my Thebes*, *The Kingdom of God*, *The Eucharist and Daily Communion*...

All this apostolic care is undeniable. However, in the words of one of his friends, *Fr. John's work is not Social Action, nor "The Echo", nor his other works... It is the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne.* And he was somewhat right. Fr. John Buj, expressed it graphically: *Since I was appointed Director, I stuck to it like the stamp on a letter.* And so, it was... in the Congregation, Fr. John Buj found a letter to suit him.

As director and confessor of the Novitiate, he is responsible for the formation of the novices. In 1896, the means are not abundant... and Fr. John speaks to the novices in the small room in the Mayor Street, which is devoid of furniture. There are no chairs. Only he and Sister Felisa Burruaga, the Mistress, sit down. On the floor, forming a semicircle, the novices are grouped together. It is Thursday. And Fr. John comments on the Word. His preaching is always simple, but deeply doctrinal, understandable to all. His word has the stamp of a conquered heart and the efficacy of a life in perfect harmony with what he teaches:

There is no other source of holiness than God. Hold tightly to Him, go continually into the Holy Presence, which works like the sun, vivifying the whole being at once. Under His influence you will not grow in one virtue, you will grow in all, as it happens in nature: the spring sun comes, and all the trees of whatever species they are, begin to blossom, and they do not have to wait for each other to be dressed in flowers one after the other, no. The kiss from their Father comes to all, and that kiss brings the seeds of life. Do not want, therefore, to listen to the words of men, but to the living Word of God, which is fruitful; leave the nursery school early and go to the University, where you will live the lessons of the Sovereign Master.

The conversation ends. *Now, my daughters, sing to Our Lady.* He wants the last memory of the evening to be the praise of Mary. And he himself begins the singing.

He completes and supports the formation of the young women through spiritual direction. He is brief in direction and in the sacrament of penance. His motto is: *Little confessional and much tabernacle*. He does not need great conversations to instill peace. Person of simple procedures -someone defined him as *a man with the wings of a dove and the heart of a child*- after a general confession he said: *All this is now in the hands of Jesus; you are to love Him without ever falling into the temptation to doubt Him*.

After peace, joy as a gift from the Holy Spirit. On one occasion, when he observes how a novice is reproved for an excess of joy, he affirms: *The heart of man is too small to be able to contain the torrents of joy produced by the Lord's visit*.

Fr. John Buj, in agreement with M. Pabla, promotes the spiritual life of the Novitiate, not only through formation, but through the living of the Eucharist and the love for Our Lady.

In January 1897, the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is established in the Novitiate, on the first Friday of each month. And in the month of June, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, spiritual exercises are held every day. On working days, privately by the Sisters of the house and on holidays, with the presence of many faithful in the small Church. The songs, led by the music director, Mr. Francisco Agueras, contribute to the solemnity of these events.

From this month onwards, daily communion is established in the Novitiate with the intention of being extended to the whole Congregation. This deep love of Fr. John Buj for the Eucharist is going to cause him more than one problem, at a time in history when the practice of daily communion is not recognized by the Church. The Archbishop calls him to be informed, in a prudent manner, about the case of the Novitiate. *Father, I receive communion every day and they (the Sisters) are better than I am*⁸.

Fr. John is deeply convinced of the action of the Sacrament. *I know of no one who has been converted by my word, even if he tried; instead, I have witnessed great and beautiful resurrections verified by the daily contact of Jesus*⁹.

And in this deep love for the Eucharist, both in the celebration of the Sacrament and in its worship outside of Mass, he is accompanied by M. Pabla. She wishes that every community may enjoy the Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist; to this end, in April 1896, she writes to the Holy Father requesting that *the Oratory and the Reserve of the Blessed Sacrament be extended to all the houses of the Congregation*, without the need for the daily celebration of the Eucharist and to have seven Sisters in the community, a number that some small foundations do not reach.

Saturday Greeting, devotion to Mary Immaculate, is celebrated publicly every Saturday since 3 May 1899. The love for Mary is a tradition in the Institute. *This Congregation of Charity chooses the Queen of the Angels, Mary Most Holy, as its main patroness, under the title of the Purest (Immaculate) Conception*¹⁰.

Fr. John Buj was a gift to the Congregation. M. Pabla always remembered it: *Do not forget, never forget what Fr. John, that holy man, has done for the Congregation and the disinterest with which he has done it*. Thirty-nine years the Sisters are accompanied by the man *with a simple and transparent soul, a great intelligence and a greater heart, from whom charity came out like a soft and mature autumn breeze* until, on September 26, 1935, the Lord calls him to His side. To home. *The creatures say, stop, stop; but the Lord calls me: John, let's go home*. There he went. They say, that with a sweet voice, like that of a tenderly loved child, he repeated: *Here I am, Lord*.

IV

OVERSEAS

On 26 November 1894, the first act of the new General Council is to appoint the Overseas Council. M. Justa Gomez, who has already been acting Provincial Superior since February of that year, is appointed Provincial Superior and M. Ambrosia Barbera, Vicar. Sisters Silvestra Imaz, Casta Irujo and Josefa Moreno, who will be replaced by Sr. Elena Diaz, made up the rest of the Council.

Sr. Zoila Fernandez is the Formator of Novices *thinking she is the most suitable for the purpose even though she is too young*. The Novitiate had been approved on November 18 of that same year, although it will not be established in the School of Our Lady of the Academy until June 1896. The first community will be composed of Sr. Zoila, and four novices: Srs. Pilar Mavilla, Filomena Batista, Enriqueta Urcategui and Mercedes Mansant. Meanwhile, the young women were being admitted to the different communities.

On December 7, 1897, the Overseas Council decided to suppress the Novitiate and to withdraw the temporary Mistress, Sr. Matea Crespo, who had replaced Sr. Zoila, assigned to the School of Our Lady of the Snows in Ciudad Bolivar, founded in June 1897.

The climate of Venezuela and the hard work that the Sisters carry out are the reasons that the Lazareto^{T.N.} Board gives to M. Justa *so that at least on work days the Sisters can change into a comfortable habit, made of cool and thin fabric that may be compatible with their occupations and*

T.N. Sanitary place that is dedicated to the observation and disinfection treatment of people who may be carriers of a contagious disease.

the rigors of our temperature. M. Pabla asks His Holiness on the 3rd January 1897 to change the black wool cloth of the habit and headdress for white cotton. On the 21st April, the rescript is received from Rome authorising the change, *always conserving the form of the religious habit.*

On 12th September 1897, M. Justa returns to Spain because she is ill. The General Council decides that she does not return. In addition to her illness, there seems to be disagreement between her and the rest of the Overseas Council, which is not satisfied with her way of proceeding. It is decided that M. Isabel Lopez goes to Venezuela as a Visitor and with the attributions of a Mother General. On the 27th of December she leaves Zaragoza and embarks in Barcelona on the 5th of January 1898. M. Pabla goes to say her goodbye, concerned about the situation of the communities. M. Isabel is accompanied by M. Dolores Enseñat, who goes assigned as Formator of Novices, and Sr. Aurora Castaños.

Foundations follow one after another. The School of The Immaculate in Trujillo (1895), the School of Our Lady of the Academy (1896) in Maracaibo and the School of Our Lady of the Snow in Ciudad Bolivar (1897). The centre of Maracaibo is inaugurated on June 1, 1896 and it is a new school, since the house in which they were in the city was rented and it was very hot. The government advances, in part, the money for the construction and commits itself to maintain and educate thirty girls, by paying their allowances. The Novitiate is set up on the upper floor and when the building collapses on the 2nd June 1898, the novices move into the House of Beneficence. The Sisters and the students also move to the city; however, the number of students is reduced by the conditions of the house and the government reduces the pensions until, because of the war, it withdraws them. The School is closed on 3 August 1899.

Venezuela is going through an unstable political situation that makes it difficult for the Sisters to continue. The permanence of Andueza as president, who modifies the Constitution to increase the presidential mandate to four years and establish direct suffrage to elect the president, leads to the outbreak of the legalist Revolution under the command of Joaquin Crespo. Andueza abandons Venezuela, leaving the post to Guillermo Tell Villegas, president of the Federal Council. That same year, Joaquin Crespo returns to power, until 1898, when he holds elections. The government's candidate, Ignacio Andrade, wins and Jose Manuel Hernandez, the loser, who accuses him of winning because of the Government's advantage, takes up arms.

In 1899, Cipriano Castro arrives in Caracas after fighting several battles in what is known as the Renovating Revolution.

In 1900, reality obliges M. Pabla to request *the necessary dispensation to suppress the foundations of Trujillo and Merida*. The cause is the situation of continuous war that makes the foundations of Venezuela go through a serious crisis that forces to suppress several communities founded this same six-year period. In addition to the School of Our Lady of the Academy in Maracaibo, The Immaculate in Trujillo, Saint Anthony of Tachira and the foundations in Merida.

On July 9, the foundation of Merida is closed because it was impossible for the Sisters to remain there and they were transferred to Maracaibo. The Council decides that the more delicate Sisters in health, the less necessary ones return to Spain. Twelve Sisters arrive in Zaragoza on the 7th of October, after resting for a few days in the Clinic of the Pilar in Barcelona.

America is going to be one of M. Pabla's loves and one of her greatest concerns. America is far away... but in the

heart there is no distance. M. Pabla experienced this. And as soon as she can, she will go to visit. *To make the Americas.*

V

BUILDING ON MERCY

On 15 November 1900 the IV General Chapter takes place in the Novitiate, attended by the local Superiors and the General Council. The spiritual exercises that begin the next day, led by Father Chavarria, a Jesuit, precede the election of the new government of the Congregation on November 24th. The elections are presided over by the Archbishop, the Vicar General, Fr. Jose Pellicer, and as secretary Fr. Juan Buj, Spiritual Director of the Novitiate. The ceremony begins with the adoration of a crucifix which, according to tradition, belonged to Father John Bonal.

The new Council is made up of M. Pabla Bescos, Superior General; M. Rosa Adell, Vicar; M. Maria Clavero, Admonitor; M. Victoria Jimenez, Treasurer and M. Clara Nuñez, Secretary. The Overseas Council is made up of M. Zoila Fernandez, Provincial Superior of Venezuela; M. Dolores Enseñat, Vicar; M. Casta Irujo, Admonitor; M. Catalina Mosacula, Treasurer and M. Elena Diaz, Secretary.

After the elections, part of the history of the Institute that is being written by Mr. Jaime Figols is read and the uniformity of prayers is discussed. On the same day, the unification of the prayers is approved and, later on, several editions of Books on Pious Practices will be published; the oldest we have dates back to 1913 and is in the Museum of Mother Pabla, in the General House.

In the second six-year period, M. Pabla's priority is going to be the completion of the works of the new Novitiate. At the beginning of January 1901, the plan of the building is entrusted to Mr. Julio Bravo, architect of the Deputation, according to the indications given to him by the General

Council. The work, in line with the budget, is entrusted to Mr. Mariano Aparicio at the beginning of September 1902 and very soon, on the 22nd, the ground begins to be prepared. Trees, walls and buildings are demolished in order to fill the site.

M. Pabla, accompanied by M. Clara, is going to invite the Archbishop to the blessing of the land and laying of the foundation stone of the new Novitiate which will take place on the 15th of October at 11 am. The General Council also agrees to invite the Section of Benificence of the Deputation, the Governor, the Mayor of Zaragoza and the President of the Deputation.

M. Pabla and M. Felisa, the Mistress of Novices, accommodate the guests while M. Clara arranges the linen on the altar. The ceremony takes place in the place destined for the Church; some woods covered with green cloth have been placed, at the ends of which is the name of Mary. Next to the altar, the emblem of Our Lady of Grace and at the end, alternating colours, red and yellow pennants. The Archbishop, dressed as a pontifical, prays the petitions over the place where the main altar of the church will be erected and blesses the first stone that is placed in the centre of the land dedicated to its construction. On the temporary altar, the Litany of the Saints and the prayers of blessing are recited. The Prelate speaks a few words about the history and mission of the Congregation; he thanks the Lord on this day when a dream of the Sisters is beginning to come true and thanks all those present for their assistance and prayers. The religious ceremony ends with the Episcopal blessing.

Immediately, they signed the act that is placed in a sealed box and this one inside the first stone that the Archbishop puts in its corresponding place. It is a white carved stone, in the center of which have been placed a medal of St. Anne, another of the Virgin of Pillar, a silver coin

of Alfonso XIII, two newspapers of the day and the minutes with the corresponding signatures. At twelve o'clock, the ceremony ends and the guests go to one of the main halls of the Hospice, where the Congregation gives them an aperitif.

It seemed that the only thing left to do was to pay for the works when, just a few days later, several provincial Deputies are determined to buy the land *on the pretext that it would take away a lot of light and air from the Hospice House*. They ask M. Pabla to note how much it had cost, including the expenses incurred up to that time and the investment made by the person in charge of the work, Mr. Mariano Aparicio.

M. Pabla had not arrived until this moment to see the new Novitiate began, only to be disappointed now. She replies with the following note, dated November 3.

The cost of the land of the Novitiate amounts to about one hundred and twelve thousand seven hundred pesetas for the Orchard of the Office, that of Mr. Aznárez, (terraplenes) earthworks, contribution, irrigation water, dispensation from Rome to buy the land, etc., etc. and also another four thousand eight hundred and seventy-two pesetas and seventy-five centimos^{T.N.} from Mr. Mariano Aparicio, according to the attached note for the expenses incurred up to now.

