



BEING AND WORKING

... in the footsteps of Mother Antonia!

Number 14

Dear Vernian Family,

As established in the first post-assembly General Council of 17.9.2023 (i.e. "holding four Councils a year"), here we are at the fourth annual Council of the new four-year period, celebrated on **28 September 2024** at 3:00 p.m.

It was held partly in person in Rome, to get to know the new Mother, and partly online (Zoom), with the participation of all the Councilors. Also connected are Mrs. Pilar Cuevas (from Buenos Aires), General Secretary, and the General Treasurer Mrs. Anna Bratti (from Crevalcore).

In addition, our General President, in addition to the Mother, Sister Elena Romano, also invited the Vicar General of the Congregation Sister Raffaella Giudici and, for a speech, Sister Elena Tosi, coordinator of the Sisters of reference.

In summary: Mother Sister Elena Romano, Sister Raffaella Giudici, President Anna Maria de Rosa, the four Councilors Mario Trombetta, Pablo Suarez (Argentina), Vincenzo Fornace and Najat Tayeh (Lebanon), as well as Pilar Cuevas and Anna Bratti, are present or connected. Sister Elena Tosi will speak later.

Immediately a thank you and much solidarity to Najat who, with difficulty, manages to connect with us, being in a war zone. They have just bombed the town next to theirs... I don't know how many would have his perseverance and courage!

Main contents of the meeting

- Getting to know the new Mother General and the presentation of our Council.
- Sharing of the participation in the General Chapter of the Congregation and the trip to the African Missions of our President.
- Brief information on the trip to Campania and Calabria to visit the local Groups.
- Where are we with the definition of the Charity Projects?
- What will be the new spiritual lines 2024-2025?
- What news on the new association website?
- Our Sisters of Reference at the starting line.



Associazione Laici Verniani



- Reflections by Vincenzo Fornace on the very important document of the Dicastery of Faith “Dignitas Infinita”. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil”...(Isaiah 5,20)
- How did the campaign for the 2024 Association Contribution go?

Getting to know the new Mother General and the presentation of our Council.

“Mother Antonia does not stop.” It is a slogan that frequently recurs in our communities and that has kept us united and encouraged during the pandemic. And so her daughters do not stop either.

In twenty years of association life we remember, with emotion, three Mother Generals: Sister Grazia Rossi (who blessed the beginning of our Association), Sister Palma Porro and Sister Raffaella Giudici who encouraged and spiritually “formed” and nourished it.

Today we have the joy of meeting Sister Elena Romano, elected in the last General Chapter.

The Mother smiles at us and immediately leads us in the initial prayer in which our thoughts are turned to our Lebanese communities (the religious and lay ones), to those of the Congregation in Jerusalem and Nazareth and also to some beloved lay people who left us prematurely in this part of the year (Gigliola, Marcellina and Donato).

Anna Maria introduces the Councilors, the Secretary and the Treasurer and Sister Elena thanks each one, individually, for the work carried out freely in the spirit of the Vernian charism.

Finally, the Mother announces that each of her new General Councilors has assumed specific roles and tasks. The Vicar General, Sister Rafaella, will have, in addition to other duties, the task of following the two Associations **that are inspired** by the Congregation: the Missionaries of Charity and the Lay Vernians.

Sharing of participation in the General Chapter of the Congregation and the trip to the African Missions of our President

Anna Maria de Rosa confides to us, with an open heart, that in two months, from July 17 to mid-September, she experienced different and intense emotions.

Representing the Association during a General Chapter, a culminating and solemn moment for a religious Congregation, is not easy at all as respect, awe and the fear, always lurking, of being “inadequate”, can break your voice and freeze your ideas.

However, our Anna Maria did not lose heart and developed the requested theme by saying who we are, where we are, how many we are and what goals we set ourselves. She illustrated the salient moments of our VI General Assembly, recently celebrated. She recalled the difficulties encountered during the



pandemic and the joy of having seen the birth, despite the difficulties induced by it, of the Groups of Namanga in Tanzania and Fuscaldo in Calabria.

According to Sister Raffaella, the capitular nuns greatly appreciated her speech and Anna Maria's report was placed, as is customary, in the Chapter Acts.

