

FOUNDING DAY FEAST OF THE SOCIETY

CEREMONIAL ACT

„WE LOOK BACK ON THE YEAR 1936“

Important things are happening throughout the world, in an economic, social, political and cultural respect.

We are in the time of **Hitler's** rise to power, which is marked by numerous military and economic alliances between European States, also between those who will be in war against each other a few years later.

In 1936 compulsory military service is reintroduced in **Austria**. The so called „**July agreement**“ leads to the reintroduction of friendly relationships to the German Reich.

At the **Reichstag election** in Berlin Hitler wins 99% of the votes. In 1936, also in Berlin, the major event „Olympic Games“ takes place.

Pope Pius XI will pass his papal encyclical „With burning Anxiety“ in 1937.

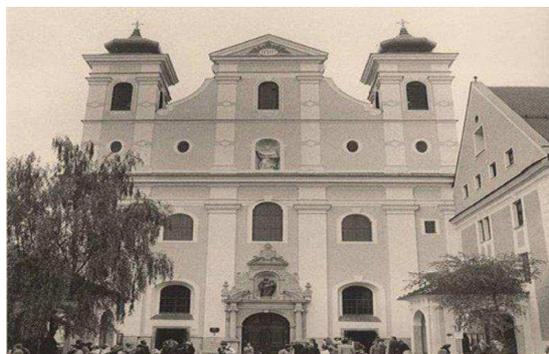
Austria is still blossoming culturally.

At the „Salzburger Festspiele“ prince archbishop **Waitz** and governor Dr. **Rehrl** receive the singer Benjamino Gigli; Marlene Dietrich, who created the trouser suit for ladies, is guest at the Festspiele. – An unusual picture of the wonderful driveway to the Festspiele over the Salzburger state bridge in 1936 shows: **left-hand traffic**.

Something less spectacular, but much more important for us 80 years later, takes place in **Steyr**, Upper Austria. We now want to look at this event a little more closely and envisage

Ash Wednesday, 26th February 1936

On this day, 80 years ago, our **Society**, the Secular Institute „Madonna della Strada“ is **founded**.



„Marienkirche“, church in Steyr

2 members from **Steyr** start with **Maria Elisabeth**, the first **Director General** of the Society, to live according to a **program** which the Jesuit **P. Carl Dinkhauser SJ** had put together for them.



Founders: Maria Elisabeth Strachotinsky
and F. Carl Dinkhauser

More members join. P. Dinkhauser and Maria Elisabeth begin to formulate the **Constitution**. This becomes necessary to obtain confirmation by the church for the new Society.

The necessity is indeed large, as the Society grows to 14 members by the end of 1937. If we remember that we are already in the time of National Socialism the following growth figures are very impressive :

- 1938 there are 19,
- 1939 already 44,
- 1940 10 more,
- 1941 20 more,
- 1942 already 85,
- 1943 as many as 108 and
- 1944 already 116.

This incredible growth occurs in the „underground“ so to speak and under circumstances which make it necessary to conceal the Society.

Back to the **Constitution** which was being worked on since 1936. The first constitution was already published on July 31 1940, the **usages**, which have to be observed by all members, were also issued by Maria Elisabeth.

As already mentioned, the „**Society of Our Lady of the Way**“ exists in secret during the years of World War II.

Nevertheless it is able to continually increase the number of members, as shown earlier on.

Only in the year 1948, twelve years after its foundation, does the Society turn to the ecclesiastical public with an information brochure „Society of Our Lady of the Way Institutum saeculare“.

On page 37 of the „Chronicle of the Society“ (which I issued at the initiative of the then Director General Maria Josefa in 2012) we read the original text of this information brochure.



House in Mauer, Vienna's 23rd district

We will now hear how this „promotional campaign“ was written at the time of religious awakening in 1948. May we manage to empathize with the ladies who discovered their vocation through this text.

Very often we are asked about the aim and objectives of our Society. With this brochure we want to provide some answers. Many working women feel a longing for perfection, the desire to serve God and work for the realization of His kingdom. Often they don't find adequate help and direction and therefore come to the conclusion that there are no possibilities and there is no need for them. They carry a heavy burden of day to day work and come to see the work as obstacle in their way to perfection and apostolic work. They think both can only be achieved by means of a monastic life. Others give themselves in apostolic and pastoral work and want to make a deeper commitment in their personal spiritual life. They are also searching for a community which would support them in their work and their strivings.