The note continues...

We must add the increase in price of the same land, since a few days after acquiring the Orchard of the Office, we were offered a two thousand duros premium and Mr. Aznárez's Orchard was sold to us for the amount it cost

T.N. Currency in Spain at that time.

him, thus giving it up because he knew it was destined for the Novitiate; otherwise, he would not have sold it, with what seems to be the will of this distinguished benefactor of Mercy that this Orchard be used for the construction of our Novitiate.

The Congregation builds in Mercy Street. Mercy that forgives and excuses everything, but love does not let itself be overwhelmed.

We must also say, that we can do nothing without the ecclesiastic authorization, having placed this matter in the hands of the Archbishop, as the Commission of the Most Excellent Deputation already knows.

On this occasion I offer myself to His Excellency with affection.

Sr. Pabla Bescos

The General Council had to suffer a lot of displeasure because of the insistence on buying the land. It was voted in a plenary of the Deputation, voting that was lost by those who wanted to buy the land.

The works of the Novitiate represent for the Congregation a considerable economic outlay that is being faced with loans, inheritances, alms from benefactors, sales of the scarced patrimony that the Sisters possess... and with sacrifice and prayer. The tradition of the Congregation states that the Novitiate is kneaded with miracles and prayers, being a gift from the Heart of Jesus. On Fridays, Fr. John Buj urged the novices to ask the Heart of Jesus for *many and holy vocations and a new Novitiate*¹. They already had it. Now they had to go raising it up:

M. Pabla came to the recreation many days for a little time, and she encouraged us, novices, with her holy simplicity and humility, to pray a lot to God to help us, because she said we were going through a great econo-

mic crisis. We could hardly eat. And even less to face the many expenses that a new Novitiate would bring and she repeated to us: "Only with a very great miracle of the Heart of Jesus can we obtain our Novitiate"¹².

One day, M. Pabla goes to the Novitiate. From the House of Health in Barcelona they have written saying that they need blankets. She asks the novices to leave theirs in the sitting room¹³ if any of them could do without them, but *above all she begged us that if we needed it, we should not part with them, that God would provide.* The next day, M. Pabla finds as many blankets as novices in the sitting room. She sends for them and, cheerful and excited, thanks them for their gesture. One of the older novices asks her for a favour: the whole community wishes to contribute to the construction of the new Novitiate and, to do so, they wish to deprive themselves of the chocolate they take every morning at breakfast. M. Pabla hesitates, but the young Sisters insist. So may it be. After a few days, M. Pabla returns to the Novitiate to share good news with the novices. They have received a donation that far exceeded the price of the blankets donated to Barcelona. And she wants the Sisters to see that Love does not allow itself to be outdone in generosity.

This is how payments are dealt with. 15,000 pesetas one day, 10,000 pesetas another, even 25,000 some day...

Meanwhile, life continues and M. Pabla visits Madrid in February 1901 and in May, the communities of Alagon, Magallon, Borja, Tarazona, Tudela, Fitero, Villafranca, Estella, Barbarin and Allo. The following year, accompanied by M. Victoria, she visits Daroca and the communities of the province of Valencia in November. At the beginning of April 1903, M. Pabla and M. Clara visit Peñafiel and Molina.

Knowing that the Deputation of Navarra wishes to inaugurate an establishment for the mentally ill, M. Pabla

writes, on 18 April 1903, to the President of the Deputation, offering to carry out the services required by the institution:

The Congregation in whose name the one who writes speaks has for nearly a century, provided the characteristic services of her Institute in the establishment for patients of that kind that the Most Excellent Deputation of the Province has in this city, and this as much to the satisfaction of all, as can be attested among others, the many families of that province who have had insane patients in this asylum.

This foundation does not take place, but the Congregation continues its service of charity wherever it is needed. Albalate del Arzobispo requests this service of charity for the Hospital and Nursery School of the locality. In January 1902, Fr. Joaquin Pintaner, the treasurer priest of Albalate, and Mrs. Nicolasa Claveria, a lady who knows M. Pabla a lot, come to the Novitiate. They request for a Sister to go and visit Albalate and to speak to the Town Hall. A few days later, M. Maria Clavero and M. Clara Nuñez go there and return impressed by the welcome they have received and the intense desire of the whole population that the Sisters take charge of the Hospital and the School.

The General Council agrees to formalise the terms of the contract and on 10 May 1902 the first community, formed by Sisters Tomasa Ucar, Filomena Enlust, Sabina Elcano and Blasa Jarrai, arrives in Albalate, accompanied by M. Pabla, M. Clara and Fr. John Buj. They are welcomed by fireworks, music, cheers and acclamations. The following day, Sunday, the inaugural feast takes place. In the Eucharist, Fr. John Buj preaches: *The Sisters come to this village to teach the little ones to live well and the elderly, assisting them in their ailments, to die better.*

The life and mission of the Congregation in America also continues its history. During this six-year period, the

General Chapter has appointed M. Zoila Fernandez as Provincial of Overseas, to whom M. Pabla communicates her appointment on November 30, 1900. The Bishop of Ciudad Bolivar writes to M. Pabla a letter dated January 15, 1901 *to plead her strongly to make every effort to have another Sister appointed to the above-mentioned post.* The reason is that M. Zoila has won the love of the city and her transfer to Maracaibo would cause great harm to the School of Our Lady of the Snow.

M. Pabla, after consultation with the Council, meets with the Vicar General of the diocese, as the Archbishop, Fr. Vicente Alda, is seriously ill. The Vicar has also received a letter in the same terms and expresses to M. Pabla that *he thought it best that M. Zoila should continue in Ciudad Bolivar and that M. Dolores Enseñat, who had been elected Vicar Provincial, should take her place until the final decision was made.*

After the death of Fr. Vicente Alda, the issue of the appointment of M. Zoila is finally resolved. Fr. Jose Pellicer, Vicar, decides to write to the Bishop of Ciudad Bolivar saying that the Council of Spain cannot comply with his request, as the appointment of the Provincial has been made in accordance with the canonical provisions. M. Zoila should go, as soon as possible, to Maracaibo and M. Carmen Castan will take charge of the School of Our Lady of Snow.

However, the situation is not completely resolved and on 29th December 1903, M. Catalina Mosacula replaces M. Zoila, who returns to the School of Ciudad Bolivar as Superior. M. Catalina, together with M. Elena Diaz, the secretary, has to appoint two sisters to form the new Council of Venezuela. Before making the appointments, they must inform the General Council to confirm them officially. The two appointed Sisters are M. Dominica Ferrer and M. Andresa Cascante.

M. Pabla decides to suppress the School of Our Lady of Snow in 1905: *Very much against her will and only because of the force of the circumstances, she decided to suppress the foundation and decreed the return to Spain of the Sisters who were there, as she wanted the moral good of the Sisters more than material exaltation, always preferring humble appearances.*

After the final approval of the Congregation, some observations were made to the Constitutions which had to be redrafted. This work was entrusted to Father Mariano Ripol, a Jesuit. The definitive approval of the Constitutions is another of the events of this second six-year period. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had requested, as an indispensable requirement, the history of the Congregation and a report on the state of the Congregation. M. Pabla sent them on the 14th of September 1900 to Fr. Antonino Langa, the Congregation's agent in Rome, to submit them. On the 21st of the same month, Fr. Antonino replies, stating that *the matter in hand is already very advanced*. On the 3rd August 1901 the Constitutions are approved "ad experimentum" with a series of amendments which have to come into force from that same date. It is precisely these warnings that lead to the change of Provincial and Council overseas. M. Pabla, in an interview with the Archbishop in February 1903, explains to him *how difficult it was to practice the innovations made by the Sacred Congregation in the Constitutions*.

M. Pabla wishes that by the Centenary of the Congregation, the Constitutions be definitively approved. In February 1903, she writes a letter to Fr. Enrique Perez, with a recommendation from the Archbishop, to work on this matter. And at the beginning of November, she sends to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, together with the disciplinary and financial status of the Congregation, a report from Archbishop Soldevila, in

which he requests the definitive approval of the Constitutions for the Sisters *who carry out works of charity, mercy, religion and good example*. Furthermore, the foundations grow day by day and in all of them the warnings given by Rome about the Constitutions are complied with and observed.

In the same month, M. Pabla agrees with the General Council to ask the bishops in whose dioceses there is a community, *an attestation to be sent to Rome and to be able to obtain the desired approval*¹⁴. This approval is granted by Pope Pius X in the Decree of 11 March 1904.

On October 10th 1904, some Sisters, including, M. Pabla and M. Clara, stay overnight for the first time in the new Novitiate. The first thing is to have the Lord in the house and a room is prepared as Oratory, as the work of the Church are not finished. The Archbishop is requested for permission to bless this provisional Chapel and to place the Lord in the Tabernacle. In addition, the house could be blessed. He replies that *on the 16th of this October and at seven o'clock in the morning he will come to practise the above-mentioned acts with great pleasure*. On that day and at that hour, the Archbishop presides the Eucharist in which the Sisters and the people who collaborate with them participate. They receive communion, *leaving the Blessed Sacrament reserved from that hour*. The Archbishop then blesses the whole house, room by room. And the feast ends with a *modest breakfast* that the community offers to all those who share with it the joy of seeing a dream come true: Mercy living in Mercy Street.

VI

HUNDRED YEARS OF CHARITY

On 22 October 1904 the V General Chapter is held in the Novitiate, as an extraordinary event to present the new Constitutions. Fifty-four Chapter members, including local Superiors and Sisters of the General Council, attend the Chapter.

The Chapter begins with ten days of Spiritual Exercises led by Fr. Miguel Aguilar, a Jesuit. At the end of the Exercises, the Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fr. Juan Soldevila, exhort them to the exact observance of the Rules definitively approved by Rome and gave the Sisters, in order of seniority, a copy of them. The chronicles say that *many of them wept with joy to see the fulfillment of their vehement desires for the definitive approval of our Constitutions.*

M. Pabla submits to the decision of the Sisters a series of observations regarding the regime of the Congregation so that *it would be easier to comply with it, seeing among all, the most convenient for the Institute.* All were approved unanimously. The ninth proposal is referred to a very significant event: the celebration of the Centenary of the Congregation. The Chapter determines: *in each and every foundation, in the way that it would be possible for them, to solemnize the upcoming celebration of the Centenary of the Congregation.*

M. Pabla informs the Sisters that the Holy Father has granted a plenary indulgence to the faithful who, having gone to confession and communion, visit any church or public chapel of the Sisters. And that on the 28th December, he will give the Sisters the apostolic blessing.

M. Pabla had already asked the Deputation for the necessary permissions to hold a triduum in the church of the

Hospital of Our Lady of Grace on the 29th, 30th and 31st December, at the expense of the Congregation. The Provincial Deputation grants the request and calls M. Pabla to a meeting at the Hospice. There, the President of the Deputation explains the wishes of the same to help with the expenses of the celebration. M. Pabla thanks for the gesture, stating that the goodwill shown is sufficient. But the Deputation commits to pay the orator for the first day of the triduum and for the lighting, electricity and candle wax. Likewise, it is placed at the disposal of the Congregation the workers needed to arrange the gardens, facades, church, ...*placing all the employees*¹⁵ *under the orders of the Rev. M. General.*

On 29th December at 10 o'clock the Eucharist begins, presided over by Archbishop Fr. Juan Soldevila y Romero and concelebrated by Fr. Jose Ma. Pra, Archpriest of the Basilica of Pillar; Fr. Jose Pellicer, provisioner; Fr. Vicente Agustin Parelo, Urruzola, Blanco and Mr. Camprovin and Mr. Millan, beneficiaries of the Cathedral La Seo. As master of ceremonies, Fr. Joaquín Yarza.

The high altar is surrounded by lights and flowers; placed in the centre there is an image of Saint Anne.

Fr. Florencio Jardiel, canon archpriest of The Pillar, *preaches with eloquent style and incomparable elegance, and sings a beautiful and enthusiastic hymn to the exercise of Christian charity*¹⁷.

The Chapel of Music of The Pillar, under the direction of the master Mr. Antonio Lozano, performs the famous Mass by Mozart.

It is necessary to open wide the doors of the Church and the faithful fill the entire corridor of the entrance up to the main gate, and there was not enough space *to hold such an extraordinary gathering of faithful*¹⁸. The façade of the temple, decorated with shields and pennants, has

electric lighting in the form of stars and is crowned by an interlaced S and A, formed by coloured bulbs.

The event is attended by all the provincial deputies who live in the Aragonese capital; the Civil Governor, Mr. Planter; the Mayor, Mr. Oreja and a commission from the City Council with their staff dressed in formal dress; Mr. Ripolles, Rector of the University and various commissions and entities.

In the afternoon, at 3.30pm, there is the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the Station^{T.N.}, the Rosary and sung litanies. Fr. Juan Soldevila, with clear and precise words, in a simple manner narrates, in broad strokes, the history of the Congregation and encourages all Christian people to exercise charity. He concludes by addressing *an ardent and heartfelt*¹⁹ prayer to the Blessed Sacrament.

The ceremony ends with a beautiful motet sung by the Chapel of The Pillar and the reserve, composed by the master of the Chapel of La Seo Cathedral, Mr. Miguel Arnaudás.