The trip to the **African missions and the Vernian groups of Kenya and Tanzania** went well beyond Anna Maria's expectations. The emotions encountered, in this case, were of surprise and emotional. Surprise, for the splendid welcome - sometimes not only the Vernians but the entire village communities were celebrating, to welcome her, along the dusty and bumpy roads! Emotional, for the sincere and simple faith of our lay people there and for the great love that was palpably perceived towards Mother Antonia. Emotional, again, for the serious state of poverty of certain families (something that is expected but for which one is never prepared).

Anna Maria also captured the **state of frustration of the African Vernians** who would like, according to the charism, not only to train and pray but also **to help their neighbor**.

They would like **"to be helped in order to be able to help"**.

From the reports, which each group has punctually and meticulously prepared, a series of requests emerge that the President faithfully reports to the Council:

- 1) Open a dispensary also in Namanga, since the collaboration of a pharmacist among the lay people of that group can be used.
- 2) to help the Kawe Orthopedic Center (Tanzania) more
- 3) to receive packages of clothing, hygiene products and stationery and non-perishable food products (request from Rakwaro - Kenya)
- 4) to receive books about the life and works or writings of Mother Antonia since there are young people in training (from 13 to 18 years of age) who would like to become Vernian Lay People (request from Kawe - Tanzania)
- 5) to receive material, which is very expensive locally, to be able to make and sell rosaries or other similar objects of sacred art (request from Namanga - Tanzania)
- 6) to receive in real time all the training material, spiritual guidelines, information and news regarding the Association (requests from Nairobi and Eldoret in Kenya, from Namanga, Kongwa and Kawe in Tanzania)
- 7) to increase the number of long-distance adoptions (request from Kadem - Kenya)



8) the possibility for African delegations who will come to Italy for the next General Assemblies to visit Rivarolo, Pasquaro and the places where the Foundress worked and to be able to pray where her mortal remains lie

9) following in the footsteps of Councilor Pablo Suarez, the groups of Gamasara and Kadem ask to be able to make the “perpetual promise” too

10) to be able to “twin” parishes (where there are groups of our African lay people) with parishes of other Vernian groups, Italian or of other nationalities (request of Gamasara - Tanzania)

11) To be involved, at group level, in online connections with our Council (requests of Namanga and Gamasara in Tanzania and Kadem in Kenya)

12) request for a minibus for the long journeys of the group (Rakwaro - Kenya) and for financing to start a business in the beekeeping sector (request of Vejula and Miyuji - Tanzania).

AT THIS POINT A PAINFUL PREMISE IS NECESSARY, OUR DEAR AFRICAN FRIENDS

MAKE US FEEL THE **SENSATION OF FRUSTRATION** THEY FEEL WHEN THEY ARE UNABLE TO HELP THEIR PEOPLE!

THE ASSOCIATION ONLY HAS SMALL CASH FUNDS, FUNDED ONLY BY ASSOCIATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS (10 €/YEAR FOR EACH VERNIAN).

OUR TREASURER REMINDS US THAT NOT ALL LAY PEOPLE AND, ABOVE ALL, NOT ALL VERNIAN REGIONS PAY THIS CONTRIBUTION. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2024 THE ITALIAN VERNIAN REGIONS AND THE USA WILL PAY THE CONTRIBUTION.

THEREFORE EVEN FOR THIS FOUR-YEAR PERIOD (as for the past one) IT IS EASY TO PREDICT THAT WE WILL NOT HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO ORGANIZE OUR ASSEMBLY (and therefore also to finance the travel and stay of foreign members from countries in difficulty).

What to do? asks Anna Bratti. What measures to take? How to finance the Charity Projects? How to help the Vernian Regions in difficulty (starting with Lebanon which is in terrible conditions or Argentina which is experiencing frightening inflation)? Anna suggests that the Lay People with a promise at Christmas, and in the next ones, allocate a sum to the Association, diverting it from certain "useless and redundant expenses" that are usually incurred in this period.

Another alternative: those who can afford it, pay a sum higher than €10.

The Council, taking note of the “scarce forces of the retreat” and relying on Divine Providence, examines and discusses each of these requests.

