



Associazione Laici Verniani



BEING AND WORKING

... in the footsteps of Mother Antonia!

Number 15

Dear Vernian Family,

Here, as always, is the summary of the most relevant events of the General Council of the Vernian Lay Association held on **December 14, 2024**, online, on Zoom.

Connected are: the Vicar General of the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Ivrea, Sister Raffaella Giudici, the General President of the Association, Anna Maria de Rosa, the Councilors Pablo Suarez (Argentina), Vincenzo Fornace and Mario Trombetta. Also present, at the invitation of the President, the General Treasurer Anna Bratti.

Absent, because they are ill: the Councilor Najat Tayeh (Lebanon) and the General Secretary Pilar Cuevas (Argentina).

Immediately a wish for a speedy recovery to Najat and Pilar while Anna Maria manages to attend despite not being in good shape and also having a considerable fever.

Vincenzo chooses as the opening prayer of the meeting that of the “Consecration to Mary”, proposed by Fr. Gregoire and recited in the Church of Pasquaro at the end of the Holy Mass during the novena of the Immaculate, our special protector. It is recited chorally with the thought turned to the birthplace of our Blessed Foundress.

Main contents of the meeting

- How were the new spiritual lines 2024 – 2025 received?
- What is the new charity project of the Association?
- The new website of the Lay Vernians is being formed: how to do it operationally?
- Pablo Suarez went to Mexico: how are our two Groups there and how are they operating?
- The new Regional Council of Piedmont
- Are our Sisters of Reference “working”?
- How did the renewal of the “promise” of the associates go in our world?
- What will our Council do to update itself on the developments of the Jubilee Year?

- Notes on the most salient parts of the very recent Encyclical “*Dilexit nos*” by Vincenzo Fornace
- The “health” of the association fund after the first year of life from the General Assembly



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How were the new spiritual guidelines 2024 – 2025 received?

This year’s spiritual guidelines, common to all three components of the Family, but adapted to the individual states (Congregation, Missionaries and Lay People) are a great work of the Mother and her Vicar. In other years, only one summary page was sent (referring to the Lay People): this year, in addition to a **basic outline**, there is the booklet “**Pilgrims of Hope...in the footsteps of Mother Antonia.**” Some Vernians, seeing the mass of pages, were frightened or, perhaps, felt inadequate and incapable of delving into this theme. No fear!

Indeed, the steps are very simple. Everything comes from the Jubilee year and from the Bull of Indiction of the same from which we understand that **the theological virtue of Hope will be the fundamental reason for this Holy Year**. Man, in this particular historical context, must truly know how to rediscover Hope!

The second step that we are asked to take is to read this virtue "with the eyes and heart of Mother Antonia". We, Vernians, are helped by having the clear example of "**how**" Antonia Maria lived Hope! That is, with "patience", "knowing how to read the sign of the times" (today, as then, the hope of world peace), with "forgiveness" and "prayer".

Finally, the first five pages, to make it easier for us, cite the Catechism of the Catholic Church and help us remember what the virtues are (human, Cardinal, Theological). The Councilors debated for a long time on whether these lines could be understood, or not, even by our simplest communities but, in the end, they all agreed on two points:

1) That it has always been said that spiritual lines must be adapted to the social and cultural context (intended as history, traditions and way of life) of the Vernian Region in which we operate;

2) That Hope can be found and embodied in many different ways that are already part of our life and the life of every human being. In support of the second thesis, some ideas from those present are reported:

o “Hope can be understood even just by living simple gestures of charity (visiting the sick, prisoners, the least fortunate...) and many of our Groups already do this...”

o “... the Holy Father in his Bull of Jubilee Indiction observes that the Works of Mercy are already a sign of Hope...”

o “...Whoever has true Faith is a bearer of Hope”.

o “...Faith and Hope are closely connected to divine Love.

All this gives those present “hope” that these spiritual lines can be understood, assimilated and shared by all.



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What is the new charity project of the Association?