The next day, 30th December, Fr. Mariano Supervia, Bishop of Huesca, presides over the Eucharist. The Chapel of The Pillar, directed by Master Lozano, performs the beautiful Mass of Gimeno with the accompaniment of an orchestra.

Fr. Jose Calasanz Rabaza highlights in his preaching a synthesis of the history of the Institute, making special mention of the conduct of the Sisters during the Sieges of Zaragoza. He ends his sermon by addressing the Sisters some sentences of praise and exhorting them to continue on the path of their predecessors.

T.N. Visit that is made out of devotion to the churches or altars, stopping to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

At the end, Fr. Mariano imparts his pastoral blessing to all those present, *with the solemnity of ritual*²⁰.

At 3.30 a.m. Fr. Salvador Beltran, S.J., preaches a *magnificent sermon of greeting and congratulations*²¹, praising the practice of charity in favour of the sick and the needy and in the exercise of the education of the youth.

Fr. Alejandro Sinaga, a priest of Zaragoza and former director of the Sisters, officiates at the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

The triduum ends on Saturday 31 December. At the 10 a.m. Eucharist, Fr. Jose Lopez Mendoza, Bishop of Pamplona, presides over the celebration and the chaplains of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace concelebrate: Jose Gardela, Eduardo Herrera, Eugenio Ledín and Jorge Vives. As Master of Ceremonies, Fr. Joaquin Yarza and the sermon is given by Fr. Fermin Erice, penitentiary of the Cabildo^{T.N.}, who highlighted how only the works of God remain and included among these the Congregation.

In the afternoon, *it is materially impossible for many people to enter the temple*²², where the Bishop of Pamplona preaches about charity and heroism in the exercise of this virtue. The Chapel of The Pillar interprets the litany of the master Calahorra and the Eucharistic motet *Lauda Sion Salvatorem*. The triduum concludes with the Te Deum by Hernandez and Fr. Jose Lopez Mendoza gives the blessing with the Blessed Sacrament

The celebration of the Centenary is a recognition of the life and mission of the Congregation and a thanksgiving prayer because the Lord has been great. How can one not be joyful? Joy that overflows in every community, big or small, which celebrates this event.

T.N. Set of priests who are members of a cathedral or collegiate church.

In the Oratory of the Hospital of Calatayud the walls are upholstered and the altar is beautifully lit. Two beautiful arches have been built in the iron door and in the Chapel. Solemn Vespers are sung and the Rosary is prayed, whose last Mystery is sung, accompanied by violins and the harmonium, by the Sisters and the girls. And the next day, in the parish, the Eucharist is celebrated with an orchestra.

Cariñena announces the Centenary with the ringing of the bells from the 28th of December. The solemn Eucharist, with the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, is sung by the Sisters accompanied by piano and harmonium. In the sermon, Fr. Joaquin Pintaned makes a *precious fabric of the simplest facts and the highest considerations*²³.

In Jaca, the Sisters have adorned the ancient Church of Santo Domingo where Thanksgiving is celebrated for the Centenary of the Congregation. The local authorities and a large number of people attend. On the following two days, the Eucharist is celebrated and, in the afternoon, a solemn triduum.

In Barbarin, the feast was announced on the night of 28 December with rockets and the traditional bonfire. At dawn, the Eucharist of the community and at 10 am, a solemn Eucharist presided by Fr. Gonzalo Etayo de Irache. The parish priests of Luquin, Ancin and Bearin participate. The celebration continues with a fraternal meal in which the priests, the community and the Piarist Fathers participate.

In the afternoon, after the Rosary and the Novena to the Child Jesus, a sainete^{T.N.} is performed in the school and carols are sung. At the end of the day, the Sisters can say that the words they had placed at the entrance of the chapel have been fulfilled:

T.N. Brief theatrical piece with a humorous theme and usually of a popular character.

*Today we celebrate joyfully,
with enthusiasm and love
the glorious Centenary
of our Congregation²⁴.*

A hundred years of charity are a hundred years of blessing. This is recognised by Dr. Royo Villanova in an open letter addressed to M. Pabla, and published on the cover of the *Heraldo de Aragón*^{T.N.} on 31st December 1904:

Blessed are you who throw yourselves into the battle of life, in the fields of ignorance and disease, with no other defence than your white headdress and your blue apron, and no other weapons than that crude Crucifix on your side!

A centenary that looks to the future, to the celebration of another hundred years of charity made hospitality to the point of heroism. This is the wish of La Sinceridad, the Catholic weekly newspaper of Caspe:

God would like the Institute to develop in the second Centenary as in the first, contributing to the glory of God and the relief of poor humanity²⁵.

T.N. Name of a Newspaper published in Aragon.

VII

IN VENEZUELA

The inauguration of the Church of the Novitiate and the foundation of the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona are the two events that close the second six-year term of M. Pabla's government.

On 4th September 1906 the foundations are signed between the Administrative Board of the Hospital Clinic and M. Pabla as Superior General of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne *to take charge of the care to be given to the patients at the Hospital Clinic and of the other services connected to it and proper to the Institute.*

A few days later, six Sisters travel to Barcelona to receive furniture and belongings that arrive at the new establishment from the different shops. They spend the rest of the day at The Pillar Clinic, sewing the necessary clothes for the Hospital. On October 5th, with fourteen other Sisters who had arrived in the city at the end of September, they sleep in the Hospital. During the months of October, November and December they are dedicated to arranging the clothes and preparing what is necessary to be able to admit the patients on the date indicated: 2nd January 1907. On that day the new community is constituted, composed of 40 Sisters, as another twenty have joined the first ones, whose Superior is M. Jeronima Molerés.

The Archbishop wants the Church of the Novitiate to be opened before the next General Chapter, so the Council decides, in a session of 3 November 1906, that the Church be blessed on the 16th and opened the following day. It is agreed to personally invite the Cabildo, Governor, President of the Deputation and Mayor. And a thousand invitation cards are printed for acquaintances and benefactors.

At eight o'clock in the morning on the 16th October, the new church dedicated to St. Anne is blessed, then the Blessed Sacrament is reserved and opened for worship to all the faithful.

On the 17th, at half past ten, the Eucharist is celebrated, presided over by Archbishop Juan Soldevila and preached by Fr. Florencio Jardiel, Dean of the Metropolitan Church of Zaragoza.

At four o'clock, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and the way of the Cross and the Rosary are prayed. The Chapel of The Pillar, which in the morning has performed as orchestra the mass of the maestro Arribas, sings a motet and, in thanksgiving, the Te Deum. The religious ceremony ends with the blessing and reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.

After the function, the community invites to a refreshment in one of the sitting rooms of the Novitiate whose construction is admired by all those present. The Archbishop, in the name of those present, congratulates M. Pabla on the completion of the work.

The six-year period has been a time of grace. On 20 November, M. Pabla convokes the Council for a final extraordinary session. M. Victoria Jiménez²⁶ presents some amounts given for the decoration of the Church of the Novitiate. The session ends *by asking each other to forgive any faults they may have committed during the six years they had been at the head of the Institute.*

The celebration of the VI General Chapter in November had been announced to all the communities in an official letter dated 24th May 1906. It is the first Chapter to be held after the approval of the Constitutions of 1904 and the number 126, which deals with the constitution of the Chapter, presents some doubts which M. Pabla resolves, after several conversations with the Archbishop Juan Sol-

devila. It is agreed to send *some documents to Rome as drafts, which will explain precisely how the elections are to be carried out.* The Holy See approves it.

What was the problem? The Chapter is attended in its own right (*ex officio*) by the Superior General of the Congregation and her Council, the former General Superiors of the Congregation, the General Treasurer and Secretary, and the local Superiors of communities of twelve or more Sisters. By election, the professed Sisters of these communities elect a Sister of perpetual profession to represent them.

The issue is in the communities of small numbers. In that case, the Sisters must join those of other houses to make up the number of twelve. Gathered together, they will first elect one of the Superiors and then another Sister of perpetual profession to attend the Chapter.

At this time, there are twelve major houses and forty-three minor houses in the Congregation, which are grouped into fourteen centres.

The foundations in Venezuela were considered to be a single centre, so a Superior and a Sister Delegate could attend the Chapter. However, M. Catalina Mosacula, Provincial, on behalf of the Overseas Council, had requested a dispensation for the Sisters of America. M. Pabla, in order *to act more wisely*²⁷ had asked Rome for such a dispensation, so the Chapter members of Venezuela do not attend the Chapter.

On the 21st November, fifty-three Sisters, twenty-seven Superiors and twenty-six Sister Delegates meet in the Novitiate to begin the VI General Chapter with a triduum of Spiritual Exercises, led by the Archbishop of Zaragoza himself, Fr. Juan Soldevila.

On Sunday the 25th, the Eucharist is celebrated, presided over by Fr. Juan Soldevila, in which all the Sisters receive communion. At nine o'clock in the morning, after half

an hour of prayer and invocation to the Holy Spirit, the prelate and the Sisters go to the chapter hall to carry out the elections.

Before starting the voting, the Archbishop addresses the Chapter to recall the dispensation that Rome had granted to the Sisters of Venezuela not to attend the celebration of the Chapter; moreover, the possibility had been obtained from the Holy See that M. Pabla could be re-elected for the third time to the position of Superior General of the Congregation. On the other hand, M. Rosa Adell cannot be voted for a new six-year term as she has held the post of Vicar General for the last six years and part of the previous six-year term in which she was appointed after the death of M. Dolores Marin.

The election of two scrutineers and a secretary is then held, being elected M. Eulalia Marín, M. Dolores Villa and M. Celestina Sancho who as secretary reads the lists of eligible and voting Sisters. Voting begins and the votes are placed in a closed ballot box in order of seniority.

M. Pabla was re-elected by an absolute majority. Voting then takes place for the General Council, which is formed, on the first vote, by M. Maria Clavero as Vicar; M. Victoria Gimenez, Treasurer; M. Vicenta Ochoa, Admonitor and M. Clara Nuñez, Secretary.

The tradition of the Congregation states that one of the first words M. Pabla pronounces after her re-election is her desire to travel to Venezuela to visit the Sisters. M. Pabla has been wanting to do this for a long time and in this six-year period, after the construction of the new Novitiate, she is going to fulfill another of her dreams: to visit the Sisters in Venezuela.

They were filled with joy *when the Mother General announced, together with her appointment, her next visit to the houses in Venezuela, in order to be able to embrace, she*

*said, all her beloved daughters and to know personally all their needs and desires, to relieve the first and to satisfy the others with the most determined will*²⁸.

On 11 August 1907, accompanied by M. Jeronima Moleres and Sr. Valentina Sabado, she embarks in Barcelona on the steamboat *Manuel Calvo*. After a happy journey, they arrive in Curaçau on 15th September, where Sisters Concepcion Goicoechea and Elena Diaz wait for them, and they head, all together, towards Maracaibo. They arrived on September 17th, the same day that the first Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne had disembarked in the port of that city seventeen years earlier. In Maracaibo, the Sisters, the Capitular Vicar, the Augustinian Fathers, the Misters of the Beneficence Board and families known to the Sisters receive M. Pabla.

In the Church of the House of Beneficence the Te Deum is sung and the Capitular Vicar blesses those present with the Blessed Sacrament.

M. Pabla arrives in Maracaibo at a delicate time. The Government has arranged for all the lepers from the hospitals of Merida, Trujillo and Tachira and those scattered around the country to be hospitalised in the Lazaretto on Providence Island. In three months, more than six hundred patients of both sexes are housed there. There is not enough to provide dignified care for the sick, who stir up due to the measure taken by the Government and the scarcity of resources available to them in Providence. The Sisters are overwhelmed. *God our Lord, who never leaves his own, arranged for the arrival of M. Pabla to give them courage and encouragement to work day and night with those beings discarded from the world.* The mission of Providence Island captivates the heart of M. Pabla. Fr. Eugenio Galilea, an Augustinian Recollect, says: *we heard her repeatedly express her desire to stay and share with them such meritorious task; desires that came from*

*her simple soul and that the Lord will know how to reward her attending the sincerity that dictates them*²⁹.

During her stay on the Island, the new lazaretto chapel, dedicated to St. Roque, is blessed with great solemnity. The Capitular Vicar presides at the Eucharist and the Hospital Chaplain concelebrates; the girls from the Orphanage, led by Sr. Aurora Castaños, sing. Besides M. Pabla and the community of the House, all the Superiors of Maracaibo attend.

M. Pabla, aware of the extraordinary mission of the Island of Providence and of the fact that the increase in the number of patients has repercussions on the task of the Sisters who are unable to attend to them properly, commits herself to send eight Sisters. This new charity expedition will arrive in Maracaibo on November 25, 1908 and is composed of Sisters Micaela Lozano, Cristobalina Marco, Juliana Munarriz, Bernardina Labiano, Emilia Mallol, Celia Laceras, Filomena Ulacia and Gregoria Hernandez.

M. Pabla during her stay in Venezuela, supervises the condition of the various foundations and makes prudent dispositions for their governance. Fr. Eugenio Galilea recalls how *she managed to inspire the utmost confidence in all the Sisters by giving a talk to each and every one of them*. She hopes that the Sisters strengthen their congregational identity and that the bonds that unite them to the whole Congregation grow. She knows that in the heart there are no distances and wishes that each and every one of them feel that they are participants in a single mission carried out in Spain and Venezuela. *She succeeded in strengthening the bonds of filial charity with bonds of affection and veneration, and sowed in her daughters the holy seed of love, which did not take long to bear fruit of tranquility and harmony*³⁰.

