

## **FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY MINUTES**

**Lay Vernian association  
(22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> October 2015)**

The present transcription presents some “omissions” in order to make reading and translation easier. Assembly acts can be consulted at the Association’s location in Rome, after request.

### **October 22nd 2015**

At 5 p.m., as programmed, vernians summoned for the fourth General assembly meet at the hall of Spirituality house SCIC, Via Valcannuta 200, in Rome.

28 people are present, they come from various Vernian regions. From Italy: Piamonte (3), Lombardía (2), Campania (5), Puglia (4), Calabria (5)

From abroad : Argentina ( 5), Líbano(3) y Kenia (1) Mount Pleasant- Pittsburg)

Due to various problems, representatives from Tanzania, Mexico (New Laredo) and the United states (Mount Pleasant, Pittsburgh) are not present.

Hence, 8 out of 11 regions are represented.

During the first assembly hours Mario Trombetta, association General Secretary, acts as Secretary.

The Assembly begins with a prayer and the candle is lit in front of our foundress Antonia Maria Verna’s picture. Dominic Okoth, from Kenya, will be in charge of this sign every day. A brief greeting by Mother Palma continues, she reminds us of the theme of reference these days: “They were searching for Jesus”. This icon has been chosen by the General Council to remember how fundamental it is for us all to search for Jesus in times so difficult for the society in which we live.

“We are at a crucial time for family, church and society, continues Mother, and we must be able to give a sign of strong presence and testimony, bringing Jesus himself, living our Christianity with determination, carrying the Gospel to people who are looking for Jesus”.  
(Omitted)

Vincenzo Fornace gives his introductory greeting. He delineates the providential coincidence between the beginning of the encounter with the liturgical memory of St John Paul II, who has been consigned in history as the “Pope of the family” and the imminent conclusion of the Family Sinod. (Omitted)

All the present go to the Chapel for the exposition and adoration of The Blessed Sacrament and for a moment of preghiera and meditation, on the subject “We want to see Jesus” (Texts John 11-12, Benedict XVI, 12.9.2008). Adoration is guided by Pina Mollo. Some lay vernians will continue adoration after dinner.

### **October 23rd 2015**

The journey starts at 7.30 with the Holy Mass and eulogy, after which we go to the classroom in procession, singing “ Come Holy Spirit” and carrying the holy book, which will be enthroned in the Assembly room.

At 9.30 Don Piero de Santis begins his Lectio Divina on the subject “We want to see Jesus”, following the evangelic texts of John (11,55.57 and John 12, 20/26)

Only some fundamental concepts are transcribed, for the sake of brevity:

- The real lay vernian should “burn from desire to see the Lord. Sadly nowadays Jesus is not in our life in first place”.
- How can we find Jesus? Following him to the Cross, embracing the Cross in our life path.
- Once found Jesus, the lay vernian must know how to carry him to others, to the world`s peripheries, not geographical but existential, to the point of “emptying himself to give”, with real missionary spirit.
- Where can we find him? In Eucharist, the Word and in our brother`s faces.

After the priest`s intervention and some brief sharing, the President of Missionaries of Charity, Luciana Tommasini, greets all present and wishes for us a prolific Assembly.

At 11.30, Mother Palma declares the Assembly officially open, has the “Assembly rules” read out loud. After a short discussion it is unanimously approved by members of right and those elected, by raisin hands.

The President, Vincenzo Fornace, verifies the number and legitimacy of all present`s participation. 12 members by right, 10 elected members, 12 auditors and 3 translators are present, a total of 37 people.

The Assembly, made up of 12 members by right and 10 elected members, votes unanimously the admission of the auditors and the translators, as stated in Art. 2.2 from the Rules.

The Assembly designates Mrs Anna Bratti and Mr Domenico Pompeo as secretaries, with 21 favourable votes and one abstention. Both accept the task.

Two scrutinizers are then designated with 22 favourable votes, Mrs Gigliola Bardesono and Miss Maya Ziade. Both accept.

From this moment on Mrs Anna Bratti writes down the minutes, in her role of Secretary.

Mother Palma, after previous deliberation with the Council, suggests a variation of the programme, which planned group work. In order to better dialogue and sharing, in short times, she proposes a collegiate work in Assembly, all presents accept.