The theme of charity projects, essential to an Association that follows the charism of our Blessed, had remained pending awaiting an indication from the Congregation. Sister Raffaella tells us that “help for Lebanon” is the objective to be pursued with the highest priority. The money from the donations will flow to the Verna Fraternitas Onlus and will be urgently sent to the Superior of Ghebaleh (Sister Grazia) or to the bursar (Sister Donatella). It will be used to help the “Immaculée Conception” school of our nuns, their two listening centers (PAD) and the population that has been hit hard by the war.

Advent is an excellent time for this commitment. We will proceed until Lent and in that second moment, very important in the liturgical year, a further project will be defined based on new needs that may emerge. Mario Trombetta, head of the association charity projects, declares himself very much in favor of this initiative and informs that a spontaneous collection of funds is already underway in northern Italy to resolve the first immediate emergencies of this martyred country. Pablo Suarez, head of the Latin American projects (Argentina and Mexico) strongly approves: “Lebanon, Lebanon and Lebanon: this is our top priority”.

The new website of the Lay Vernians is being formed: how to do it operationally?

In the previous Councils it was decided to have our own space, managed by us, in the future website of the Congregation, to accept the estimate to change the obsolete electronic language of our old website and to insert basic documents considered fundamental for the Association (Statute, approval document of the Holy See, Regulations, minutes of General Assemblies and related resolutions, documents relating to training etc). Now we must move on to the operational part.

The Councilors propose that Mario, historical memory of the Association, who has already archived all the documents from 2003 to 2024 in an external fixed memory, lying in our Roman office at the General Curia, **go to Rome to meet a technician from VICIS S.r.l** (company that follows the new website of the Congregation) and work with him in the phase of setting up the data and the documents. As for the next update phase, the Council asks **Anna Maria to read and “filter”, at least for an initial period, the material that will arrive from the various Vernian Regions.**

It is in fact important that our “business card” in the media world is decorous and strictly pertinent to the life of the association and the criteria that inspire it. A team of people will then be identified who will follow these aspects. Anna Maria and Mario accept.

Pablo Suarez went to Mexico: how are our two Groups there and how do they operate?

Pablo’s trip to Mexico took place from 1 to 11 December with the aim of visiting the two Vernian Groups of Nuevo Laredo and Sabinas Hidalgo and bringing them the voice of our Family. From 1 to 5 December he stayed, with his wife Mirta, at the community of **Nuevo Laredo**, the first to be established on Mexican soil.



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Our Vernian Family down there, right on the border between Mexico and the United States, is made up of three Sisters and nine Vernian Lay People “with promise”. The religious community lives in a very poor neighborhood (Colonia Nueva Era) and very dangerous because of the presence of Mexican “drug lords”. They have as their easy prey a population of emigrants who have accumulated, over the years, at the border without managing to emigrate towards the mirage of the “American dream”. These people are therefore morally tested and perpetually dissatisfied. Just think that the drug dealers trade a few hundred meters away from the house of our courageous daughters of Antonia Maria! “Trying to report them and stop the bosses of the area could mean signing our death sentence”, claims the parish priest who lives near the Sisters.

The houses in Nueva Era are, in many cases, made of wood, cardboard and sheet metal. Almost an improvised village for people passing through... who instead stay there for a lifetime. Pablo assures that in terms of safety and poverty the neighborhood is much worse than Villa 21 in Buenos Aires, which is saying something! On the other hand, our community is very united and welcoming. Pablo and Mirta have always had lunch and dinner in different homes of our Vernians, even though they have our Sisters' house as their base. If I remember correctly, all the windows have iron bars and it is one of the few brick homes.

The local priest of the parish of San Giovanni Bosco also gave them a good welcome. The lay people meet on the first Saturday of every month for training or prayer. Pablo, in this regard, brought them the new spiritual lines and tried, in broad terms, to explain them. Simplicity and humility, however, do not prevent the Vernians of Nuevo Laredo from doing many great deeds; every day lay people and Sisters visit the sick, recite the Rosary with them and bring the comfort of the Gospel, the sacraments and a friendly word. Pablo also met the parish priest and the Vicar General to whom he provided extensive information on our Association and our Foundress.