For point 1) (dispensary in Namanga) the Council has no competence in this regard. Only the Congregation can make decisions of this nature. Anna Maria will at least try to bring this proposal to the appropriate venue.

For point 2) (greater help for the Kawe Orthopedic Center) the Association can try to open, as in the past, a “Charity Project” in this sense. However, as will be seen in one of the next topics of this issue, this decision must also be shared by the General Curia.

For point 3) (packages with special products and non-perishable goods for the Rakwaro Group - Kenya). In Rakwaro there is a tradition: during Lent the Group usually visits the sick and needy families, leaving a “gift package” of basic necessities as a gift. The Councilors would like to help in this circumstance but remember that in the past, and several times, they have even sent containers containing food and clothing not only for Rakwaro but for many other communities (the Emilian Group of Crevalcore has stood out in particular). Anna Bratti confirms that many difficulties have always been encountered due to customs clearance problems and very expensive duties. It is agreed that it would be easier and safer to send money (always through the Onlus, opening a specific one-off annual project) to the local African Superior who could help the group, assessing the needs of the population and buying what is necessary on site.

For point 4) (books and writings on Mother Antonia for the Kawe Group). Sister Raffaella informs us that there is already material in Rome in Swahili and English. Anna Maria is waiting for the response of the Superior of Kawe to see if it is necessary to provide for this need immediately or if she already has the requested texts.

For point 5) (Request for materials to be able to make sacred art objects). In Namanga there is this particular skill and the Group finances itself by selling these artifacts. The lay people would like to avoid the costs of raw materials by having the processing material shipped. Also in this case what was said in point 3 applies.

Point 6) concerns Training and information. Five Groups have felt the primary need for it and have declared it in their reports but other Groups have also spoken about it verbally. The Councilors ask the President, who will also follow the training aspect of the Association for this four-year period, to be connected in real time with the local leaders or with the respective reference nuns. Not only will the Spiritual Guidelines be sent, at least in English, but also other important documents and “Being and Working”, which summarizes what was said in the General Councils. Mario reiterates that in the past, significant efforts have been made to spread these documents, but in Africa there has not been much success, both because the right channels and the connections themselves were missing due to electricity rationing.

In point 7) the Kadem Group asks to “increase adoptions at a distance”. This request is motivated by the fact that there are still, in their area, despite the efforts made, children in extreme need of adoption. Unfortunately, this is not a problem that concerns the Association. The only thing that the local Group can do is to report, through the Superior, to the person in charge of adoptions in Rome, the names and

information on the most desperate cases. Certainly these children will be on the priority list in the hope... that families predisposed to adoption will soon present themselves.

In point 8) both Regions ask that their representatives in the Assembly can go on a pilgrimage to the places of Mother Antonia. The Council greatly appreciates the idea and shares it. As stated in the introduction to this chapter (hoping to have the funds to pay for the trip to Italy) it will try to help in part, facilitating their stay in Rivarolo and Pasquaro, but the train ticket, to get there and back to Rome, will be, as always, paid for by the representatives themselves.

For point 9 regarding the perpetual promise, what Anna Maria has already anticipated is valid. The Promise is the culminating moment of our lay vocation. It is made in a group but every heart of every single Vernian is committed not for a year but, presumably, for life. It is a direct and personal relationship with God, the Immaculate and Mother Antonia. Nothing prevents each one, after a deep discernment, from making this promise, but only within themselves, in a strictly personal conversation with Mother Antonia, in the presence of our Lord! Without any recognition by the Association, as it is not contemplated by the association statute.

In point 10) the possibility of "twinning" between two parishes attended by Vernian lay people in two different nations is requested. The Council debated this point at length but in the end it unanimously concluded that the initiative, although spiritually stimulating, is difficult to implement due to many aspects of language, distance, connection and character and cultural diversity in the various nations. The Association will not promote the implementation of this project but will certainly not prevent each group from working in this direction.

In point 11) more groups ask to be more involved with the Council also through online meetings. This is certainly a way to feel "more part of the Association" and is a laudable request. The Councilors will try an experiment, using Zoom, with a first Group and then continue with other Groups that have easy internet connection.