The answers to the subject in discussion will be written and with brief synthetic interventions, so that everybody can express themselves.

It will be the secretaries` job to sum up what arises and produce a final document.

Next we share the repercussions of the Lectio, in order to illuminate and understand “Who we are today after 12 years of Association, where we have remained loyal to our vocation and where we have to make a conversion”.

**President`s report**, it begins at 3 p.m.

The speech is long and organized, it will be posted on the internet site, it deserves an attentive reading. Only some of the most outstanding passages are informed:

- In 2011, a great moment coincident with Mother Antonia's beatification, the icon was "to throw out the nests", and move away from the coast.
- In 2015 the icon is "To search for Jesus". The relation implies continuity, since they are progressive stages of the same itinerary linked to the past but projected towards the future.
- Each vernian region has brought its own contribution to this Assembly after answering some questions about the past period and what they expect for the future. The sum of it has been synthesized in a "work instrument" that constitutes a serious base for discussion.
- Among the positive aspects of the four years they remember the pilgrimage to Rome, the first martyrs' places and a series of shows on the subject "beauty that will save the world" in Canavese, Lombardia, Copreno and Milan and other regions. The lay vernians' participation in the most varied parts of the world is remembered, the Pilgrimage of the relics of Beata Madre Antonia in 2014-2015. There have been 8 Council meetings, its documents have been at everybody's disposition, translated in various languages, every year spiritual lines have been outlined for formation, these have been followed by great part of local and regional groups.
- From a numeric point of view, lay vernians, excluding sympathizers, have moved from 503 to 676 from 2003 to 2007, from 676 to 696 from 2007 to 2011 but have diminished from 696 to 550 approximately in the last four years. This is alarming, six groups are no longer operative and there are only two new ones. Causes are plenty: lack of autonomy of local realities that go hand in hand with the closing of congregation communities, a certain coldness in associative life, the lowering of the tension that preceded beatification, the high age rate that is, in some regions, above 70.
- The report's last part has the programmatic indications on the basis of "They searched for Jesus". In conformity with the Pontifical Magistery, this part provides splendid points taken from The Holy father's interventions, which deserve attentive reading.(Omitted)

Next comes the **General Treasurer's** report, in which Anna Bratti informs on some points (omitted)

- This four year period's current account was opened with what remained from the preceding Assembly (2011), €308. We reach this Assembly with €1600. From these €6042 have been spent, practically only for this Assembly. When the Assembly closes we'll have an exact amount.
- Payment of Association fees should not be considered in the spirit one has when paying taxes. We must have the joy to contribute to this Assembly's realization, which is much more than a mere formality. There should be no need to ask once and again for its payment.

The Treasurer proposes that we should, in view of the spirit of the Association and the charisma transmitted to us by our foundress, destinate great part of what remains (more than €5000) to a work of charity linked to our sisters, leaving in the account only a fund for use in the next four years.

The Assembly approves the proposal unanimously. Mother Palma thanks us and proposes to give the money to the Kadem Mission Leprosary in Kenya, where they have received fewer contributions from MISSIO. The donation would be divided among the lepers' needs, disabled children who are operated by Italian doctors and Orcalao and the oratory, which has approximately 100 children and adolescents.

The Assembly approves unanimously the Kadem Project with applause, and asks the new Council to move on operatively. It is established that in the new currents account there will have to remain about 1000 euros to begin the four year new period.

After a brief interruption we continue sharing the "Work instrument", focusing on the "lay vernian identity" in this historical moment and how the charisma is incarnated. Each participant has some minutes to write and hand in to Mario Trombetta or Pablo Suarez, to expose his ideas, some indeed synthetic. (Omitted). Interventions continue, *by Pablo Suarez, Maya Ziadeh, Dominic Okoth, Luigi Riillo, Pilar Cuevas, Massimiliano Genco, Anna Bratti, Pina Mollo, Madre Palma, Anna Maria de Rosa, Emilio Borella, Gigliola Bardessono, Antoinette Fahed and Dominico Okoth again.*

The President and the Counsellors answer some questions. (Omitted, answers by Vincenzo Fornace, Mario Trombetta and Pablo Suarez)

At 9 p.m., after dinner, we gather in the room to share life of the groups. Representatives from Lebanon and Argentina share photographs and films to illustrate the activities developed in their regions.