The Society of Our Lady of the Way wants to answer these needs. The beginning of the Society goes back to the year 1936. That time the first members started to have a constitution and to live according to it. 1939 it was approved by the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna and later on by other bishops as well. Between 1938 and 1945 the Society was growing, but there was no basis in canon law for it. As the members don't live together in a cloister, the Society could not be regarded a religious congregation. The members wanted to be more than a pious union. Then, unexpectedly on February 2nd 1947 Pope Pius XII published the apostolic constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, which complemented parts of the canon law. *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, the providing mother church, gave communities like ours the legal framework to be constituted as „*Institutum saeculare*“ as part of the church and provide their members with a special status within the church. „Fulfilling what in my conscience was my duty and out of fatherly love for those souls who strive for sanctification in the midst of the world“, he wrote this law, said our holy Father Pius XII. **The Society of Our Lady of the Way** did not have to make bigger changes in her constitution to ask the holy See for permission to found an „*Institutum saeculare*“, as a „Society“ whose members live their apostolate keeping the evangelical counsels in the midst of the world, faithful to the apostolic constitution, striving for Christian

perfection. (Art I of the special law for the Instituta saecularia.) In September 1947 the superior presented our constitutions together with a letter of the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna to the Holy Father, who, in a private audience, told her how glad he was about it and ordered the holy congregation for religious to revise the constitutions.

Dated February 1st 1948 the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna received a rescript of the congregation for religious, approving of our constitutions. So on March 7th 1948 the **Society of our Lady of the Way** was erected canonically as Institutum saeculare by the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna. The sisters became members by the vows of perfect chastity, obedience and poverty.

The vow of chastity means for us the joyful offering of our entire life to God. The commandment is only the minimum. Our sacrifice is for the Kingdom of God. The value of the vow does not lie in being without a husband but in adoring God and giving ourselves to our saviour. Motherhood is not limited to a small family but is opened towards all growing life and through prayer, sacrifice and sharing forms part of the motherhood of Mary. The chaste, single motherliness gives understanding and helpfulness for the people among us and lets us forget about our own needs. **Our obedience** makes us keep a strict daily routine, as described in our constitutions. It sanctifies our duties at home and at work with the dedication to fulfil the will of God. Through obedience the Society is allowed to decide about the members for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls, as far as our duties towards family and work permit. **Our poverty** means to maintain possession of what we have and earn, but not to make use of it freely, but to render accounts. Sincerity and consciousness in giving accounts are our constant exercise of poverty. Of course that is not a small sacrifice for an independent person. The lifestyle of each sister should be according to her personal circumstances. In all we want to maintain inner freedom and "have as if we do no". Important is the spirit of poverty.

Dedication to our Saviour in chastity, obedience and poverty is something that challenging that it has to be accompanied and protected by some rules. It is hardly possible to give oneself to God in the evangelical counsels without norms and bonds. All who try to do it realize that. Following the evangelical counsels requires commitment and the following of certain spiritual exercises; otherwise inner life becomes superficial and shallow. By keeping the rules we get the strength and grace for faithfulness in our dedication and the opportunity to confirm our dedication. Obedience is not possible without rules and superiors. Very seldom the accompaniment of a confessor covers not only issues of conscience, but also issues of work, family life and external things.

The Society helps us in that sense and also gives us the spiritual exercises which maintain us in eagerness but don't ask for too much: essential Christian prayers, the so necessary daily meditation, spiritual reading, visiting the Lord. It may happen that for some the fulfilling of some of that is definitely impossible, because of the family or work. These external obstacles are not a reason for not becoming a member.

Our constitutions are generous and magnanimous, most important is the spirit: wanting to do **more** in the service of God and for His kingdom, in **greater dedication to the Saviour**. Our consolation is that what we are not able to do is done by our sisters, and we know that the sacrifice is valuable as well. And also community.

Not alone. Our Lord wanted us to be one, those who want to be with the Father. His commandment is “to love each other as I have loved you”. And that goes especially for us. Not only obedience and bonds, also the sisterly love will strengthen our dedication. Mutual help and encouragement, the bonum et iucundum of the sisterly bonding often asks for sacrifice, consideration and humility, but also strengthens our dedication.