The day of returning to Spain is approaching. The visit to Venezuela had been extended for another month, by

decision of M. Pabla, at the insistence of the Sisters. This delay annoyed M. Jeronima, for whom it was difficult to adjust to the American climate and customs and she wishes to arrive in Spain as soon as possible.

On November 4th, M. Jeronima Molerés has a slight fever, but she does not agree to stay in bed, as there are only three days left to embark to the Peninsula. It is decided that M. Pabla embarks on the scheduled date and that M. Jerónima embarks on the next steamboat. On the 6th the fever has disappeared, but at night it returns violently and M. Jerónima's 40 degrees do not indicate anything good. The appearance of the black vomit makes all hope disappear: it is the yellow fever. At three o'clock in the morning, Fr. Eugenio Galilea administers the sacrament of Anointing to the sick. Nobody dares to communicate the state of the sick Sister to M. Pabla who, on getting up for prayer at four o'clock in the morning, knows what happened. Faced with the danger of contagion, the Sisters decide that Mother Pabla abandons the House of Beneficence and goes to the community of the Provincial Asylum. At nine o'clock in the morning, the day of M. Pabla's departure, M. Jeronima Molerés dies. The Sisters want to hide from M. Pabla the news of her death, but when the Inspector of the Asylum goes to say goodbye to her, who ignored this wish, gives her his condolences, to which M. Pabla responds with a *Blessed³¹ be the Lord's will.*

The doctors forbid M. Pabla to return to Maracaibo, so she cannot say goodbye to any Sister. At nine o'clock at night she passes through the city to board the Buenos Aires, together with Sisters Andrea Mateos and Ramona San Martín, for Spain. We can imagine the journey. In addition to the preceding events, the steamboat engine breaks down after seven days at sea. Another steamboat picks them up and they disembark in Mayagüez (Puerto Rico) where, after twelve days of waiting, they are picked up by the Montserrat.

A telegram received in Zaragoza informs the Sisters of the next arrival of the travellers in Barcelona, scheduled for the 19th of December. M. Sebastiana Bescos and M. Clara Núñez are on their way there. They disembark at ten o'clock in the morning on the scheduled day. They stay in Barcelona until the 23rd when they travel to Zaragoza, where the General Council, several priests and some acquaintances go to meet them. The Archbishop, the Superiors of the city and the community of the House wait for them at the Novitiate. On their faces, the joy of the encounter and the pain of the loss.

VIII

HEROISM OF CHARITY

On celebrating the Centenary of the Congregation, Mr. Gregorio Mover had published an article in *El Pilar*^{T.N.} that described the actions of the Sisters during the Sieges that Zaragoza suffered during the War of Independence. Mr. Gregorio stated that *Zaragoza should not forget its obligation to the Sisters of Saint Anne who distinguished themselves so much in the two sieges*. A request that Fr. Marcelino Casado, chaplain of the Novitiate, had seconded with an article published in *El Noticiero*^{T.N.}.

The Executive Committee of the Sieges decides to dedicate a tombstone to M. Maria Rafols, as it did to other heroes.

REST IN PEACE
THE VENERABLE MOTHER
MARIA RAFOLS
HEROINE OF CHARITY
SUPERIOR OF THE HOSPITAL
OF OUR LADY OF GRACE
IN THE YEARS 1808 AND 1809.
FOUNDRESS OF THE CONGREGATION
OF SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF SAINT ANNE.

T.N. The "El Pilar" magazine comes out in public, as a Catholic Weekly, on November 10, 1883, becoming dean of the Zaragoza press, and one of the oldest in Aragon. Since its foundation, it has been collecting every day all the events that occurred in the Basilica del Pilar of Zaragoza (Spain) or related to the devotion to Our Lady of Pillar.

T.N. "El Noticiero" was a Spanish newspaper, published in Zaragoza, between 1901 and 1977.

DIED ON 30TH AUGUST 1853.
THE COUNTRY
AND THE CITY GRATEFUL TO
DEDICATE THIS MEMORY TO HER
ON THE I CENTENARY OF THE SIEGES.

The Executive Committee of the Sieges wishes that the mortal remains of M. Maria Rafols, which until then rest in the Crypt of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, be moved to the magnificent chapel built in the Church of El Portillo, together with the other heroines. M. Pabla and the Council are deeply grateful for this gesture of distinction but consider that M. Maria should rest near her daughters and in the Hospital she loved so much. As a living letter of charity to remind the next generations of Sisters that *no one has greater love than the one who gives his life up.*

The Commission decides to unveil the tombstone on the afternoon of 3rd August 1809, coinciding with the festivities that the parish of St Paul prepares in honour of its heroes. Furthermore, it is the anniversary of the bombing and fire of the Hospital de Grace during the Sieges, when the Sisters distinguished themselves so much in the rescue of the sick and the wounded:

The Sisters had increased in number and were already twenty-one when the Sieges of this city came; in which they not only did not abandon their destiny, but also faced all the dangers, whether in the transfer of the sick and the effects they could save from the fire of the old Hospital, or in serving all kinds of sick people, even the soldiers, in the second Siege, without being afraid of the scarcity and still lack of assistance at times, nor the infectious nature of the epidemic that reigned, nine of them having died victims of Charity. Even in this calamitous time of the Sieges, when the old building of the Hospital was destroyed and it lacked all the resources

to sustain the many sick people who took refuge in the temporary buildings that were used to make up for the lack of the Hospital, the Sisters dedicated themselves to begging for the city for money, goods and clothes with very happy results, and some days of the week they all left their ration for the benefit of the poor sick people³².

The General Council decides that on the same day, 3rd August, a funeral service for M. Maria Rafols be held at ten o'clock in the morning in the Church of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace. The decoration is simple and austere. The high altar has been covered with black cloth and in the centre of the temple a coffin covered by the Spanish flag has been placed on a mound. Candles and wreaths decorated with garlands of flowers and laurel surround the burning chapel.

The Dean of the Metropolitan Council, Mr. Florencio Jarriel, presides over the Eucharist and Fr. Luis Corominas and Fr. Marceliano Casado, chaplains of the Hospice and Novitiate respectively, concelebrate. The Chapel of music of the Pillar, directed by Mr. Ramon Borobia, interprets the mass of the Master Cuellar and the eulogy of Mr. Elias Vilarreal.

The act, according to the chronicle of *El Noticiero*, was of an unusual brilliance.

Numerous personalities attend: a Commission from the Town Hall, a representation from the Executive Commission of the Sieges, a Commission from the Town Hall of Vilafranca del Penedes, representatives from all the Army Corps and Commissions from all the religious orders, the Archbishop of the town, the Captain General and the Dean of the doctors of the Hospital together with the Director of the establishment.

At five o'clock in the afternoon, Saint Paul Square is crowded with the public and the numerous authorities.

Fr. Casimiro Lopez, parish priest of Saint Paul, congratulates his parishioners for the enthusiasm that the celebrations have aroused in them. The Mayor of the city, Mr. Aznarez, accompanied by the Mayor of the district, Mr. Francisco Orios, climb the tower of the Church to raise the national flag. The band of the Hospice plays the Royal March and from the tower fifty doves are released.

The cheers and applause follow one another. After a few minutes, the Mayor pronounces a speech:

You do well, citizens of the parish of Saint Paul, neighbours of the neighbourhood that inspires most sympathy, you do well to commemorate the events of 1808-1809, especially on the most glorious day of all those memorable Sieges, because by commemorating the dead people, by putting up inscriptions in memory of those heroes, you fulfil a sacred duty, because the people who do not know how to honour their heroes, those who forget their own history, are not worthy of passing down to posterity³³.

After the words of Mr. Aznarez, a tombstone is discovered dedicated to Mr. Mariano Cerezo, who organized the civic campaigns of the parish of Saint Paul and on August 4th he locked up the French soldiers in Saint Francis, eliminating them from the Coso Street. When the inscription is discovered, in the street that bears his name, the public burst into applause and the children sing the Centenary hymn.

The procession heads for the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, where many people are waiting. Fr. Juan Soldevila waits for the procession outside the temple, while inside the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, carrying lit candles, form two rows from the presbytery to the door. When the procession enters the Church, the bells ring for the dead and the Chapel of the Pillar sings a funeral prayer. At the end, M. Pabla gives the cord to the Mayor of Vilafranca del Penedes, Mr. Paciano Verniguet who discovers the

tombstone. The bells ring to Glory and the children sing the Centenary hymn again:

*Sacred memories,
blessed memories,
that up in heaven
left written
faith and courage,
touch the fibre
of the Spanish soul
may it vibrate with longing,
may it feel, may it sing
a hymn of honour.
Children, sing,
may it reign in Spain
always peace³⁴.*

Around eight o'clock the ceremony ends, *with a solemn grandeur³⁵ that deeply impressed all the faithful*. In a dependency of the Hospital, five large tables have been prepared elegantly arranged for the lunch offered by the Congregation. The Sisters serve pastries, ice cream and sweets.

The day has had two exceptional witnesses: Sister Teresa Domenech and Sister Raimunda Oliver. Sr. Teresa had lived with M. Maria Rafols for the last four years of her life, Sr Raimunda for a year and a half. She was also one of those who shrouded her with her own habit, because M. Maria's habit was too old. Exceptional witnesses to this heroism of charity with which the Congregation is modelling itself and which shapes its features. Constant work and prayer, silence and humility, abnegation and joy with which the Sisters, heirs to a charism that Zaragoza recognises as a gift from God to the Church and the world, share with audacity the pain and misery.

On 29 October, the alabaster chapel dedicated to the heroines of the Sieges is inaugurated in the Church of El

Portillo. The event is attended by King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia, who preside over the celebration, which is attended by the nobility and the people of Zaragoza.

The Executive Board of the Centenary appoints for the event a Board of Ladies composed of the Countess of Bureta, the wife of the General of Artillery, the wife of the Mayor and the Superior General of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, representing respectively the late Countess of Bureta, Agustina de Aragon, Casta Alvarez and M. Maria Rafols.

By invitation, a large number of ladies, dressed in the classic Spanish mantle, and nuns from all the city's institutes, invited by M. Pabla, arrive at the Church.

Arranged in two long rows, from the presbytery to the door, they wait for their Majesties the invited persons, the Archbishop of Zaragoza, the parish clergy and the authorities. When the King and Queen arrive, the various authorities accompany under canopy Mr. Alfonso and the four ladies of the Board, Mrs. Victoria Eugenia; they pray in the presbytery for a few moments and go to the Chapel dedicated to the heroines, where the Prelate gives a speech recalling the deeds of those women, to which Mr. Maura, President of the Council of Ministers, responds on behalf of the King.

Next, in El Portillo Square, the monument dedicated to the same heroines is inaugurated. Fr. Florencio Jardiel, Vicar of the Diocese, hands the Queen the cord that covers the statue, leaving it in public view. On one of the sides, the name of Maria Rafols.

*And Zaragoza acclaim her,
and History exalts her,
and the arts polish her:
and she is like a column of fire*

*that even leads the way
of a legion of heroines,
the Sisters of Saint Anne³⁶.*

P. Calasanz Rabaza, Sch. P.

IX

COMMUNITIES

The Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne continue to be called upon from all parts of Spain and Venezuela to serve in charitable ministries, especially among the poorest and the neediest.

During this six-year period, two psychiatric Hospitals are founded in Maracaibo and Zaragoza. The first one, on the 25th February 1906, on the initiative of Mr. Andres Espina, who asks M. Catalina Mosacula, Provincial Superior, for a community of four Sisters to assist the sick, *a ministry that demanded great sacrifice and almost heroic charity.*

In Zaragoza, the Sisters were caring for the mentally ill since 1810. *When the hospital was located in the Convalescent building, a Sister was commissioned to provide the best care for the mentally ill.* In 1907, the Deputation builds new pavilions on the outskirts of the city and a new community is formed on 17 October.

Navarra is the Spanish province that hosts almost all the other foundations. In one of her letters, M. Pabla states: *There are very good villages in Navarre, may the Lord preserve them*³⁷. They are small towns, where the communities run the School and the Hospital, sharing the life of the simple people who discover through the presence of the Sisters the love and mercy that Christ has for them.

Fr. Florencio Laguardia, parish priest of Lerin, writes to M. Pabla asking for the basis for establishing a foundation in that Navarrese town. M. Pabla sends M. Dionisia Biescas and Mauricia Lezaun, Superiors of Estella and Allo, respectively, to go to Lerin *to study the matter and exchange impressions.* It is agreed to set up a community for the Hospital and after the corresponding works, a school

for nursery students and another for older girls. On the 10th October 1909, M. Pabla, M. Clara and Fr. John Buj leave Zaragoza on the first train with the new community: Sisters: Mauricia Lezaun, Asuncion Marquet, Maria Arruego, Aurea Esteban and Conrada Ortiz. At 10 o'clock in the morning they arrive in Calahorra where a car placed at their disposal by the Town Hall is waiting for them to drive them to an Inn near Lerin. There, several personalities await their arrival. The Sisters rest from the journey and eat. At three o'clock in the afternoon, *amidst delightful enthusiasm and a universal clamour, interrupted by pious chants, rockets and bells, the town of Lerin welcomed its long-sighing Sisters.*

In the Church, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed and the rosary is prayed. Fr. John Buj preaches and a Te Deum is sung. In their new house, the Sisters offer a modest refreshment prepared by the Sisters of Allo, Estella and Barbarin. M. Pabla enjoys these days very much which she can share with the Sisters. Writing to Sister Elena Diaz, she tells her: *On the 10th of this year we founded in Lerin and were received with great enthusiasm by the whole town. They are very good in Lerin, I came filled with piety and virtue from those people.*

In Estella, Mrs. Jeronima Uriarte wants to build a Nursing Home for the elderly of the town and the region. Since she was a child she knows the Sisters and wishes that they would manage the residence. Could they? On 27th December 1911 the Nursing Home run by Sisters Felisa Ferraz, Blasa Larrainzar, Maria Latorres, Pabla Zaro and Silvia Santol is inaugurated.

