

NEWS

VITTORINA GEMENTI'S BIOGRAPHY UN SORRISO "DI SOLE" DIVENTA CASA (A "SUNNY" SMILE BECOMES A HOUSE) IS AVAILABLE

WRITTEN BY DON STEFANO SILIBERTI.

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LUI FRANCO - VIA GALILEI, 34 - 46041 ASOLA (MN) TOGETHER WITH 20 EUROS.

The Association "**Amici di Vittorina Gementi**" ("Friends of Vittorina Gementi"), was founded in November 2004, with the aim of perpetuating and spreading the memory of this exemplary woman, and of favouring the opening of the canonical process recognizing her sanctity also at an official level. **Vittorina Gementi** spent her existence living the two loves that urged inside her in a radical way: the love to Christ and love to her neighbour, in particular to the children, particularly the children with cerebral handicap, the so called mentally retarded. Her first meeting with these creatures happened in a small school of the countryside near Mantova, when Vittorina was 20 years' old and begun her mission as a teacher. That was an unforeseen and decisive turning-point of her life, which lately -in 1966 led her to fund a specific school for them, Casa del Sole (the House of Sun). Faith and love to God -and in particular to Jesus present in the Eucharist, are at the root of her deeds, of her deep humanity and sense of social justice.

ASSOCIATION

The association "Amici di Vittorina Gementi" is based in Via V. Gementi, 52, San Silvestro di Curtatone (Mantova), Italy, and was founded on **November 11, 2004**.

According to its Statute, the association proposes to "perpetuate and spread the memory of Vittorina Gementi...founder of Casa del Sole and of other institutions for persons with cerebral handicap " and to "diffuse the knowledge of her life, exemplary for her cheerful chastity, deep spirituality, daily Eucharistic attendance, ardent and incomparable apostolic commitment, intrepid public testimony in her Parish, at school, in politics."

The Statute specifies the means by which the commitment to pursuing the aims of the association will be implemented: "publications, conferences, events, acquaintance with her writings", all in close collaboration with the Ecclesiastical authority, so that the memory of Vittorina Gementi is adequately guarded also inside the Church.

Anybody is allowed to join the Association; ordinary members and honorary members are foreseen: "ordinary members are those who ask to personally participate in the implementation of its aims. Honorary members are those people and organizations that are acknowledged as worthy by the Board of Directors, for their contribution to the achievement of the aims of the association.

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BIOGRAPHY

Vittorina Gementi spent her existence living the two loves that urged inside her in a radical way: the love to Christ and love to her neighbour, in particular to the children, particularly the children with cerebral handicap, the so called *mentally retarded*. Her first meeting with these creatures happened in a small school of the countryside near Mantova, when Vittorina was 20 years' old and begun her mission as a teacher. That was an unforeseen and decisive turning-point of her life, which lately -in 1966 led her to fund a specific school for them, Casa del Sole.

Professor Alessandro Manenti says about her: *"Nothing in her life prefigured her to end as a founder. She had begun with taking quite another path: as a teacher, town councillor, vice mayor, exponent of party, commissioner of a body, guardian of minors in "pre-adoptive fosterage", member of a school patronage... And this, all things considered, bureaucratic and institutional path, in the best of the cases, could have lead her to a some chair in parliament. At a certain point she happened to face the unexpected problem of children's maladjustment and she let herself be moulded by this event. From then on, she began to write her life according to a not previewed script. This was her greatness: living a story she hadn't determined as it was a sunny novel, letting herself be led there, where life had fitted her in, rather than pushing her life along the railroads she could pre-arrange."*

To accept to take that unexpected path until the end, meant for Vittorina also to accept innumerable sufferings, humiliations and incomprehension, so much to push those who knew her to seriously question on the motivations of that commitment of hers. And Vittorina herself gives the answer: she was asked one day: *"Which is the first source from which you draw so much strength to do your job with so much joy, even though through so many sufferings?"* And Vittorina answered with her typical spontaneity: *"I believe I have had a great gift in my life: that of being in love, having a crush on Jesus. I believe I have received nothing more than anyone can have. I have always tried to and I am trying to know and love the Lord more and more "*.