## October 24<sup>th</sup> 2015

After Mass and Laudi **Don Marco Marchiando**, at 9.15 a.m., talks about the subject "Reflexions on the Statute and the Promise formula in the light of "Searching for Jesus". His words deserve wider space, but we'll limit ourselves to a brief synthesis:

- Articles 1 and 2 from the Statute, which express how to "realize our Christian vocation", are commented with words from John's Gospel, or, in better words, with its four verbs: "believe, know, bare witness, remain". Believing is having faith, knowing and baring witness are concrete actions linked to Jesus's figure, and remaining means to stay with him and persisting with determination.
- Believing is not blind but conscious faith. John Paul II said that "Believing has two wings: faith and reason". Without one of these two characteristics man cannot fly. Saint Thomas said that "seeing God means never to finish wishing for him"-
- Article 2 speaks of "gratuity", but this term already presupposes "searching for Jesus" with love, in others' faces, helping these, giving oneself to the poor (who may be materially needed or spiritual poor).
- It is implied in article 3, which mentions "apostolic commitment", the concept that it is necessary to "start from Christ" and take him as a model to take to the others. Therefore, we mustn't tire of searching for him and wish to "see Jesus".

We share some time while we expect **Monsignor Velasio de Paolis**'s arrival. At 10.30 the Cardinal, after salutation, proposes to the Assembly to proceed with the revision of the Statute first, with the approval of some modifications risen along the years,

and then the new General Council election, contrary to what the programme said. The Assembly approves.

What follows is informed in the section **ACT OF STATUTE REVISION AND PRESIDENT AND COUNSELORS' ELECTION**, signed by Secretaries Anna Bratti and Francesco Domenico Pompeo and scrutinizers Maya Ziadeh and Gigliola Bardessono and Cardinal Velasio de Paolis.

At 4.30 p.m., when the election finishes, the Cardinal thanks the salient Council, wishes the New Council a good job (Mario Trombetta, Pablo Suarez, Massimiliano Genco, Vincenzo Fornace and Najat Tayeh) and greets all present.

After a brief interval Mother Palma asks all present **to specify programmes and goals** for the future, using what has been expressed by orators and the “work instrument”

It will be fundamental to organize the Association's future, such as suggested by the emblematic icon of the meeting: “To search for Jesus”. We find his living presence:

- Living the Eucharist,
- Being “thirsty” of his word, which is the fire that can also light the young.
- Committing to “building fraternity”.
- Becoming missionaries, a vernian without a mission would be like Mother Antonia without her first rules of life. It would be, like the Holy Father says, like a Sheppard without his “sheep's smell”

We work in small groups, three or four people from the same region when possible.

When we finish the representative reads the conclusions, which must be brief and schematic, presents them in written to the Assembly and the secretaries. **FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

These are the syntheses that have arisen, in order of intervention:

#### Campania (Giuseppina Mollo)

- In order to advance we need the humility to know how to go back, finding our faith and vernian vocation again.
- It is necessary to deepen the charisma with the help of a sister, if possible.
- Formation is still a priority and will have to be adapted to groups' capacity and characteristic.
- “Missionarity” may manifest itself keeping an attentive look to the others' needs and trying to put a remedy as much as possible.
- It is necessary to improve our “sense of belonging”.

#### Argentina. (Pablo Suarez and Pilar Cuevas)

- Prayer and action, together, hand in hand.
- Persevere in faith, in service, in formation.
- It is necessary to work on “the territorial reality”, maybe having seminars, retreats, camps with families, the elderly and the young, in a “continual formation” context.

- We must “search for Jesus” in Eucharist, in our brother, but it must occur with “conviction, formation and sense of belonging”
- Nowadays the poor are not only the indigent, but also other poverty expressions both social and spiritual among children, youths, adults and the elderly, we must know how to look at these ways.
- We mustn’t be “cloister lay people, but open”, according to Mother Antonia’s example, attentive to her times’ needs.