Precisely at the inauguration of the Nursing Home in Estella, the Mayor of Puente la Reina and a councillor come along *very determined that two Sisters should take possession of the Hospital.* M. Pabla makes them see that this is not the way to go about it. It is better that the new Town

Hall takes over. She knows that Fr. Jose Lopez, Bishop of Pamplona, is very keen on this new foundation, but she writes to him on 6th January 1912, saying that *before the Sisters be established, it is very important that they go with the approval of the Town Hall, which has left and which has entered. Lest the Sisters go to pay for the broken pots -as they say- and see ourselves in a problem. Therefore, until the effective Mayor and the new Town Hall call the Sisters and give me assurance of the foundation, I think it prudent not to take any steps since they are the ones who are requesting and I would be very sorry that one would call us and another would take us away.*

On 9 February, Sisters Aurelia Garde, Leocadia Sabater, Saturnina Arpa and Genara Dionis leave for Estella, bound for Puente la Reina. They are accompanied by M. Clara Nuñez and Fr. John Buj. On the 12th they go by private car accompanied by the Superiors of Estella. As the Servants of Mary had been there for more than thirty years, there is no celebration. The Sisters visit the parish and the convent of Agustinas, before taking possession of the Hospital. They return to Estella in the afternoon. Fr. Domingo Alfonso, the parish priest of Saint Michael of Estella and a native of Puente, stays in Puente la Reina and celebrates the Eucharist, *leaving the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the Oratory of the Establishment.*

It is not all about new foundations. In some existing ones, works and reforms are necessary. In Estella, a hall of the Mercy next to the Nursery School that the Sisters had, held a class of girls. But the hall becomes small for the growing number of children and it is decided to rent a flat. The General Council agrees to buy a house with an orchard and there to make the necessary premises for a small School. On March 27 1908, the building is blessed and the following day, Fr. Pablo Diaz, the Sisters' confessor, celebrates the Eucharist.

Also in Calatayud, on 4th November 1911, the new school is opened, and M. Pabla attends the ceremony.

In Alcañiz, a new school building is inaugurated in the Glorieta. On 26 June 1912, at seven o'clock in the evening, the Blessed Sacrament is installed. The streets are decorated and the procession is accompanied by motet music. In the new chapel, a little girl recites a beautiful prayer. The following day, the Eucharist is celebrated and in the afternoon, in one of the new and spacious halls, the community, whose superior is M. Sebastiana Bescos, offers the authorities and friends, *a splendid refreshment served with exquisite taste*³⁸.

Two new expeditions of Sisters are sent to Venezuela. On 11 October 1908, eight boarded, as agreed with the Board of Providence Island. M. Pabla, accompanied by M. Clara, goes to see them off in Barcelona and visits the communities in that city, Caspe and Alcañiz.

On 31 January 1910, the General Council appoints the new Council of Venezuela, as the term of office of the previous one had expired. M. Concepcion Goicochea is elected as Provincial Superior and M. Heliadora Tardio, Valentina Sabado and Antonia Pardo as Councillors.

That same year, on October 3, 1910, six more Sisters boarded for Maracaibo in *El Veloce*.

The Sisters of Charity of St. Anne are spreading charity. With full detail, with all affection, with the greatest love.

X

WITH PERMISSION FROM ROME

On 24 November 1912 the General Chapter begins with a triduum of spiritual exercises, led by the Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fr. Juan Soldevila. Three days later, after half an hour of prayer and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the elections for Mother General and Councillors begin. Sisters Veremunda Regil and Isidora Sangorrin are appointed as scrutineers of the Chapter and Sr. Dionisia Biescas as secretary. The lists of the Sisters who have the right to vote and who are eligible are then read out and the vote is taken. M. Pabla is *unanimously re-elected Superior General with the permission of the Holy See*, as the Constitutions of 1904 stated that *the Mother General could be re-elected for a third six-year term with the approval of the Holy See, provided that she had gathered two thirds of the votes of the members³⁹ present*. As General Councillors, *all with an absolute majority of votes*, Mothers Pia Oses, Petra Goñi, Celestina Sancho and Florentina Franco.

On 5 December the new Council meets for the first time and decides that M. Pabla, accompanied by M. Clara Nuñez, General Treasurer, will attend the inauguration of the new foundation in Mendavia on 11 December. The event is attended by the Bishop of Pamplona, D. Jose Lopez, who, in his homily in the parish church, highlighted *the great benefit that such a beneficial establishment under the direction of the Sisters of Saint Anne would bring to the town*.

The community that attends the Hospital-School is composed of five Sisters: Ma. Carmen Soler, Felicitacion Moño, Gregoria Moreno, Juana Nagore and Leonor Ezcurra. Classes begin on 2nd January 1913 with a registration of 200 girls and 280 infants. Twelve days later, Sr. Leonor

dies. The foundations are built on foundations of heroism and surrender...

Another Hospital and School is opened in Barrica (Vizcaya) on 8 December 1914. A beautiful building constructed by the executors of Mrs. Concepcion Elorduy, who wanted a Hospital for Barrica and its surroundings. A few months later, the Board agrees to create a School for girls and Sister Gregoria Bravo increases the Barrica community formed by Sisters Carlota Zabalegui, Ester Carbo, Nicolasa Garayo, Josefa Niclos, Florentina Goñi and Engracia Luna.

Also in Puebla Larga (Valencia), *at the repeated request of the parish priest and the town council*, the Sisters go to offer their services in a School for girls and infants. Mothers Pia Oses and Clara Nuñez go from Algemesi to Puebla Larga to make the necessary arrangements and on their return, when the General Council meets, *it is decided to make the foundation*. The inauguration, on 1st February 1915, is attended by the Superiors of Valencia and Algemesi, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities and the inhabitants of the town. The community is composed of five sisters: Concepcion Marques, Carmen Curieses, Maria Moreno, Manuela Lopez and Juana Hernandez.

Thanks to the will of Mr. Eugenio Labay, the chaplaincy of the School that the Congregation owns in Almudevar (Huesca) is inaugurated on the 2nd of August 1915, and a free school for poor girls is opened, which had been operating for months without the four Sisters assigned to this task receiving their salary of six pesetas a day.

In Zaragoza, two doctors had been calling for a community of Sisters for their Clinics for some time. They are Doctor Lozano and Doctor Serrano. The Council only agrees to these new foundations when the conditions for installing the Sisters are adequate and *they can have community life*. Doctor Lozano's Clinic is located in Sagasta

Promenade and Sisters Felisa Marco, Juana Alastruey, Jacinta Andres and Juana Pla provide charity services there since October 1, 1916. On Cervantes Street, Doctor Serrano had located his Clinic where, *in response to his repeated pleas*, a new community of four Sisters is founded: Delfina Arilla, Basilia Fernandez, Candida Gonzalez and Eusebia Monllor.

Other places request the presence of the Congregation. But M. Pabla is inflexible on some points, faithfully fulfilling the Constitutions:

I will not be able to accept the foundation because our Constitutions order me not to admit any foundation that the Sisters do not have enough to live on, and the experience of having been at the head of the Congregation for so many years shows me that less than what I am asking of you cannot be.

And the Sisters, despite the insistence of Fr. Martin Baramuendi, parish priest of Oteiza⁴⁰ (Navarra), do not settle there.

Another reason is given in a letter dated 2nd March 1912 and addressed to Fr. Juan Badia, Dean of The Penedes: *there is a great shortage of vocations and not as many are coming in as needed, for this reason I have no Sisters available at the moment*⁴¹.

The lack of Sisters is a cause of suffering for M. Pabla: *I do not have enough Sisters in this Novitiate so that they can occupy the positions left by those who have to go there. I have none to spare in this house and this makes me suffer a lot, that they ask me for Sisters and I do not have any*⁴².

The opening of new foundations in America, and the health of the Sisters is the reason why M. Concepcion Goicoechea, Provincial Superior, calls for new Sisters from Spain. During this six-year period, twenty-three Sisters board four expeditions to Venezuela, at the begin-

ning of December 1912, in May and November 1915, and on February 20, 1917.

In 1915, the Congregation celebrates twenty-five years of presence in Venezuela. *On September 18, 1915, the Sisters residing in Maracaibo celebrated the Silver Jubilee with all solemnity.* The arrival of the first Sisters is commemorated with a Eucharist, in which the blessing is given with the Blessed Sacrament, and the singing of the Te Deum as an act of thanksgiving for these twenty-five years. The feast continues in the House of Beneficence, where the Sisters give a reception to the authorities, friends and benefactors. The next day, in the cemetery, solemn funeral prayers are held in honor of the Sisters buried as grain in the ground.

The celebration of this date impels the Sisters to a greater fidelity and a deeper living of the charism. In Maracaibo they have been asking the Sisters for some time to open a school in the city. The Congregation is not going to construct a building so the President of the State, gives them the free use of a building with the only obligation to make the necessary repairs. The General Council approves this new foundation, the School of Our Lady of Pillar, which is inaugurated on January 2, 1916. In July of that same year, *the premises on Providence Island not being enough to accommodate all the poor lepers of the Republic of Venezuela,* the country's government decides to open a new establishment in Cabo Blanco. They request a community of Sisters to attend to the sick and the Vicar of Overseas writes to M. Pabla, who responded: *I only wish that they have health and do much good for the glory of God and the good of souls*⁴³. They are going to do. As Superior of the new community, one of M. Pabla's nieces, M. Segunda Cebollero Bescos. She is accompanied by Sisters Ines Goñi, Asuncion Irreguerena and Martina Gracia.

The formation of the Sisters continues to be a concern of M. Pabla. The General Council decides that the young

Venezuelan women who wish to enter the Congregation will make their novitiate in Spain. As for the postulants in Spain, *since there are many of them and they cannot all be in the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace⁴⁴*, it is decided that they have the time of Postulancy in all the houses of Zaragoza and in the Hospitals of Huesca and Calatayud.

M. Pabla is opening new paths. Responding to the situations that are presented and trusting in the new generations of Sisters, some young women begin studies of nursing *because the present times demand it⁴⁵* and to be able to offer a service according to the new techniques and needs without neglecting the charity and the small gesture that love always discovers. The love that is not passed on, is not spent, but worn away. *Due to the increase of sick and retired Sisters that makes the Novitiate's infirmary insufficient⁴⁶*, extension works are undertaken in Garrapinillos Tower. In that healthy place, one can recover one's health. Always to serve better and love more.

XI

MERCY AND RAFOLS SOUND THE SAME

The VIII General Chapter begins on November 24, 1918, with a triduum of Exercises directed by Fr. Juan Buj. On the 27th, after half an hour of prayer and the invocation to the Holy Spirit, the Superiors and the Deputy Sisters proceed to the election of the secretary and scrutineers. The lists of Sisters who can vote and who are eligible are read and the election of the General Superior, Councillors and Treasurer is held. *Mother Pabla Bescos is unanimously elected with the permission of Rome.* As General Councillors, Sisters Clara Nuñez, Pia Oses, Celestina Sancho and Florentina Franco. Sister Veremunda Gil is the Treasurer. *All by absolute majority of votes.*

The opening of new communities, in response to new needs, continues in this fifth six-year period. For the attention to children, the Children's Hospital in Caracas, capital of Venezuela, on April 3, 1919; in Spain, the *Molinuevo Foundation*, in Vitoria, on September 25, 1924. The Bishop of Vitoria, Fr. Zacarias Martinez, writes to M. Pabla requesting Sisters to attend the Children's Hospital that is being built in the capital.

On June 5, 1919, in Busturia (Vizcaya), a Nursing Home. The following year the Hospital and the School of Luesia (Huesca) are inaugurated. The foundation is carried out by Mr. Luis Aruej, a native of that place, *who left his village, being very young, poor and alone to fight for life; and the Lord so favored him in all his enterprises, that after some years, possessing an immense wealth, he wanted to show his gratitude to the Almighty, founding in Luesia, a Hospital-School for the benefit of the poor and at the expense of a community of Sisters.* And on June 13 the build-

ing and the chapel are blessed, leaving the Sacramental Jesus reserved in the afternoon and singing a Te Deum of thanksgiving. Another Residence for the Elderly is opened in Burbáguena (Teruel), assisted by a community of four Sisters, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Josefa Tomas, *who decide to use her capital and her house to found a nursing home for the old people.*

In 1922, on Ascension Day, M. Pabla and M. Celestina attend the opening of the Convalescent Home in Zaragoza. And in 1923, in Valera (Venezuela), the Peace Hospital is inaugurated, result of the efforts of Mrs. Ana Hernandez de Tejera. The community of four Sisters takes charge of all the services and the Hospital is handed over to M. Pilar Ingran, Vicar of Overseas. One year later, a community takes care of the patients assisted in the Clinic of Doctor Barraquer, in Barcelona.