In point 12) the Rakwaro Group asks to be facilitated in the long journeys that it must undertake to participate in the activity of the Region and meet the other Kenyan Groups. This topic is extremely embarrassing (and has already been proposed for the fourth time - three times with the past President!) for the high costs it entails. Both for this initiative and for the financing of beekeeping (this one done by the Vejula and Miyuji Groups) unfortunately what has already been expressed in the introduction applies.

Brief information on the trip to Campania and Calabria to visit the local Groups.

In June, Anna Maria and Mario visited the Groups of Naples (Campania), San Giovanni in Fiore, Isola di Capo Rizzuto and the nascent Group of Fuscaldo (Calabria). **Everywhere they received a splendid fraternal welcome.**

Mario provides a brief summary of these meetings.

In Naples, also in the presence of Sister Elena Tosi, the Group Leader Pina Mollo, who is also Regional President, her husband Antonio and some lay people from the very early days did the honors.

Pina regrets a certain "fraying" of the Group due to the pandemic and the difficulties in finding a place to meet. The formation has suffered and they have limited themselves to commenting on the Word of Sunday.

Having resolved, thanks to the Provincial Superior, at least for the moment, the problem of the place, Pina guarantees that the group will reunite with enthusiasm and that the formation will take place following the spiritual lines planned by the Congregation, availing themselves of the help of Sister Elena, the nun of reference pro tempore for the Campania Region.

We would also have liked to meet the **Bacoli** Group but the Group Leader and a Vernian were busy on a pilgrimage. We are told that the Vernians of the Group will have a meeting in September or October with the parish priest and Sister Elena to resolve problems/misunderstandings with the Group Leader herself.

Big party in **San Giovanni in Fiore** for the presentation of our new President.

In the hall, in addition to the reference nun (Sister Rosaria) and her fellow nuns, there are the young and friendly parish priest and about fifteen Vernians and supporters. Six of them have already promised in 2023 and others should promise at the end of the year. The Group, which equally suffered during the pandemic, is reuniting and shows a certain degree of enthusiasm. We leave with a serene spirit this community that asks us to return soon and stay close to them.

Excellent welcome for Anna Maria also from the lay people of **Isola di Capo Rizzuto**. There are about 25 people present, the Group Leader, Massimiliano Genco, the reference nun (the superior Sister Maria Concezione) and her fellow nuns.

In her speech Anna Maria says she is honored by the friendly and warm welcome but sorry that Vernian Calabria, represented by very valid and young people, has not voted for its Regional Council for more than three years as required by the Statute. In this way it has not made its voice heard in the recent General Assembly. Massimiliano says he is sorry and sure that it will soon be possible to have an elective Regional Assembly.

However, he asks Anna Maria to resolve a doubt for him: "*A Vernian Group, in order to be such, according to the statute, must be numerically at least 10 people. Can other Groups composed of a number of people less than 10 vote in the Regional Assembly?*". Anna Maria replies that, since the beginning of the Association, some Groups, due to many different vicissitudes, have decreased in their staff. In these cases, they have relied, when possible, on the closest community, becoming a full member and therefore with the right to vote. This has happened, over time, in Piedmont, Lombardy, Argentina and even in Campania (Acerra, a community in which Anna Maria is Group Leader, has absorbed the lay people of Santa Maria Capua Vetere). **In the regional assemblies they have always been able to vote.**

For maximum security, he promises to ask for confirmation at the first General Council that will be held.

The Councilors, after having also heard the opinion of "our" dear lawyer and Councilor Vincenzo Fornace, unanimously reiterate that even members of a smaller group have the right to vote at the Regional Assembly, provided that they have promised in the previous year, as also explained in point 3 of the "Regulations for the holding of Regional Assemblies", approved by the General Council on May 25, 2019 and presented to the General Assembly of October 2019 for appropriate ratification.

During the splendid evening, we also talked about training, the availability to serve, a weapon of the Vernian lay person against a society that is ignoring many human values, and the important role of the Sister of Reference.

