

# Jubilee Postcard from Cuba

The charism is a living reality, a gift of God given to the universal Church: it can flourish anywhere in the world in the power of the Spirit.

# An anecdote about the beginnings– 1949-1950

- „In the beginning Sr. Nicoletta did not feel called to stay in Cuba. She was only waiting for her visas. However, there appeared three young girls who expressed interest for the charism of the Society. The Salesian fathers invited the sisters to Camagüey and to Santiago. The bishop of Santiago was looking for a community that could take over the tasks of completing the building of a pilgrim house in El Cobre, attending to the shrine, and doing social work in the village. He wrote a letter to Sr. Margaret, asking her to send sisters to El Cobre.

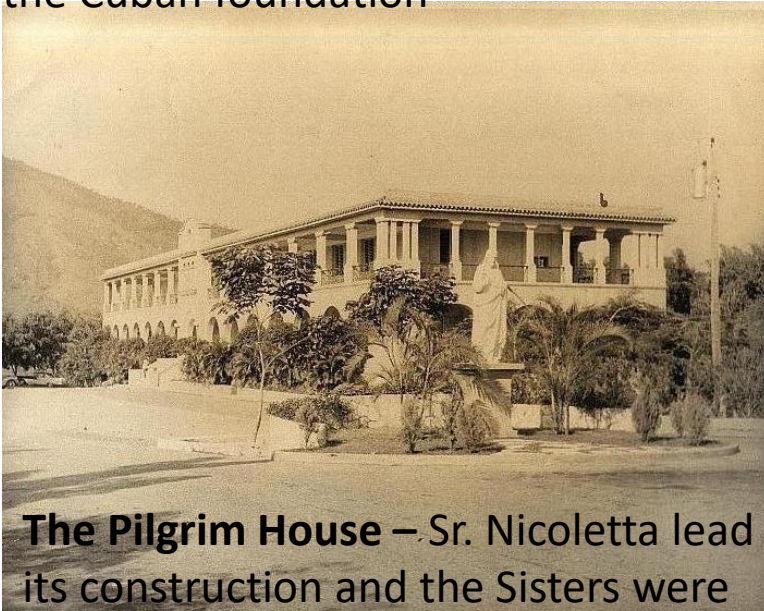


- Sr. Nicoletta and Serafina, one of the girls seeking to enter the Society went to Canada to meet Sr. Margaret there and to deliver the letter of the bishop. Sr. Margaret immediately delegated Sr. Nicoletta as superior and postulant Serafina to start the foundation in Cuba. Not having any other counter-argument, Sr. Nicoletta remarked that there used to be a lot of earthquakes in that region. Sr. Margaret asked her: „And tell me, my Sister, do people live around there?’ „Sure,’ replied Sr. Nicoletta. Sr. Margaret responded: „Then you will be able to live there as well.’” (*Paulina Casáns Garcia, The History of the Cuban District*)

# Where the Society Took Roots

## – *El Cobre*

October 11, 1951. – The official date of the Cuban foundation



**The Pilgrim House** – Sr. Nicoletta lead its construction and the Sisters were working in its administration for decades



**The Marian Shrine in El Cobre: Our Lady of Charity**

The first novitiate was in the upper level of the church.

# Facing a Tough Decision

*„We were in tremendous uncertainty. We did not know how to proceed. Then the nuncio told to us: ‚Do not be afraid. You are daughters of God.‘ This was enough for us. And we stayed.”*

*Sr. Maria Morales.*

- 1959 – the year when the revolution succeeded in Cuba. The foreign religious and missionaries had to leave the country, Sr. Nicoletta as well. But by then there was already a small group of Cuban sisters – all of them young, temporary professed.
- The big question for them to decide was whether to leave or to stay.
- They stayed. For decades to come the Sisters of Social Service were the only women religious in Cuba.



**Sr. Maria Morales** is the last sister from that initial group still among us.

She is a musician as well – with her brother she composed many of the songs from the national Catholic hymnal Together with **Sr. Paulina** they translated into Spanish all of Sr. Margaret’s writings available in English.

# Serving the Pilgrims

- Working with the pilgrims is a very complex ministry: the thousands of pilgrims come from a very diverse religious background, most of them with no knowledge about or practice of the Catholic faith tradition.
- Sr. Marta wrote a book about this ministry. Even today, after her retirement she continues to go out to the shrine three times a week; she shares her experience with the community of sisters who took over this ministry and supports them.



**Sr. Marta**  
instructing pilgrims.



**Sr. Marisol** conducts a similar ministry at a shrine outside Havana. In her very simple and firm way she is able to move crowds of people and lead in prayer.

# The missions

- Sr. Vilma was the one who started to organize missions, i.e. small communities in the villages - „*los campos*” – in the mountains surrounding Santiago.
- The words of Camilo de la Paz Salmón Beaton, the priest responsible for prison ministry in the diocese: „*Sr. Vilma is the example of total dedication to God and to the service of the people. She represents for me what religious life is all about. It is her merit that we have these missions and that we have prison ministry in the diocese, because it was she who started the missions and started to visit prisoners. Our present programs grew out of her initiatives. ...*”



**Sr. Vilma** – Due to her old age she can only leave the house if someone helps her. Nevertheless she continues to visit daily the shut-in elderly in her neighborhood.

*„My vocation is to be a non-conventual sister. I need to be among the people. I cannot leave the elderly remain alone, and my heart breaks when I have nothing to give to them ...”*

# Los Campos

- The missions are small communities in the villages around Santiago. They are attended to by a „virtual parish;” this parish has no church building, the communities gather in peoples houses. From a center a priest regularly visits the communities with catechists and volunteers to minister to the people (celebrating the sacraments, offering catechesis, visiting the sick, doing social work)
- Many of our sisters participated in this ministry throughout the years, but for Sr. Nora this is a lifelong passion.
- Leandro Naunhung, the present pastor of the virtual parish attends 51 communities in the region. *„In El Refugio I do not have anything else to do but to administer the sacraments. Sr. Nora is an excellent ‚pastor’, she organizes and takes care of everything.”*



**Sr. Nora** at the age of 81 goes out to the missions on her motorcycle three times a week



# Working with Youth



In each place where sisters are present they work with youth groups. Their goal is to maintain and to transmit values to the young generation.

The organize young associate groups, and they are also present in youth programs on national level.





# Serving the Poor and the Needy

- Soup kitchen in Havana – with the help of associates Sr. Yurelis prepares lunch for 65 poor people three times a week
- Sr. Dailenys leads women's groups and support groups for women rescued from prostitution
- And a new project in making: in cooperation with a medical center (where one of the novices was working) the sisters organize support group for pregnant teenagers offering them a comprehensive service ( besides medical care they would receive there psychological, spiritual, social, educational support).



**Sr. Yurelis** in the kitchen cooking for the poor

# And the Charism Lives On



Novices Claudia and Gertrudis with the novice director, Sr. Berglis

- New possibilities in Cuba: sisters can now also work in the public sphere
- Novices Claudia and Gertrudis are both medical doctors.
- Exploring new ways: how can they continue their medical career as sisters and how can they live the charism as doctors.

# „Little but Strong...” *Pope Francis*