The good news is that next year the Nuevo Laredo Group will try to appoint a local leader.

On December 5th, Pablo and Mirta moved to **Sabinas Hidalgo**, the second Community, 170 kilometers away, traveling difficult roads. There are three other Sisters, six Lay people “with promise” and two supporters. The place is definitely less dangerous than Nuevo Laredo but it is located in an equally poor, depressed and truly out of this world area. The inhabitants are even more humble and simple. Here too Pablo and Mirta were invited to lunch and dinner by the lay people and the Sisters. Three training meetings were held with the Vernian Lay people in preparation for the promise.

On the evening of December 7th, Pablo had dinner, together with the Sisters, at the parish priest's house: a very capable man who asked many questions about the Association and, above all, about Mother Antonia.

On December 8, after a moment of preparation and prayer, Pablo made the promise together with the Vernian brothers of Sabinas. On that occasion the parish priest gave a sermon, almost an hour long,

speaking enthusiastically about our Foundress! The visit to the Mexican communities ended with the splendid celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe who is highly venerated in Mexico.



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Pablo's summary is a picture based on two points. The first: a truly moving and fraternal welcome (as also witnessed by the sad farewells at the departure). The second is that the Group is made up of very simple people but with the great gift of knowing how to help their brothers with commitment, by listening and with the heart. In this mission both Groups draw nourishment and support from their Sisters.

The Councilors thank Pablo for his visit and his considerations and, after intense discussion, unanimously decide that the Mexico Region, not having yet appointed its representatives according to the Statute, be followed directly by the General Council. In this case Pablo Suarez will be the contact person and the person in charge, therefore he will also be interested in the training, adapting it to the needs of the Region itself, and will report directly to the Council. Pablo thanks and accepts this task.

The new Regional Council of Piedmont

Vincenzo remembers the great sadness that characterized the initial part of the meeting on Sunday, November 17. Not only was our Gigliola missing, who recently passed away and who was the Regional Manager for many years, but also Marcellina, Giuseppe and others who left our Family down here and joined Mother Antonia up there. However, the discouragement is not, and should not be, typical of the Vernian Lay People if we look to our Foundress, teacher of hope and patience. "We must move forward", continues Vincenzo, knowing how to "turn the page". Even the presence of a reference Sister, such as Sister Roberta, with her preparation, kindness and warm hospitality, and of Don Mario, an always enthusiastic religious, encourage us to continue on this path. This was done by appointing the new Piedmont Regional Council in the persons of Vincenzo Fornace, President, and the two Councilors Giancarla Cossavella and Annamaria Bertot.

The General Councilors thank Vincenzo, Giancarla and Annamaria for their availability and wish them good work.

Do our Sisters of Reference "work"?

Our President Anna Maria, who works closely with them, is enthusiastic about this small structure (there are eleven in Italy and four abroad – waiting for the two from Kenya and Tanzania to be appointed). "These Sisters – she continues – are of great use to the Association as they can really provide a pulse on the situation in their areas of expertise". Each of them has also given their availability to illustrate aspects of the life and virtues of Mother Antonia in the training days planned by their Groups. The collaboration between Anna Maria and the Italian Sisters of Reference will be realized above all with online connections that will take place three, four times a year. Perhaps, in the future, there will also be connections with the Sisters of the foreign Groups.