Faith and love to God -and in particular to Jesus present in the Eucharist, are therefore at the root of her deeds, of her deep humanity and sense of social justice, such as Mons. Egidio Caporello, Bishop of Mantova underlined: *"I am convinced that if we underestimate Vittorina's Eucharistic faith, we can't acknowledge her. If we want to understand the mystery of this creature, her exuberance and above all her smile and her joy, which was never care freedom and was also combativeness, we must consider the centrality of her Eucharistic faith. And there her heart is."*

Her faith and her love to Jesus in the Eucharist have transfigured her life making the service to her brother with cerebral suffering a mystical experience that Vittorina expresses with very strong words:

"Jesus in the Eucharist is the beginning, the strength, the food, the light and the goal of our activity, of our pedagogical job, our brotherly service".

"Our Children are living Tabernacles, their bodies are just like the Monstrance, Jesus lives and grows in them."

"Children's Silence and Serenity make every day merry and bright and facilitate contemplation. We must become worthy of this unique and precious gift that God grants us: to work with His favourite ones, those whom nobody wants, His little ones, the more poor ones among the poor, in order contemplate our brother, as the Lord desires. This job of ours with cerebropathic Children is a strong moment of reflection on Life and therefore of Prayer, contemplative, too."

"In the Life of the most serious brain-damaged Children we can see works of God to be revealed the and we can learn to love and to pray as they do, in the total abandonment and in the inactivity of intellectual faculties."

Indeed Vittorina, as mons. Caporello further affirms *"has revealed sanctity, that daily, popular, sanctity, that secular sanctity that attaches to all of us in different measures, not always through extraordinary expressions but through a Christian life dimension expressing itself into great service."*

The dates of her life

February 17, 1931: she was born in Porto Mantovano (Mantova, Italy)

1950 – 1960: she works as an elementary teacher in two countryside schools and is engaged in Azione cattolica (Catholic Action) as diocesan responsible person for Gioventù Femminile (Young girls).

1960 – 1980: she is town councillor in Mantova, at first in the Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy) lists, and afterwards (1975-1980) in the civil list “Rinnovamento” (Renewal) she herself founded. In these years she holds several offices representing the Municipality in different Bodies.

1962 – 1973: she is town councillor responsible for infancy and nursery schools assistance. With this role she founds many nursery schools and particularly takes care of teaching personnel’s training.

1965 – 1970: she is Mantova vice mayor.

1966: she gives life to Casa del Sole.

1977: she founds the “Centro Solidarietà per bambini cerebrolesi gravissimi” (Solidarity Center for seriously brain-damaged children).

1981: she founds the “Gruppo famiglia” (Family group) for disabled women.

1983: she gives life to the “Centro accoglienza” (Welcoming centre) for disabled young and adult people.

Of all these structures she was president, animator and orthopedagogue, from their foundation until the day of her death, which took place in Mantua, on June 3, 1989. For her initiative, a cloistered monastery of Poor Clare nuns has risen close to Casa del Sole, as the crowning achievement of her work

HER LAST WILL

Providence always arrives before sunrise

This is considered as her spiritual will.

(from *Il dono del Sole (The gift of Sun)*, published by Casa del Sole, Mantova 2003, pp 19-21)

The Lord realises His Kingdom on this earth through His children’s Life. For each of us -from Eternity and with infinite Love, He thought of what we should be and should do with the help of his Grace.

Our primary commitment then is to get to know His will through daily facts. That’s why we should strive to get to know ourselves better and better, in order not to hamper God’s plan too much, because of our egotism, fear, and vanity. Tomorrow will always be wonderful if we can discover and make true what God desires from us today.