There are new answers for new needs... and new answers for new times. Since April 1919, the community of the Psychiatric Hospital of Zaragoza, strengthened with ten new Sisters, is in charge of assisting the sick in the men's wards.

But the central events of these years are the dedication of a street in Zaragoza to Mother Rafols and the Tribute paid to her in Vilafranca del Penedes, her hometown. If M. Pabla wants the Congregation to go unnoticed and that *nobody knows that we exist because of the noise*, the immense love that she professes for M. Maria Rafols and Fr. John Bonal, makes her, so little friend of distinctions and public tributes, work tirelessly for the recognition of the founders.

In 1922, Sister Maria Arruego from the community of Lerin (Navarra), impressed by the prodigious healing of a sick person who had been evicted, by invoking M. Maria Rafols, moves to Zaragoza and asks M. Pabla to kiss the sepulchre of her founder.

Mother Maria is buried in the crypt of the Church of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace and her tomb is the object of great veneration since the beginning:

On the occasion of some deaths, I went down to the pantheon a few times, and M. Dolores Marin said to the novices: "My daughters, give many kisses to the tombstone of the Mother Foundress who was very Holy; ask her for the charity and humility that she had".

We passed a handkerchief by the tombstone as a sign of veneration⁴⁷.

The burials in the crypt were suspended in 1868 by the promulgation of a law prohibiting burials inside Churches. The entrance to the crypt is sealed with a thick wooden platform on which an altar dedicated to Saint Joseph is placed.

Sister Maria Arruego's plea is difficult to grant; but M. Pabla does not get scared. She requests permission from the Director of the Establishments of Beneficence, Mr. Francisco Sarria Carranza and the Vicar of the Diocese, Fr. Jose Pellicer, who grant it. We do not know the exact date when the crypt is opened, *the truth is that we all came out of there with new encouragement.* The novices, surrounding the sepulchre, sing a Miserere, and the greatest possible number of Sisters residing in Zaragoza visit the crypt.

In the Council session held on September 2 of the same year, M. Pabla expressed her desire that the life of Mother Maria Rafols be written. The Council appoints Fr. Calasanz Rabaza, a Piarist who has a great esteem for the Congregation, who replies to M. Pabla in a letter dated October 26, accepting to write the biography and indicating that *you collect, copy and send me as much information and news they have, keep or remember about Mother Rafols and we will go walking. I will guide the work, one, the one that you designate there, will be doing it⁴⁸.*

Sister María Naya, assistant to the Mistress of Novices since September 1908 and niece of M. Pabla, is the person designated to collaborate in the elaboration of the book by searching for materials. That same year, the first documents are found in the Archive of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace.

M. Pabla had heard M. Martina Balaguer say many times how Mr. Miguel Ballarin, the Director of the Charitable Establishments of Zaragoza said that the name of Mother Rafols should be written in gold letters in all the streets of Zaragoza. In all the streets and in gold is not necessary, but... to give her name to the street of Mercy?

And since not only the Congregation but the entire city owes her an immense debt of gratitude, it seems to me also opportune to indicate to you if you think the time has come to do something that honors her memory, such as dedicating one of the streets of our city to her name, as has been done with the other heroines of the Sieges.

If you think it is appropriate, we would like to have the street of Mercy, because it is where the Hospital of Grace is, the main theater of her inexhaustible charity, and also because it is where the headquarters of the Congregation she founded are located⁴⁹.

The Provincial Commission, in session of July 2, agrees to sponsor the dedication of the street, and on July 16, the Vice President of the Provincial Commission, addresses the City of Zaragoza in a letter recalling the heroic deeds that M. Maria Rafols performed *and with whom the entire city has contracted a debt of immense gratitude, reasons enough for the Most Excellent City Council of Zaragoza, fulfilling a duty of justice, agree to honor the memory of the Reverend Mother Maria Rafols by dedicating to her the street of Mercy in which the building of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace is currently located, where so many acts of her inexhaustible charity were performed during her life.*

The Zaragoza Consistory agrees in session on August 8 that, *accessing to the wishes of the Provincial Deputation, the name of Mother Maria Rafols, Heroine of the Sieges, be given to the street of Mercy.*

On October 15, 1923, the street dedication ceremony takes place, beginning with a religious function at the Church of the Provincial Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, which is insufficient to accommodate the many people who have gathered there. The Town Hall and the Deputation are present; also, the parish priest, Archpriest of Vilafranca del Penedes, Fr. Juan Badia and Fr. Juan Colomer, beneficiary; Mr. Thomas Puch and Mr. Eduardo Batle, councillors of the Town Hall of that city; the Civil Governor, General Sansurjo; a representation of the Academy of St. Louis and the Royal Mastery of Zaragoza; numerous priests and friends and benefactors of the Congregation. In addition, of course, the Sisters.

Fr. Jose Pellicer, Vicar of the Diocese, presides at the Eucharist, and Canon Santiago Guallar, at the end of the Mass, *gave an account of the virtues of this sublime heroine with great and eloquent treats*⁵⁰. The religious function concludes with a funeral prayer sung by the Cabildo and then they descend to the crypt where M. Maria Rafols is buried and a funeral prayer is recited again.

It rains a little, but many people attend the act of discovery of the tombstone that gives name to the new street. Mr. Mariano Pin, President of the Deputation, in his speech extols the virtues of Mother Maria Rafols who *was an instrument in the world of the Almighty, distributing mercy with excess*⁵¹. And he thanks the City Council of Zaragoza for honoring her with the dedication of *a street saying that it is the same to be called by one name or another because Rafols and Mercy sound the same*⁵².

The Mayor of the city, Mr. Fabiani, unrolls the curtain that covers the tombstone. He remembers that from that

day on, *the memory that the city dedicates to the Venerable Mother will be written in marble. And he wishes that her deeds of charity and heroism, serve as an example to all.*

The delegation then proceeds to the General House. A marble slab has been placed over the main entrance door to the church, with which the Congregation has also wanted to pay homage to its Foundress. Fr. Miguel de los Santos Diaz de Gomara, Auxiliary Bishop of Zaragoza, gives a speech praising M. Maria Rafols and the first Sisters and explaining the emblem of the jar of white lilies.

The Congregation, in one of the halls of the General House, where a portrait of M. Maria Rafols presiding over the event has been placed, presents those attending the tribute with a lunch. Fr. Badia, in his speech, expresses his deepest gratitude for the attentions and love with which the commission from Vilafranca del Penedes has been invited and received. He also invites those present to the acts that will be prepared in their day, dedicating to Mother Rafols a tombstone that will be placed in the house where she was born, and a street to which her name will be given.

It will be in September 1924, but before that, on June 23, the first recognition of the mortal remains of the Founders takes place, with the permission of the Capitular Vicar and the Governor of the Province. The General Council, several Superiors of Zaragoza and some Sisters like M. Ángeles Ruiz, Mistress of Novices, and Sr. Maria Naya. As witnesses, some priests, among them Fr. Juan Buj and the Director and Administrator of the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace.

Several workers carefully tear down the walls and open the niches that appear white and clean. The boxes, intact, have the same shape as those known to the Sisters: white with blue ribbon edging. When the coffins are opened, the tall stature of Mother Maria can be seen, as her box is

1.93 meters high. Also distinguishable is her habit, identical to the one worn by the Sisters and the black leather shoes, not very thin and with a button as the only binding. Fr. Juan Bonal's hood, handle, cincture and shoes are recognizable:

All those present felt a devotion so great in the presence of the venerable mortal remains that they agreed to let their Daughters, who in great number form the present community of the Hospital of Grace, come down to complete the exciting spectacle, who with great reverence were approaching to contemplate close those appreciated mortal remains.

On August 31, 1924, M. Felisa Guerri and Sr. Maria Naya leave Zaragoza. On the same train to Vilafranca del Penedes, the ecclesiastical and political authorities invited to the tribute travel: the chaplain of the Novitiate, the President of the Provincial Commission of Zaragoza, Mr. Pedro Moyano and Mr. Paulino Saviron, first Deputy Mayor of the City of Zaragoza. In the station they are received by the authorities of Vilafranca, who lead them to the Town Hall to welcome them. They stay in private homes; the Sisters in the residence of Mr. Paul Alcover, owner of the *Moli d'en Rovira*, birthplace of M. Maria Rafols, who welcomes them *with care and affection*. The next morning, at nine o'clock, in the hall of the Town Hall, Mr. Hill welcomes the authorities of Zaragoza and Barcelona and the public that attends the event. Representing the Congregation, besides M. Felisa Guerri and Sister Maria Naya, the Superiors of the Clínica The Pillar and the Clinic Hospital, M. Magdalena Monreal and M. Trinidad Clavero, accompanied respectively by Sisters Severina Artola and Rita Guel.

After the speeches given by various authorities, the portrait of M. Maria Rafols is unveiled, which is going to be placed in the gallery of illustrious people of Vilafranca del Penedes.

The whole delegation goes to the Basilica of Santa Maria, where a large group of faithful awaits the start of the Eucharist presided over by the Dean, Mr. Badia, being reserved the homily for Fr. Calasanz Rabaza, historian of the honored woman, who highlights aspects of her childhood spent among the places of Vilafranca. The religious function ends with a visit to the crypt of St. Felix. At the exit of the temple, a caravan of cars is organized to go to the Molí d'en Rovira. Mr. Santiago Abella, in the name of Mr. Alcocer, who was unable to attend due to illness, addresses a few words that remind those present that they are in *the Alcocer heritage house, where María Rafols saw the first light*⁵³. The curtain is drawn and above the door of the mill there is a white tombstone commemorating this fact: *In this house was born the R. M. Maria Rafols Bruna, Foundress of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne and Heroine of the Sieges of Zaragoza.*

It is then, once the words and gestures are finished, that the Sisters can carry out their own homage. *The Sisters of the Commission and those who came from Barcelona entered the rooms of the mill, and upon entering one where M. Rafols probably saw the light first, they knelt and prayed devoutly.*

XII

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

The IX General Chapter, meeting in Zaragoza since November 25, 1924, proceeds, three days later, to the election of the Mother General, her Councillors and General Treasurer, *resulting from it unanimously re-elected, Rev. M. Pabla Bescos*. M. Felisa Guerri and the Sister Councillors Amalia Forcano, Vicenta Urtasun and Angeles Ruiz accompany her in this Council. As Treasurer, Sr. Veremunda Regil is re-elected.

May it all be for the glory of God and the Congregation. They all know that I did not want any more positions and I had told all of them, the confessors and the Vicar General of the Diocese, and yet, they went to the vote -as M. Concepción would say- and in the doubt of whether they would approve it or not⁵⁴.

It was approved. A request is sent to Rome which grants, for three years, a rescript of confirmation in office.

On November 29, M. Eufemia Esandi is appointed Mistress of Novices, replacing M. Angeles Ruiz.

The new Council continues with the work of exalting the figure of the Founders, M. Maria Rafols and Father John Bonal. The transfer of their mortal remains to the Church of the General House and the introduction of the Cause of beatification of M. Maria Rafols are the two events that are undertaken during these last years of M. Pabla's life.

At the end of the previous six-year period, the Council, in a session of April 29, 1924, had decided to begin the process of transferring the mortal remains of the Founders from the Hospital to the Church of the Novitiate *where they can be honored and made more known, since it is the house of formation, the Superior General's residence and the property of the community⁵⁵.*

And - says the Book of Chronicles - the idea arose, which became a desire. They dreamed of moving the mortal remains of the venerable Founders to the Church of the Saint Anne Novitiate, their own house and the cradle of the new generations.

It was necessary to establish the greatest possible contact between the Mother Foundress and those called by God to renew the future generations of charity and heroism, and much had to influence in the formation and tempering of their spirit to be able to lean their forehead on the edge of her sepulchre.

That is why the idea of moving their mortal remains spread and grew in the Institute, at the same time that the virtues of the Venerable Mother were more known and divulged, and her graces and wonders were commented and popularized, and the desire and purpose of calling the attention of the Holy Mother Church was opened, to manage that the declared heroine of charity of the Sieges of Zaragoza be declared heroine of virtue in the altars.

The necessary steps are taken and, once the necessary permits are obtained, what had been born as a dream became a reality on October 20, 1925, during the festivities of Our Lady of Pillar. The permanent Commission of the City Council of Zaragoza invites the parish priests and mayors of Vilafranca del Penedes and Terrades, birth-places of M. Maria Rafols and Fr. John Bonal, to attend the events. The Deputation agrees to collaborate in the organization of the event and to pay the expenses that are deemed convenient.

On the 19th, at half past ten in the morning, the exhumation of the bodies of the founders takes place. Their mortal remains are deposited in zinc boxes that have four keys on them where it is possible to read: Town Hall, Prelate, Deputation, Congregation. The Sisters go to contemplate and venerate the mortal remains.

The zinc boxes are placed inside wooden coffins, also closed with four keys, built and carved in the workshops of the Provincial Hospice. They have carved, on the four sides of the box, the shields of the Town Hall, the Archbishop of Zaragoza, the Deputation and the Congregation. On the cover of Mother Maria's coffin, the shield of Vilafranca del Penedes and on the cover of Father John's coffin, the shield of Terrades.