Regarding the foreign Regions (Argentina, Mexico, Lebanon, United States, Kenya and Tanzania), not only are there six regional reference Sisters but - Anna Maria reminds us - during her summer trip to the two African countries, she found that all eleven Vernian Groups of the missions are assisted by a specific

local nun. She took care to recover all the Whatsapp numbers of all these Sisters to be able to easily communicate with them in real time. A real success in this aspect alone, given the great difficulty in



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connections in the past! Having Sisters close to our groups is an ancient dream come true! And Art.23 of the Statute also states: "*For its growth and development, the Association sees the presence of the Sisters as extremely useful.*"

The Councilors thank the Mother General, the Vicar and the Italian Provincial Superior for enriching our Groups and Regions with such dear, caring and charismatic presences.

How did the renewal of the “promise” of the associates go in our world?

The renewal of the “promise” is the fundamental moment of the year for all those lay people who feel deeply “sons and daughters of Mother Antonia Maria Verna”. It is difficult to express the feelings and emotions that each one feels when, in front of a parish community, one stands up and recites that short formula in which, renewing the baptismal promise, one also expresses the desire to help the Congregation, “according to the lay condition”, to live its spirituality, which originates from Mother Antonia, and to honor the association Statute. It is a demanding promise and certainly should not be taken lightly!

The litmus test of a day like this is represented by the testimonies and sharing on our WhatsApp group. In the “Vernian Family in world”, which collects the voices of the Vernian leaders of our Family, so scattered around the world, many photos and joyful messages have arrived this year too. These contributions have arrived not only **from Italy** (Naples and Acerra in Campania, Crevalcore in Emilia, Fuscaldò, San Giovanni in Fiore and Isola di Capo Rizzuto in Calabria, Carbonate in Lombardy, Cascine Vica in Piedmont, Bari in Puglia and so on) but also **from abroad** (Sabinas Hidalgo in Mexico, Santa Fè and the Argentine Groups, Ghebaleh in Lebanon, Mount Pleasant in the United States, Nairobi, Kadem and Eldoret in Kenya and Gamasara in Tanzania).

Vincenzo instead tells us that the majority of the Piedmont Region will recite their “promise” together tomorrow, December 15. The Missionaries of Charity, registered like some Sisters in our group, also send us their greetings. Pablo remembers with emotion his promise in Mexico, where the parish priest of Sabinas gave a strong Vernian imprint to the Mass, as reported in his story. Mario still has in his heart the splendid day of Carbonate (province of Como) in which, before the promises of the Missionaries and the Vernian Laymen, Sister Alice and then the Sisters of the Community renewed their vows. Those who attended the Sunday Mass, it was clear, were very involved and involved in this simple ceremony. The parish priest, for the occasion, finally offered lunch to the parishioners, inviting all of us. In short, every year, for years, the feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated in the best possible way, but one has the impression that every year there is “something more” in this day dedicated to our Patron Saint!

What will our Council do to update itself on the developments of the Jubilee year?

A Jubilee does not happen often and is a special event and of great interest to everyone indiscriminately. It is unthinkable not to reflect, in a Council like ours, the main themes and suggestions that the magisterium of the Church addresses to us in a “time of grace” like the one we will experience

next year. We asked ourselves who among us had the right skills and preparation to be able to inform us adequately and we all thought, I believe in unison, of our Vincenzo Fornace!



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If the Council had been held “in presence” all eyes would have “pierced” the eyes of our Vincenzo! Therefore in the next four General Councils there will be a space for him on the news and Jubilee conclusions of the period immediately preceding our meetings.

Notes on the most salient parts of the very recent Encyclical “*Dilexit nos*” by Vincenzo Fornace

The Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* of the Holy Father Francis on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus Christ is a very important document of the Papal Magisterium that for its richness and depth not only deserves to be carefully read and adequately meditated for the spiritual benefit that we can draw from it, but also should be widely disseminated as a particularly useful tool in the work of Evangelization to which, in order to be a “*sign of hope*”, every Christian is called to give his or her own contribution. The reason for such centrality and extreme relevance of the theme of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is happily outlined in the first eight pages in which it is underlined how necessary it is to “*recover the importance of the heart*”, how indispensable it is to “*return to the heart*”, how “we need all actions to be placed under the political dominion of the heart”, because, as always and today more than ever, only by uniting our heart to that of Christ, every man can find himself and thus become capable of relating in a brotherly way with others “*to build in this world the Kingdom of love and justice*”.