The presentation of Anna Maria also aroused great celebration and enthusiasm in the future **Fuscaldo** Group. For several years, about twenty people, some of whom are young, have been preparing to recite their promise. In reality, they are already a close-knit, operational Group, rich in spirituality (just look at their faces) and close to their beloved Sisters. The arrival of Sister Assunta Veneri, as Superior and Sister of Reference, not very young but with a very young heart and enthusiasm, was the catalyst for a further leap in quality.

With this last visit, a small tour (of a few hundred kilometers) ends that has enriched us with new spiritual and human experiences and, above all, given us new hopes and a desire to continue in the mission.

How did the campaign for the 2024 Association Contribution go?

This point is anticipated because our Treasurer must disconnect for... Vernian reasons. In fact, she is organizing for the evening the celebration and farewell to Sister Nardina Giannandrea who is leaving the Community of Crevalcore after 16 years.

The association fund, almost a year after the Assembly, contains a thousand euros.

Only four Groups (two from Campania, one from Emilia and one from Calabria) and the US Region have paid the contribution for 2024. So for now all the reminders have been useless: a failed campaign. Anna returns to propose what was said above: at Christmas, or even before, do we want to help our Association a little? **Do we believe in it?**

Where are we with the definition of the Charity Projects?

As is known, we welcome suggestions for Charity projects from our Sisters, who have contacts in the social sector, and therefore with the most diverse types of realities. **An Association that is inspired by Mother Antonia cannot fail to have them.** Given the limited resources, as previously stated, we expect suggestions for only two/three important projects. Our Sisters are examining the emergencies that arise. The Council is starting to appoint, also for this four-year period, the Vice President Mario Trombetta, responsible for these projects. He will have to receive them from our Sisters, launch them and monitor their progress, reporting to the Council itself.

Mario, thanking them for their trust, appeals to the good will of all the Regional Presidents to urge their Vernian Groups to make a serious commitment in this sense. It is not said that they should only tax themselves but "work hard" to find alternative solutions (sale of cakes, "pizza parties", sale of handicrafts, organization of ad hoc evenings, tombola, lotteries, involving friends and acquaintances ...). All this also serves to strengthen the group spirit.

In this regard, all the Councilors regret the loss of Gigliola, Regional of Piedmont, who also in this field has always been very committed and distinguished.

What will the new spiritual lines be?

For some years now, the spiritual lines of the Association, and also those of the Missionaries of Charity, have coincided with the spiritual "Programming" of the Congregation, albeit adapted to their respective states, to increasingly consolidate the spirit of the Vernian Family.

Mother Elena and Sister Raffaella inform us that the report of the General Chapter will be released in a few days, which will also include the aforementioned programming.

Since our Groups and Regions begin to compile calendars and schedule training meetings in October, they provide us with a preview: **the lines will be based on the next Jubilee and will therefore forcefully contemplate the "theme of Hope" and the strengthening, through this, of our charismatic identity.**

The Councilors thank and ask Anna Maria, who in the last four years had been interested in Formation throughout our Vernian world, to continue also for this four-year period, to find the new training lines and send them to all the Regions.

The President thanks and accepts. Fresh from her recent trip, she will make sure that all 11 African Groups visited also receive and follow them. In this case, contacts with the Sisters of Reference will be very useful!

Pablo Suarez suggests that, in such a turbulent context in which we live, the theme of "**peace in the world**" should also be taken into consideration. The Council approves. In fact, spiritual lines can always be multiple.

What news on the new association website?

Sister Raffaella communicates that the Congregation's website is almost ready. There is also a box set up, but separate, for the Vernian Lay Association. The old lay website cannot be inserted as is in the box because it uses, as already said at the time, an obsolete electronic language. It must therefore be redone, taking advantage of the opportunity to discard files that are no longer updated or deemed unnecessary and inserting a new setting.

This costs 600/700 Euros but subsequent annual updates, thanks to the Congregation's subscription, will cost 20 Euros per year. **The Council believes that an association website is absolutely necessary** and that the expense is worth making.

It also discusses the type of basic "structure" that would be necessary: *Who we are, how we are organized, what is our charism and what are our objectives, where we are present in the world and with which Groups, what are our fundamental documents (Vatican Approval, Statute, Regulations, our Rule, the formative pamphlet, the assembly resolutions, "To be and to work", the annual spiritual guidelines, the annual charity projects, for example ...).*

Mario also asks that each Region have a space to introduce themselves and send their contributions.