The keys of the boxes, in their respective cases, are collected by M. Pabla to give them to each one of the entities.

The coffins are placed in the center of the Church of the Hospital and the eighty Superiors who came from all over Spain, alternating with the Sisters residing in Zaragoza, keep vigil over the mortal remains that are privately transferred to the Basilica of Pillar.

The next morning, numerous faithful and representations of military, civil, political and religious authorities fill the central nave of the Temple and spread out in front of the main sacristy and the chapels of Saint Anthony and Saint Braulio. In the sacred way, between the two pulpits, on a burial mound, rest the mortal remains of M. Maria Rafols and Fr. John Bonal.

Fr. Ignacio Laborda, President of the Saint Charles Seminary, presides at the Eucharist and Fr. Calasanz Rabaza, Provincial of the Piarist Fathers, preaches:

We celebrate the feast of dust, of luminous dust... That dust, asleep in these funerary boxes, was brain and was heart... Admirable is Mother Rafols, charitable, patient, self-sacrificing, generous, slandered, persecuted, suffering... but she is more admirable surviving herself by giving her spirit to her daughters so that they live and encourage the virtues of their Mother...⁵⁶

He ends up asking for them the light and splendor of the altars.

After the funeral prayer, the Archbishop of Zaragoza officiates the response, sung by the Chapel of The Pillar, and then the retinue is organized. The procession is led by the Municipal Guard, followed by the Cornet Band of the Provincial Hospice and the boys and girls of the Asylum; then, the representation of Confraternities, such as the Daughters of Mary and the Association of the Child Jesus of Prague, and Fraternities such as that of the Refuge or that of the Soup; followed by the teaching corporations and a large number of religious women from the various Congregations, of course many Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne; the priests of the parishes of Zaragoza and the parish priests of the various locations where there is a community of Sisters; the cathedral clergy and the Cabildo of The Pillar, reciting the miserere.

Then, under the command of a sergeant, the artillery armor with the two coffins followed by the General Council and some people from Vilafranca del Penedes and Terrades. After the City Council and the Deputation, the Presidency: on behalf of the King, the Most Excellent General Captain, on behalf of the Civil Governor, Mr. Afan de Rivera; the military Governor; the Mayor, Mr. Cerezuela; the President of the Deputation, Mr. Lasierra; and the Mayors of Vilafranca del Penedes and Terrades.

The retinue is closed by an Infantry picket that, upon arriving at the General House, pays military honors to the mortal remains of M. Maria Rafols and Fr. John Bonal that are deposited in the sepulchres built on both sides of the Church's presbytery. The coffin of M. Maria Rafols was carried on the shoulders of those from Vilafranca del Penedes and those from Terrades, the coffin of Fr. John Bonal.

The Chapel of Music of The Pillar sings the last funeral prayer. It is one thirty in the afternoon.

At half past four, a solemn evening is held at the Provincial Hospice *to honor the memory of Mother Maria Rafols and Reverend Mosen John Bonal, founders of the Institute of Charity of Saint Anne*⁵⁷. The Archbishop of Zaragoza, Fr. Rigoberto Domenech y Valls, presides over the event, which is attended by diverse authorities, friends and benefactors of the Congregation.

An afternoon of words and thanksgiving begins with the hymn to Mosen John Bonal sung by a choir of girls from the Hospice and, then, one of them, on behalf of all children and young people in the Hospice, wants to publicly recognize the work of Mother Maria in the Foundling Home, where *she practiced virtue, led to heroism, all the days of her life and with the abandoned children, heroism led to sacrifice*⁵⁸.

Mr. Mariano Pano, President of the Academy of Fine Arts, elaborates a synthesis of the history of the Congregation, highlighting how *it is extending its action to the whole world, because where a serious need appears, there the Sisters of Saint Anne appears*⁵⁹. Next, Mr. Gregorio Garcia Arista, member of the Royal Spanish Academy and History, recites a poem in which he praises the conduct of the honorees during the Sieges of the city.

Fr. John Buj takes the opportunity to talk about Mosen John Bonal, whose *life was a straight line, the highest praise we can make of him*⁶⁰. He highlights righteousness of heart as another character of his life that leads him to see reality in the light of God and how his whole existence rotates around two great loves: God and His poor.

The Dean of the Chapter, Fr. Florencio Jardiel, speaks of Mother Maria Rafols. His father knew her and spoke of her *with the greatest praises. A woman who loved peace, with the love of God and for Him held, two intense loves burned in her heart: love for the poor sick and love for her daughters*⁶¹.

The speeches continue. Now from the Dean and the Mayor of Vilafranca del Penedes. And Fr. Calasanz Rabaza, who *with his usual eloquence praises this heroine of the Sieges and of charity*⁶². Fr. Rigoberto Domenech, Archbishop of Zaragoza, makes *some brief considerations about these tributes*⁶³. And the ceremony ends with the speech of the President of the Deputation, Mr. Antonio Lasierra: 120 years pouring out love and sweetness and ingenuity to help those who suffer! *120 years working as women in love with God and who know the preferential place that the poor sick people occupy in His Most Sacred Heart!* These are words of acknowledgement *with which the Deputation corresponds to the selfless, intelligent, assiduous and effective care that the Sisters of Charity put at the service of those who are sheltered into the Provincial Establishments.* Mr. Antonio, concludes with a petition addressed to the Sisters. *If with the file you intend to open for the canonization of your illustrious foundress you achieve, as I hope and desire, your desire, do not forget that a special relic of the Saint would constitute a true treasure for the poor of the Hospital*⁶⁴.

On October 23, the Council meets in an extraordinary way with the ecclesiastical notary, Mr. Manuel Herrando and two witnesses, Fr. John Buj and Mr. Rosendo Cortes. Having read the duties and rights of the Postulator, the election of the same one is proceeded that falls on Fr. Carmelo Blay, Josefino priest. In May 1926, M. Pabla informs the Council of the election by the Archbishop of Zaragoza of the Tribunal for the process of beatification of M. Maria Rafols, and on July 2, the Archbishop of Zaragoza publishes the edict appointing him. Thus, the Ordinary Informative Process begins in the Curia of Zaragoza, which will last from July 1926 to January 28, 1927. The purpose of the trip is to deliver to the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the Ordinary Informative Process on the fame of sanctity, virtues and miracles of M. Maria Rafols and the process of

Non Culto. Also, that the Sisters may visit the Holy Father and in the name of the whole Congregation, present and offer him the life and mission of the Institute.

On February 8, they leave Zaragoza by train to Barcelona where the Sisters of the Condal City wait for them. They stay at the Pillar Clinic and at seven o'clock the following evening they start their journey to France. Crossing the French Provence, at eight o'clock in the morning, they arrive in Marseilles where they take another train to Italy. In Vintimiglia, the first Italian town, they boarded another train, and at nine o'clock in the morning on February 11th they are in Rome. Fr. Daniel Delgado, Procurator General of the Augustinian Recollects, waits for them at the station, and he accompanies them to Minerva Hotel where they will remain during their stay in the Eternal City. *His support facilitated so much the quick and easy compliance of the goals that brought us to Rome*⁶⁵. That same afternoon, Fr. Daniel presents them with invitations to attend, the 12th, the Eucharist celebrated in the Sixtine Chapel on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the election of Pius XI. And on Sunday, the 13th, at half past seven in the morning, M. Felisa Guerri and Sr. Maria Naya are invited to the Eucharist in the Holy Father's private Chapel. *They had never received Communion with such fervor and never was their thanksgiving so deeply felt*⁶⁶.

They still want something else. A private audience. They apply on Monday, the 14th and are granted for Wednesday, the 16th at a quarter to one. In this audience, M. Felisa Guerri, as Vicar General, offers him the homage of the Congregation and a small gift for which the Holy Father was grateful. He also asks questions related to the Congregation to which Fr. Santiago Guallar responds in Latin and they explain to the Pope the double reason for the visit to Rome. The private audience ends with the blessing to all the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne and all those who are associated with them.

With regard to the cause of beatification, on the 11th they visit Cardinal Vico, Prefect of the Congregation and protector of the Institute. They also meet with the procurator of the cause, Fr. Carmelo Blay, in charge of the Spanish College in Rome, who informs them that the writings on M. Maria Rafols have already been translated into Italian and that Cardinal Granito Pignatelli has been appointed rapporteur of the cause, whom they visit and greet.

On the 13th, accompanied by Fr. Carmelo Blay, they hand over the Informative Process in the Sacred Congregation of Rites in the Palace of the Chancellery. They return to Zaragoza. The Process has to follow its course. In the correspondence of these years, M. Pabla recalls the need to ask the Lord for the cause of M. Maria Rafols; on September 12, 1928, she announces to the General Council *with deep satisfaction*⁶⁷, the possible introduction, in that year, of the cause of the Mother.

The latest foundations carried out with M. Pabla as Superior General show her creative fidelity; fidelity to the charism received and attention to the new signs of the times.

The School Colony of Pedernales, where children from more than thirty-five villages in Vizcaya are going to find *joy, health, love and protection* with the community of six Sisters who attend this permanent colony since August 13, 1925; from January 9, 1927, in Torrevelilla (Teruel), the dedication to the free education of infants and children on weekdays, and on holidays the education of adults; and in Tardienta (Huesca), four Sisters begin to take care in 1929 of the instruction of the children of the workers of the factory that Mr. Mariano Gavin owns in that locality.

The foundations of Venezuela continue to hold a special place in the heart of M. Pabla who, every month, sends them letters on every steamboat that travels to Maracaibo.

The request of Sisters to strengthen the overseas communities is a constant petition, and M. Pabla, who is short of new vocations, with which to attend to so many requests, assures: *I get dizzy with requests and there are no Sisters for all those that are asked and I suffer with this*⁶⁸. She never denies Sisters for Venezuela. On January 10, 1925, with the company of M. Concepcion Goicoechea and Sister Lorenza Sanchez, who had attended the General Chapter, an expedition of ten Sisters departs, who have offered themselves to live charity in America, where the Congregation already counts on an important number of Sisters and communities. M. Pabla, in April 1925, transmits to the General Council the desire of the Sisters of America that the *Vicar Sister of Overseas has representation for her position in the Chapter and also they wish the visit of the Mother General or a Delegate to Venezuela*⁶⁹. The Council approves the proposals, postponing the journey for *when it is deemed convenient*⁷⁰. The right moment comes in 1926 when the trip to Venezuela of M. Angeles Ruiz, Secretary General, accompanied by a group of eight Sisters *who went happy to practice charity in a heroic degree*⁷¹, is decided. M. Pabla and M. Vicenta Urtasun, General Councillor, accompanied M. Angeles to Barcelona. M. Bernardina Labiano, Superior of Cabo Blanco, and the eight Sisters who form the new expedition wait for her there. On August 13, 1926, they embark on the steamboat *Leo XIII* and arrive in La Guaira on the 31st of that month. M. Tomasa Izco, Vicar of Venezuela, accompanied by several Sisters, are waiting for them at the dock. In Cabo Blanco, they stay until September 4 when they embark for Maracaibo, arriving three days later.

M. Angeles visits the thirteen communities in Venezuela where she has the opportunity *to admire the good spirit and regular observance that animates them. She was also able to appreciate their spirit of sacrifice and consummate prudence.* The communities of the Lazarettos of the Island

of Providence and Cabo Blanco, have gone through truly difficult moments due to the management of the administrator appointed by the Government who, later, disabused by his decision, entrusts the entire administration and direction of the two Lazarettos to the Sisters. *With great prudence, great constancy and fine tact, everything returns to its being.*

On November 21, after the canonical visit, M. Angeles returns to Spain accompanied by Sr. Rosario Oses and the postulant Amparo Hernandez. They embark on the *Legazpi* which arrives in Barcelona on December 11 and M. Pabla receives them at the door of the General House, four days later. M. Angeles informs the Council of the good spirit she has found in the Sisters, of their observance and of the delicacy and abnegation with which they fulfill their mission. And of how much they are loved.

So much that very soon, on June 20, 1927, M. Pabla informs that *it must be asked who has a vocation*⁷². In December, Sister Emilia Mallol arrives from Venezuela to look for Sisters, since there is an increase of Sisters in all the houses; among them, some with nursing degrees are needed. M. Pabla, a woman of foresight, had already decided in 1926 that twelve Sisters should study nursing at the same Faculty of Zaragoza. This decision made it possible for four, of the fourteen Sisters who made up the twentieth expedition to Venezuela, the last one M. Pabla knew, to have this degree. There are also other Sisters studying in Madrid and Valencia. M. Pabla manifests to the Council her satisfaction *for being able to send that number in the scarcity that we have*⁷³.

The missionary experience of M. Pabla leads her to make a firm commitment to the communities of Venezuela. As a woman of great missionary dimension, she decides the participation of the Congregation in the Missionary Exhibition of Barcelona of the year 1929, to give a scholar-

ship to an indigenous seminarian, or the creation, in July 1926, of the magazine *Manantial de vida*^{T.N.} as an instrument that would give unity to the various manifestations of piety and zeal that characterized each of the different Schools or Centers.