Libano. (Maya Ziadeh and Antoinette Fahed) –

- In order to be Family it would be nice to institute “an international prayer day” for all lay groups, as well as sisters and missionaries.
- Vocation, faith, charisma and formation are the bases on which to found our future, but they must balance action.
- The young must have a dynamic group life and their voices must also be heard. They must know how to send personal messages.
- Communication is very important, both among groups all over the world and with the General Council, in order to know the reciprocal experiences and “make family”. It is good to make use of communications media to make ourselves known locally.
- An operative collaboration with the various vernian groups and with “good” local social and religious realities is very important.

Calabria. (Gino Riillo)

- In the site of Calabria, which is well developed and detailed, there are also projects for the future.
- It is considered useful to organize meetings and agreements to face social themes of our complex times.
- It is indispensable to make people sensitive to concrete problems that every day life puts in front of us and to provide solutions valid to solve them.
- It is necessary to help the “new poor”, not only with alms but providing the instruments to “help them help themselves”
- In Calabrese reality there is no lack of young people (around 400 gravitate around the Isola de Capo Rizzuto group). A good management of these young people, involving their families, and above all, giving a good example of “vernian life style” is a future project.

Piemonte. (Gigliola Bardessono)\_

- It is sustained that the first vernian charity, today and for the future, is to be capable of “listening” and to assist “our” old people, who are really a lot. This can be done, as it already is, with the moments spent with them, being able to inspire the family spirit which so much has been spoken about.
- It is necessary to get form and to work, according to the specificity of the individual group, each one of us has different characteristics.
- We must be capable of weaving relationships with other local realities as well (Caritas, Catholic Alliance, etc).

- Among the topics the General Council should consider there are those inherent with ecology, proposed by the Holy Father.
- “The family”, in its widest meaning, must be in the base of our prayers and actions, as society’s cornerstone even if it has been put up for discussion.

Puglia. (Teresa Resta)\_

- To increase our “missionarity spirit” looking forward to “transmitting our faith to the fellow man, especially to the young couples”.
- Increasing our formation, which must be part of our life style.
- To develop the actions necessary to hold and getting involved within the parish.
- To be the support of the elderly, and particularly, of our sister’s resting home.

Lombardia-Emilia. (Danio Sarti) –

- We must act according to the three guidelines: prayer (Holy Mass and Eucharist, if possible daily), the study (the Bible and our foundress’ word, life and work) and action (being true and committed in the apostleship with “innovative creativity”).
- To keep and improve a “special contact” with our sisters, to get involved with the schools and the didactic guidelines, both in the spiritual activities as in the actions directed to getting the charity projects financed.
- To establish (as it once was) a formation session, extended to every vernian, at least the Italian regions, every two years.

Kenya (Dominic Okoth) \_

- “Getting new responsible members” out of the Association has not been a problem for some time now, after having individualized the truest believers and most charismatic people.
- The four Kenyan groups find it hard to fulfill charity projects for the most needed, “What you don’t have you can’t give”, even though the sisters’ help is fundamental and always present.
- It is of vital importance that the accompanying sisters do not change often, because they are a constant and secure reference in the future.
- The General Council must attend to the “charity projects, as it already does, not only does it assist the most needed (the elderly, women and children undergoing difficulties), but it also helps them to be able to help themselves.
- At 18.50, when speeches are over and individual productions have been gathered, there is a space for Mother Palma, Vincenzo Fornace and Mario Trombetta.

The new President, in thanking all of the people present for the trust placed on him, promises to treasure the many indications arising from the intense praying days and from the work done. He also wishes to contribute always, with the Council’s and the Mother’s help, with the “development and consolidation of the Vernian Family” in its wholeness: Lay, Congregation and Charity Missionaries.

He thanks particularly the outgoing President, Vincenzo Fornace, for his love toward Mother Antonia and for his dedication, confident in his continued collaboration. He also thanks Pina Mollo for her involvement during her term as Counselor. Aware of the great

challenge church and society will have to face at a world scale, he requests everyone's support and prayer.

We trust everything to the Lord, while the Vernian Lays 4th General Assembly is declared to be over, at 19.15 .E

**The President**

Mario V.Trombetta

**The secretaries**

Anna Bratti

Francesco Domenico Pompeo