



UAC NEWSLETTER

July 2013



Dear sisters and brothers in the Union,

we are very happy to present to you in this newsletter **a note on Saint Vincent's work with prisoners**, along with other news from the Union.

1. SAINT VINCENT AND PRISONERS

In Vincent Pallotti's time, prison conditions in the Papal States and elsewhere were very poor. Gregory XVI (1831-1846) did try to improve the lives of young prisoners by establishing trade schools to offer them an alternative future. Roman prisons were full of criminals mixed with political prisoners. Gregory and his ministers, particularly Cardinal Luigi Lambruschini, penitent, supporter and often defender of Pallotti, appointed Secretary of State in 1836, responded to the growing influence of sects opposed to Papal temporal power with repression, having rebels hunted down and imprisoned. At least 400 awaited trial in prison, many being condemned to death.

Pallotti had great compassion for prisoners and, even before priestly ordination, included "the poor little ones of Jesus Christ, ... many poor slaves, prisoners, detainees" among those whom he particularly wished to comfort and relieve (Resolutions prior to priesthood (1816), OCCC X, pp. 19-20). He had his first experience of apostolic work with prisoners as a young priest at least as early as 1821, as evidenced by a letter sent to Mgr. Gaetano Bonanni on April 28th 1821 communicating a request by a Mr. Pietro Riccioni that Mgr. Bonanni visit him in the Carcere Nuove (OCL I, p. 120). It was at this prison, located near the church of Santo Spirito dei Napoletani on via Giulia, that Pallotti got his real training for priestly work among prisoners, being the first priest to preach, give religious instruction and hear confessions there regularly. On May 21st 1821 he wrote to his collaborator, the Oratorian Fr. Luigi Sciarra, asking him to visit a Mr. Santini, imprisoned in the Infirmary of the Carcere Nuove, and on September 20th 1846, asked him to hear the confession of a young man, Vincenzo Silvio, in the same prison (OCL I, pp. 122 and 228). On November 11th 1836 he wrote to Fr. Silvestro Graziani of Frascati imploring him to "effectively undertake to promote in every possible and appropriate way the poor man Lorenzo Colasanti being held in Frascati prison" (OCL II, pp. 145-6). On July 29th 1846, Filippo Coccioni, a father of 14 living in Tivoli, having been imprisoned for a few hours for unpaid debts, wrote to ask for Pallotti's help and prayers in his "spiritual and temporal needs", receiving a reply on August 6th (OCL V, pp. 270-2).

When he developed the system of Procuras, Pallotti assigned the care of prisoners, including those condemned to death, to the eighth Procura, under the protection of St. Bartholemew. Its members were to care for all dimensions of the prisoners needs, including spiritual care, physical needs such as food, advocacy for their rights and seeking remission for good behaviour, including the provision of lawyers, and were also to look after prisoners' families. Pallotti held various courses of spiritual exercises annually for young prisoners of the prisons in via Giulia and of the Baths of Diocletian. As his reputation grew, inmates of other prisons also frequently requested him as a confessor. He visited prisoners in the prisons of the Holy Office, Castel Sant'Angelo and the House of Correction at Ripa Grande, including military prisoners. On July 22nd 1845, he wrote to the pontifical military leadership to intercede for Luigi Berna, a young military policeman who had already spent 6 months in jail for deserting while drunk to go to see his sick mother, and Giuseppe Belardi, a 17 year old fusilier who had already spent 5 months in jail for what Pallotti maintained was a false accusation against him by 3 corporals (OCL 5, pp. 101-2). There is a large body of letters in which prisoners ask him to arrange a favour or to seek the remission of the remainder of their sentence, frequently by appealing to their good conduct in prison.

In a letter dated January 13th 1838, he writes with regret to Tommaso Cassini who had asked him to visit a prisoner in Castel Sant'Angelo: "My tasks during the time of cholera kept me far from entering S. Angelo Fort. To my surprise and regret I no longer found him there: forgive any negligence on my part" (OCL 2, p. 234). When he discovered that there was no chapel in the prison he obtained permission from the Papal authorities to adapt a suitable location for this purpose.