In 1927, all the local Superiors of Spain and the General Council celebrate the Spiritual Exercises. M. Pabla is now seventy-nine years old, and she addresses the Sisters with the wisdom that comes from age, and the grounds of a life surrendered in favor of others; *my pleasure is to give pleasure if possible*⁷⁴. It is a time of balancing, of recognition, of confidence:

*God, who is just in his works and who does not let anything go unnoticed by Him, rewards in his own time the humiliation through which our Congregation has gone from the earliest times: I myself have witnessed many and great humiliations, especially up to the approval of the rules by the Holy See and only with God's help and great sacrifices was it possible to ensure that the Deputation did not exercise any control over the government of the Congregation, the only obstacle they put to us in Rome for the approval of the rules. That day was for me the day that I suffered the most in my life*⁷⁵.

T.N. *Spring of Life*.

XIII

BY THE NOISE MAY NOBODY KNOW THAT WE EXIST

M. Pabla writes in June 1928 to M. Rita Garcia: *I am well but the travels already frighten me; at home I do what I can.* December 25 is the last day she goes down to the tribune of the General House and in her room *she finished embroidering the fabric of the most ardent charity.*

She lives her illness with confidence. *Not one complaint, not one observation*⁷⁶. Just what the doctor and the Sisters of the infirmary say. Deeply grateful for the care they give her, one often hears her repeat: *Poor little ones those in the hospital! How many needs they will have without anyone knowing it and here always one or the other looking at what you lack!*

On January 17, the General Council sends a circular letter to all the communities of the Congregation informing them that *today the doctor found her better, however at her request this afternoon the Holy Viaticum is administered.* M. Pabla wishes to receive the Eucharist as viaticum, and has the consolation of being able to receive communion every morning, until the day of her death.

Do you want to go to heaven? -the Sisters ask her. *I only want what God wants* -she answers them. And M. Pabla is dying as she has been living... On January 21, after the Sacrament of Reconciliation, she asks for the anointing of the sick. *What a great grace to receive all the sacraments with full knowledge!*

And the next day, a new letter from the General Council, allows *the Superiors who are in condition, to be able to come to this Mother House, in order to receive with her last breath, the blessing and spirit of the one who consecrated all*

her life, without omitting sacrifice as painful as it was, to the good and exaltation of the Institute.

The Superiors are arriving in Zaragoza. The house, in spite of receiving so many Sisters, awaits in silence and prayer. Only the oldest Sisters, upon hearing the bell announcing the doctor's visit, go to the infirmary to ask about the state of health of M. Pabla. On the 25th, as a birthday gift, all Superiors come in to visit her: *Just the Reverend Mother opened her lips to show her gratitude and to ask us to take much care of them because they had come from far away, there were old Sisters and it was very cold. Up to the last moment, she was careless of herself and attentive to the needs of others: I want you to say to all Sisters of the Congregation that I never wished or intended to mortify them, and if I did it was unconscious, may they forgive me*⁷⁷.

From this moment on, she doesn't stop smiling. It is February.

*On the 19th, around three o'clock in the afternoon, she exclaims: I see death coming and taking a moment to reflect, she began to name all the oldest Sisters and Mothers who had died. Raising her hands to heaven, with an attitude that expressed confidence, peace, and longing, she repeated over and over again: "I surrender myself totally, in life and in death, I am totally yours, O Divine Heart of Jesus"*⁷⁸.

Around eight o'clock at night she exclaimed:

The greatness of God, the greatness of God, that alone is worth; the rest is all lies. It would be approximately half past eleven when the Sisters of the vigil noticed in her face signs of extraordinary joy, and the Sister Nurse, taking her pulse, gave the alarm: "The Mother is dying". Immediately the chaplain came, and the prayers of the dying and the recommendation of the soul were read, and with the same beatific smile, without any exter-

nal sign, she peacefully slept in the Lord. It would be approximately half past twelve at night.

Her body remains exposed in one of the halls of the General House, in a white, violet-covered mound. The Eucharist is celebrated without interruption from six in the morning until eleven, and in the afternoon, at five, the rosary is prayed. Many people come to show the love and respect they have for M. Pabla. And, the recognition of her holiness. Medals, rosaries, and objects of piety are passed over her body as a relic; they ask for small objects of her use, some stamps, a piece of cloth, and some kiss her hands and feet.

On the 23rd, the body is moved to the Church. The Sisters of the General Council, her religious nieces and her nurse carry the coffin. Behind the cross, two rows of Sisters with the candles lit, and numerous Sisters from Zaragoza as well as some priests who sing the *Miserere*. That same day, at 11:00 a.m., her funeral is held, attended by many people and a large number of authorities. *Church, tribunes, house, everything was full before the time of the funeral and the people were struggling to get in but were unable to do so.*

Fr. Jose Pellicer presides over the celebration and Fr. Federico Minguillon and Fr. Pablo Gines concelebrate. The Chapel of The Pillar sings the Requiem Mass of Perossi and the Requiem of the same author. At the end of the funeral, while the *Benedictus* is sung, her body is taken to the tribune where *she spent so many hours absorbed in prayer. In this house, so dear to her, among walls kneaded with miracles*⁷⁹, rests a woman whose life, without any noise, tells us of a dream come true. A reality of universal charity, chiefly to the poorest and the neediest, through the practice of hospitality to the point of heroism.

FOOT NOTES

PART I

1. GARCIA, Jose Antonio, *Religious Life and countercultural resistance*, Santander, Terrae Publishing House, 1989, page. 117.
2. Report on the Provincial Beneficence of Zaragoza submitted by the Commission in charge of this matter that comprises the Hospital of Our Lady of Grace, the Hospice of Our Lady of Mercy and those in Calatayud and Tarazona, with the general inventories of all the furniture, tools and farms, and the movement of money and sheltered during the financial year from 1869 to 70, Zaragoza, Provincial Printing House, 1871, page 7.
3. Idem, page 9.
4. Ibid.
5. Constitutions of 1824, page 11.
6. From here onwards, a big number of quotations appear from the Books I and II of Chronicles of the Congregation. In order to facilitate the reading, decision has been taken of not noting all of them.
7. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, pages 77-78.
8. Constitutions of 1824, page 146.
9. Ecclesiasticus 6:16.
10. Constitutions of 1824, page 35.
11. Ibid.
12. Report on the Provincial Beneficence... page 38-39.
13. LEON, Felipe, *Verses and prayers of the walker, in virgin Path*, Visor Libros Publishing House, 1983.

14. Constitutions of 1824, page 63.
15. Constitutions of 1824, page 6.
16. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, pages 111-112.
17. Constitutions of 1824, page 146.
18. Constitutions of 1805, page 76.
19. Constitutions of 1824, page 70.
20. *Idem*, page 29.
21. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 172.
22. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 178.
23. Minutes of the Session of the City Hall of Alcañiz, 14th August 1882.
24. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 215.
25. *Idem*, page 219.
26. *Idem*, page 228.
27. *Idem*, page 227.
28. Constitutions of 1824, page 6.
29. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 292.
30. *Idem*, page 298.
31. *Idem*.
32. Luke 6:27.
33. Tribute of gratitude and veneration that the city of Alcañiz pays to the religious Congregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne. Instance to the Most Ex-

cellent Provincial Deputation, Alcañiz, M. Delgado Printing House, 1890.

34. Communication to Mr. Esteban Paricio.
35. Minutes of the extraordinary session on 5th May 1890 of the City Hall of Alcañiz.
36. Minutes of the session on 16th July 1890 of the City Hall of Alcañiz.
37. Appointment of M. Pabla as Novice Mistress of the Congregation of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, 4th September 1889.
38. Book for the use of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, Zaragoza, M. Salas Printing House, 1890, page 30.
39. Letter-witness of Sr. Dolores Barduzal to M. Felisa Guerri, Fitero, 5th October 1930.
40. Book for the use of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, Zaragoza, M. Salas Printing House, 1890, page 5.
41. Idem, page 43.
42. ECHEVARRIA, Pedro Jose, *Warnings for a Novice Mistress*, Barcelona, Religious and scientific Printing House, 1879
43. Letter-witness of Sr. Dolores Barduzal to M. Felisa Guerri, Fitero, 5th October 1930.
44. Ibid.

PART II

1. Letter-witness of Sr. Isabel Araiz, Calatayud, 6th September 1934.
2. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 392.

3. Idem, page 395.
4. Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars approving the Institute of Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne as a Congregation of Pontifical Law.
5. From here onwards, a big number of quotations appear from the Book I of Foundations of the Congregation. In order to facilitate the reading, decision has been taken of not noting all of them.
6. Letter-witness of Sr. Dolores Barduzal to M. Felisa Guerri, Fitero, 5th October 1930.
7. There are numerous quotations in this chapter, all of them correspond, except for those mentioned, to different articles in the magazines *Manantial de vida* (Spring of life) (1935/November) and *El eco de la cruz* (The echo of the cross) (1935/October), dedicated to the figure of Fr. John Buj, on the occasion of his death.
8. GASCA, J., *Apostle of the Eucharist, Biography of John Buj y Garcia*, Zaragoza, 2000, page 113.
9. BUJ, J., *The Eucharist and the daily communion*, Zaragoza, Mariano Salas Printing House, page 77.
10. Constitutions of 1805, page 77.
11. CANTERO, S. *El eco de la cruz* (1935/october), page 5.
12. *Life of Mother Pabla*, Tarazona, Luis Martinez Moreno Printing House, 1935, page 412.
13. Idem, page 413.
14. Minutes of the session of the General Council, First days of November, 1903.
15. Minutes of the session of the General Council, First days of November, 1904.

16. *Heraldo de Aragon*, 30th December 1904.
17. *El Noticiero*, 30th December 1904.
18. *El Noticiero*, 30th December 1904.
19. Ibid.
20. *Heraldo de Aragon*, 30th December 1904.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Newspaper clipping, without name, 2nd January 1905, kept in the General Secretariat of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne.
24. *El Pensamiento navarro* (The Navarre Thought), 3rd January 1905.
25. *La Sinceridad* (The Sincerity), 31st December 1904.
26. Minutes of the General Council on 20th November 1906.
27. Minutes of the General Council on 8th October 1906.
28. GALILEA, E., *Sisters of Charity of Saint Anne, Foundations of said Congregation in the Republic of Venezuela*, Zaragoza, Mariano Salas Printing House, 1909, page 290.
29. Idem, page 276.
30. Idem, page 293.
31. Idem, page 296.
32. *News of the establishment of the Sisters in the Hospital and their progress*, 1823 in Historical Documents I, page 163.
33. *Tributes paid in honour of the Rev. M. Maria Rafols Bruna*, Casa Cesaraugustana Printing House, page 24.

34. *Hymn of the Centenary of the Sieges*, in the magazine *El Gancho* (1908/October).
35. *Tributes paid in honour of the Rev. M. Maria Rafols Bruna*, Casa Cesaraugustana Printing House, page 25.
36. *Idem*, page 29.
37. Letter of M. Pabla to Sr. Elena Diaz, 15th October 1909.
38. *Tierra Baja* (Low Land), 4th July 1912.
39. Constitutions of 1924, pages 108-109.
40. Letter of M. Pabla to Mr. Martin Baramuendi, 31st December 1917.
41. Letter of M. Pabla to Mr. Juan Badia, 2nd March 1912.
42. Letter of M. Pabla to M. Concepcion Goicoechea, 14th October 1916.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Minutes of the General Council, 31st May 1916.
45. Minutes of the General Council, 8th February 1916.
46. Minutes of the General Council, 5th February 1916.
47. Letter-witness of Sor Josefa Badenas, 25th November 1925.
48. Letter from Fr. Calasanz Rabaza to M. Pabla, 26th October 1922.
49. Instance of M. Pabla, 23rd June 1922.
50. *El Noticiero* (The News), 16th October 1923.
51. *Tributes paid in honour of the Rev. M. Maria Rafols Bruna*, Casa Cesaraugustana Printing House, page 52.

52. Ibid.
53. Idem, page 68.
54. Letter of M. Pabla to M. Tomasa Izco, 31st January 1925.
55. Minutes of the General Council, 29th April 1924.
56. *Funeral Prayer* of Fr. Calasanz Rabaza in the Tribute paid to M. Maria Rafols in Vilafranca del Penedes, 1st September 1924.
57. *El Noticiero*, 21st October 1925.
58. *Tributes paid in honour of the Rev. M. Maria Rafols Bruna*, Casa Cesaraugustana Printing House, page 85.
59. Idem, page 88.
60. Idem, page 92.
61. Idem, page 98.
62. *El Noticiero*, 21st October 1925.
63. *Tributes paid in honour of the Rev. M. Maria Rafols Bruna*, Casa Cesaraugustana Printing House, page 106.
64. Idem, page 110.
65. GUALLAR, S., *Impressions of the journey to Rome in Manantial de vida*, (1927/May) page 169.
66. GUALLAR, S., *Impressions of the journey to Rome in Manantial de vida*, (1927/September) page 226.
67. Minutes of the General Council, 12th September 1928.
68. Letter of M. Pabla to M. Bernardina Labiano, 21st August 1926.
69. Minutes of the General Council, 4th April 1925.

70. Ibid.
71. Minutes of the General Council, 18th August 1926.
72. Minutes of the General Council, 20th July 1927.
73. Minutes of the General Council, 4th October 1927.
74. Letter of M. Pabla to Sr. Amancia Martinez, 28th March 1924.
75. Words of M. Pabla addressed to the Local Superiors, at the end of the Spiritual Exercises of 1927.
76. *Manantial de vida*, (March/1929), page 8.
77. Idem, page 7.
78. Idem, page 8.
79. Idem, page 18.

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