The more the years that God grants us, the more we realize -with wonder, surprise and thankful joy, the great things that He makes with our simple Life. I was brought up by a Family where Faith was lived and tested every day. I can remember Granma and Mum, when they helped us pray the Rosary and live the Mysteries: visiting the sick, helping those who were lacking what we already had, joyfully welcoming the unexpected and simple guests, daily reading one page of the Gospel, and silently and solidly committing to help those who nobody else helped, certain that Providence always arrives before sunrise. The Parish and the Catholic Action let me know and love Jesus with all my heart. The practices of pity, constant prayer, Spiritual Exercises, Confession and Spiritual Direction have been of great help for me:

Like all young people, I also wanted to test my faith, my love for Jesus, by respecting the dignity of every person, and so I committed myself to serve my brethren: catechesis, A.C. (Catholic Action), teaching at school. I remember my Mum, when I enthusiastically spoke about the smarter pupils: she always gently asked me to speak of that child who never or little understood, because that was the one I should give more... and she would add: "What you will do to the least one, you will do it to Jesus^[1], and Jesus doesn't forget anything."

In my educational work I have met Children with handicap, which in those days were sent away to far institutes, and when , and when I found myself in the position of being able to contribute to some social justice,

I have been in the situation to be able to contribute to the realization of some it executes social, the Lord has suggested the idea of a Therapeutic day School "Casa del Sole", where Children with cerebral handicap could have what the other Children have in common structures, without departing from Their Families.

So from 1966 until today more than 4,000 families have felt a helping hand, accompanying them along the path of pain, and they have also helped me understand that the Life is always a great Gift of God, it is its continuous message of love to us men, so that we remember Him and the Homeland ahead of us.

I have met wonderful Families, who can perform miracles of love and service for their Children with cerebral disabilities, including the most serious brain-damaged ones. Sacrifices and renounces are for Them reasons for joy and unity. The presence of the seriously handicapped Child is for them a source of internal richness.

From them I learned that, to truly love, we must respect "everyone's Diversity of " and grow in mutual giving, without expecting to be always those who give, but by opening ourselves to receive with joy the message that God sends us through every Man and in any conditions of poverty.

Our Faith wants us to be enthusiastic, optimistic and creative people, because we care of needs and justice. S. James reminds us that Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead ^[2].

S. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians states: "The parts of the body which seem to be weaker are really indispensable, and those parts which we think less honourable, we invest with the greater honour ^[3]".

Let each of us do what we can, today, immediately and in the place where we are, without criticizing, without complaining, knowing that the Lord is close to us, listens to us and not only He helps us, but He wants us to work for free by always choosing "the last ones" which in the Kingdom are the " First ones ^[4]". And to the Lord who gives us the Life, we give back the great gift of our Life entirely committed to the service of "human promotion " in favour of our brethren and of solid solidarity to their Families.

Let the world see that our Faith is real and solid and let it believe in God Merciful Father, because we don't preach Love, but we make it tangible it through fraternity and solidarity day by day, without delegating to others or postponing till tomorrow what we can and must do ourselves immediately. Let our Lady help us to be witnesses of the Gospel in the prayer and in the service (II Vatican Council) and to live the "charity" with great joy and enthusiasm, to grow in the unity of the God's sons great family.

^[1] Matthew 25:40

^[2] James 2:17-26

^[3] 1 Corinthians 12:22-23

^[4] Matthew 20:16

CONTACTS

The association "Amici di Vittorina Gementi" is based in Via V. Gementi, 52, San Silvestro di Curtatone (Mantova), Italy.

Contacts

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How to reach us:

Coming from Milan:

Take the Autostrada del Sole A1 Highway towards Piacenza, then follow the signs to Cremona. Drive along the Padana Inferiore state road (Cremona-Mantova). At the entrance of the industrial area of Curtatone turn in direction Curtatone-Montanara. Continue to San Silvestro.

Coming from Trento, Verona or Bologna:

Take the Autostrada del Brennero A22 Highway (Bologna Brennero), Exit at the toll booth of Mantova North of the follow the directions for Mantua Centre. Follow the signs for Parma - Cremona. At the top of the overpass turn left onto state road Parmense. After 200 meters turn left again and follow the signs to San Silvestro - Casa del Sole.

For further information you can also visiting the website www.casadelsole.org