“Let us go to the heart of Christ, the center of His being, which is a burning furnace of divine and human love and is the maximum fullness that the human being can reach. And there in this heart, which we finally recognize ourselves and learn to love ... This sacred Heart is the unifying principle of reality, because Christ is the heart of the world, His Easter of death and resurrection is the center of history, which thanks to Him, is a history of salvation”.

This brief presentation does not allow us to proceed further other than the illustration of the content of the document which, I repeat, is a very precious gift as everyone can verify through their thoughtful reading.

Finally, in my humble opinion, the Vernian Family is called to reserve a special and additional consideration to the *Dilexit Nos* because on December 8, 1916, on the centenary of the foundation of the Congregation, “*as the most suitable connection to worthily commemorate the memorable date, it was deemed necessary to consecrate the entire Institute to the Sacred Heart*” (Fr. Adamo Pierrotti O.F.M., page 357), and in a circular of 1917, Mother Bonomelli expressed herself as follows: “*However, let us gather together, let us reinvigorate ourselves in the spirit of our dear Foundress and we will be strong with that grace that comes from the center which is the Heart of Jesus*” (cfr. Fr. Adamo Pierrotti O.F.M., page 366).

The “health” of the association fund after the first year of life from the General Assembly.

Our Treasurer announces that, one year after the last Assembly, the fund amounts to approximately €1,600. We have certainly not collected a large amount if we consider that we had started the financial year with a positive balance of €270 and that two Vernians made a special donation. This means that **unfortunately not all the Groups have paid the well-known €10 per person per year** (a figure that has remained unchanged since the beginning). We are talking about 83 cents per month! Furthermore, we



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will soon have to sustain an expense of a few hundred euros to redo our now obsolete website, as reported above.

Anna therefore asks the Council if she can launch a small promotional campaign to ask, perhaps on the WhatsApp group “Vernian Family”, on the occasion of these holidays, for a special contribution to Vernians of good will, perhaps encouraging them to make a **small sacrifice**. Otherwise, there would be a risk, from the first year of management, of not being able to have sufficient funds to organize the sixth General Assembly that will be held in exactly three years. **This would mean not being able to help support the trip of delegations from countries in difficulty.**

The IBAN of the association's current account is: IT27S 05080 36790 CC03506262289, Banca di Imola, Crevalcore branch, registered to the Associazione Laici Verniani. The Council thanks Anna Bratti for her commitment and certainly authorizes her to promote her initiative.

Before concluding her speech, Anna, leaving the administrative context, would like to share with the Council the splendid and touching commemorative ceremony, which took place on November 21, for the centenary of the presence of our **Sisters at the Sant'Orsola hospital in Bologna**, which she attended. She reads just one of the many moving testimonies on their invaluable work over the course of a century.

Vincenzo, before concluding the Council, also asks for a prayer for **His Excellency Monsignor Edoardo Cerrato** who has concluded his mandate as Bishop of Ivrea. For years he has lovingly followed and animated our Association both in the formative and spiritual moments and in the celebrations of our General Assemblies.

Anna Maria reminds us that the next General Council will be held “in presence” in Rome, at the Seat of Santa Rufina and Seconda, on April 5, 2025. On that occasion we will have the pleasure of having Pablo Suarez with us.

With this latest news, “Essere e funziona n.15” closes. This “newsletter”, which has now become famous (if I may use a joke) will be translated into the various languages spoken in the varied and diversified world of our Foundress and will reach, in addition to Italy, the coasts of Latin America, the United States, Africa and Lebanon in the Middle East. And whoever has had the courage and patience to read it to the last line will realize **that being and working in the footsteps of Mother Antonia can be difficult but always fills the heart with joy!**

With best wishes for happy holidays.

Mario V.Trombetta

For the General Council