He also began to be sought for the painful task of giving priestly assistance to those condemned to death. The arch-confraternity of Mercy of San Giovanni Decollato attended the condemned in Rome since the late 1400s. According to its Registers of the Executed, between 1835 and 1846 Pallotti was asked to come to nine condemned prisoners who remained unrepentant, in two cases despite even the efforts of such saintly priests as Bernardo Clausi and Biagio Valentini (St. Gaspar del Bufalo's successor as General Superior of his Congregation). In seven of these, he had the joy of seeing the prisoner's conversion. Such assistance to the condemned frequently

required hours of the greatest effort and devotion on Pallotti's part. Some people were changed in an instant: when called to one impenitent man, he exclaimed in the chapel before the man and to those present in an urgent voice, "Let us pray that God endow this poor man with his grace immediately!" The man was converted immediately. Others took more time. On March 8th 1845, he entered the cell of Giovanni Vannerelli, 26 years of age, from Gubbio, who had murdered a German pilgrim, Anna Kotten, a former nun, and who for a long time refused conversion, repeatedly blaspheming and asserting his innocence. Pallotti, who had previously spoken with Vannerelli, was called by the marquis Sacchetti, a collaborator, and after more than two hours, managed to lead him to Confession and Communion. Given his success, the confraternity, whose cardinal protector was Pallotti's friend Cardinal Acton, offered to appoint him chaplain, but he refused because of the income attached to the post.

Every day of execution in Rome was a day of penance and prayer. Posters announced the executions and exhorted prayer, confession and communion for the condemned. The prisoner, never given prior notice of the day of execution, was suddenly awoken in the middle of the night and led to the chapel, where the priest and members of the aforementioned confraternity were waiting. While the latter prayed, the priest heard the prisoner's confession, celebrated Mass, giving them Communion for the last time. If the person was unrepentant, the priest tried to convince them, and sometimes the execution was postponed until evening to leave more time. Pallotti experienced great joy when he succeeded in leading a condemned prisoner to conversion. One day he met Emanuele de Gregorio, a penitent of his and a colonel of the Pope's General Staff, and, unable to contain his joy, embraced him and told him of his deep happiness at the conversion of a condemned man.

When the time for execution arrived, the condemned man was taken to the place of execution inside the prison or, by cart with the priest, through the streets of Rome to one of the public squares, accompanied in procession by members of the archconfraternity, the soldiers and the executioner, led by a bronze cross. Pallotti accompanied a number of condemned prisoners in this way, either in the cart or following on foot. After the final prayers and the kissing of the cross, the prisoner was executed by guillotine.

In the 1840s, Pallotti's activity among prisoners greatly increased, as attested during the proceedings for his beatification. Two final interesting points regarding Pallotti and prisoners: (a) Saint Vincent obviously viewed prisoners not simply as passive recipients of the charity and apostolate of others, but as called in their own right to be active apostles in the apostolate of the Church, as is clear from his inclusion of prisoners in the list of possible members of the newly-founded Union of Catholic Apostolate which he outlined between the summers of 1835 and 1836 (cf. OOCC IV, pp. 182 and 326); (b) in a letter dated September 17th 1847, he asked the members of the Society to do everything possible, but "without offending any Christian virtue", to obtain that his "corpse be buried in S. Giovanni Decollato in one of the tombs of the executed" (OCL 6, p. 133).

2. MEETING OF NATIONAL FORMATION PROMOTERS IN ROME

The second meeting of National Formation Promoters of the Union, organised by the International Formation Commission of the Union in collaboration with the Ecclesiastical Assistant, Fr. Jacob Nampudakam SAC, and the General Secretariat, was held in the 'Cenacle' Pallottine International Formation Centre, via Ferrari, Rome, from the evening of July 11th to that of July 16th. Representatives from Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Poland, Rwanda/DR Congo, Slovakia/Czech Republic and Ukraine attended, while those from Australia, Portugal, Switzerland and the USA were unable to do so, with some other NCCs/countries lacking a functioning National Promoter. Topics included reflections on the nature and reality of the Union today and concrete challenges to implementing St. Vincent's charismatic vision with particular reference to formation (Fr. Jacob Nampudakam SAC & Fr. Derry Murphy SAC), the role of the Ecclesiastical Assistant and of National Formation Promoters (Fr. Hubert Socha SAC), Contemporary Models of Adult Spiritual Formation (Dr. Susan Timoney, Catholic University, Washington, USA), the Role of an International Public Association of the Faithful in the work of the New Evangelization (Prof. Gianni La Bella, Sant'Egidio Community) and the 2004 General Orientations for Formation in the Union (Sr. Stella Marotta CSAC). Each representative gave a report on the reality and particular challenges of formation in their country. There were discussions in language groups on the final day with a list of concrete proposals regarding initial and ongoing formation in the Union drawn up from the feedback of the groups to the plenum. Important proposals adopted include: making Christ, as revealed in the Word of God, the centre of UAC formation, which must lead people to participate concretely in his mission to those on the peripheries of existence; the need to develop concrete attractive Cenacle models of formation where participants experience the transforming power of the Spirit in a community of faith; the priority of the formation of formators, creating solid formation teams at each level in order to identify and form formators in the long term; the need to instil a passion for St. Vincent and his charism and spirituality in those being formed.