The Council suggests that there be "a filter" for updates so that nothing inappropriate is published that could damage the image of the Association and therefore also of the Congregation.

Anna Maria and Mario volunteer until a trained and trustworthy person is found who can manage the site operationally.

Our Sisters of Reference at the starting line

Around 5 pm, Sister Elena Tosi, coordinator of the Sisters of Reference of the Italian Province “Immacolata dei Miracoli”, enters the Council. In issue 13 of “Essere ed funziona” a very complete table of the Sisters who have made themselves available to accompany the Italian Vernian Groups or the Regions themselves had already been presented. Sister Elena reviews them and adds, for the Acerra Group, Sister Armida.

Various articles of our Statute hope for this relationship. Article 23 quotes verbatim: “*For its growth and development, the Association sees the presence of the Sisters as extremely useful...*”. Abroad, each Region has its own Sister of Reference, if not, as in Africa, a Sister for each Group.

To create this capillary structure, Sister Elena really had to travel all over Italy and, in doing so, she also got to know practically all of our Groups, trying to understand their characteristics, motivations and objectives.

She tells us about the positive experiences she had, for example, knowing the Bari Group or the one in Fuscaldo or Isola di Capo Rizzuto or the one in Crevalcore and many others.

Not only that: together with Anna Maria, these Italian Sisters have started to meet online, trying to gain a deeper understanding of the realities in which they find themselves operating (some of them will also help with the training process or, at the very least, will intervene to recall various aspects of Mother Antonia – one never knows her enough – and of the Charism).

Sister Elena ends by thanking the Lord for this new beautiful experience.

We are at the beginning of the Vernian year (October 2024 – October 2025): the Councilors unanimously wish good work to these daughters of Mother Antonia and thank the Provincial Superior and her Council for this great help.

Reflections by Vincenzo Fornace on the very important document of the Dicastery of Faith “Dignitas Infinita”.

The Declaration “Dignitas Infinita” on human dignity, published on 02.04.24 by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, is a very important document as it deals with a theme not only considered absolutely “central” and “essential” for the life of the Church and Society, but also having a particularly significant value for the Vernian Family.

The text of “Dignitas Infinita” is the result of an elaborate maturation that began at the Congress of March 15, 2019, which confirms the relevance and delicacy of the serious violations of human dignity in our time, to address which authoritative and well-founded “elements of reflection are necessary ... so that in the midst of so many worries and anxieties we do not lose our way and do not expose ourselves to more lacerating and profound suffering”. In the awareness that the frequent confusions that occur in the use of the term dignity derive from an erroneous anthropology that in turn is the result of misleading equivocations and malicious manipulations, the first three parts of the document recall the indefectible founding principles and theoretical assumptions of the truth about the human person that urgently needs to be rediscovered and deepened and whose obscuration and subversion is, it is repeated, at the origin of the emergence and worsening of the aforementioned distortions, deformations and counterfeits now

with increasingly aberrant outcomes. The fourth part presents, with no exhaustive intent, some *"serious violations of human dignity"* (the tragedy of poverty, war, the suffering of migrants, sexual abuse, violence against women, abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide, the discarding of disabled people, gender theory, sex change, digital violence) in which the immense and inalienable dignity that belongs to every human being *"is not only not adequately recognized"* but is often even subtly offended and sometimes contemptuously trampled upon.

The framework within which to place the teaching contained in Dignitas Infinita can be that of Isaiah 5:20: ***"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness"***.

The Council thanks Vincenzo for such an effective and heartfelt summary.

It is also decided that the next Council will be online **in December**, after the promise, and the following one will be on **April 5** in person in Rome and perhaps we will have the joy of having Pablo with us too.

The Mother leads us in the final prayer dedicated once again to Gigliola, to the Lebanese mission of Ghebaleh and to the nuns and lay people of that community, to Pablo's next trip to Mexico (end of November) ... and to the celebration of the anniversary of the beatification of Mother Antonia which will be celebrated next October 2nd.

For the President

and the Council

Mario V. Trombetta