It is also our task to help working women, to give them inner and exterior home with us. The spiritual inner life of our Society leads us to mission. Dedication to the Saviour is not complete without devoted care for the souls we want to lead to Him. Directly by our sisters in their environment. Cooperation in apostolic tasks. Sisters working in Caritas and pastoral will give inputs. Superiors will forward these needs and inputs to the sisters, individually or to groups, or to the whole Society. Superiors will even – when possible for the sisters – order them to do apostolic or charitable work and make sure they do it.

Women who want to join the Society have the opportunity to get to know it better and become part of it during **introduction and probation time**.

After **completing probation time** and mutual examination a candidate can be admitted to oblation. It consists of the vows of chastity, obedience and poverty and is the commitment to the Society for one year or later forever, and the candidate is received by the Society.

One would want to discuss the wish to join the Society with the confessor, but if he does not know the Society, it would be good to clarify doubts and difficulties with members of the Society, in order to have a good basis for the decision. Finally, the decision will always be a personal issue, personal responsibility and venture. Maybe only trying it will give final clarity. During the time of discernment we have to pray a lot. Bishop Joh. M. Sailer wrote this beautiful prayer:

Father of the Light, you are wisdom and mercy without end. You know all that is good for me. You know the way I should go, and the goal I want to reach. You know the good and bad consequences arising from my decision for me and my fellow human beings. Send me a ray of your wisdom, to see what is true and what is wrong, what is good and what bad, what you want me to do and what not. Grant me strength to choose what I will wish to have chosen in the hour of my dead. In your name, Lord, I will discern what I should do, in your holly presence I want to take the decision and with your strong help I will complete what I have decided to do.

Amen.



At Pentecost 1956 on the Mönchsberg the Society celebrated its 20th anniversary –
in the first row on the right – Annaliese Sammer

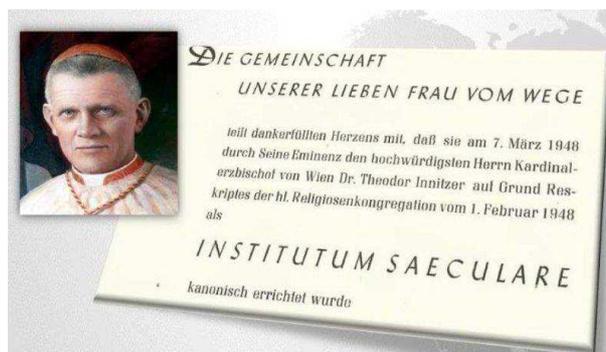
Even today I feel that the message of this prayer is excellent. However, we need to **promote** our institute in a different manner. The Internet is an opportunity for interested women all over the globe to learn about consecrated life in the world.

In fact, the year 1948 was an important year for the “Secular Institute Madonna della Strada” (current name).

On 8th August 1948 the first members took their vows in Linz.

In the old feast calendar you can see that 67 “sisters” (I am adding the apostrophes from today’s point of view) took their **vows** in an “Institutum saeculare according to diocesan law“, which had already been established on 7th March 1948 according to the certificate.

From now on the ecclesiastical commissioners were responsible for the ecclesiastical management of the Society (as deputies for the Cardinal-Archbishop) in the respective dioceses, where the so called “Units” of the Society were established.



Invitation to the oblation ceremony from 3rd March 1948
and Cardinal of Vienna Dr. Theodor Innitzer

For Salzburg: Univ. Prof. Dr. Jakob Reiser,
for Graz: Univ. Prof. Dr. Johann List,
for Gurk/Klagenfurt: DDr. Friedrich Illwitzer,
for the Diocese Linz: Dr. Leopold Prohaska SM,

for St. Pölten: Prof. Dr. Josef Wodka.

This information is from a booklet with 50 pages on the “**history of the Society**”. It was excellently written by **Martha Preschel**, a member who has unfortunately already passed away. She managed to bundle up all important events and phases of development of our institute and to highlight the substantial aspects.



Martha Preschel

It has been 20 years that this short booklet on the history of our Society was written. Martha writes:

The Society of Our Lady of the Way is looking back on a history of 60 years as already mentioned in the foreword. Below is the account how the Society was actually established and how it developed step by step with God’s assistance and guidance despite all difficulties and obstacles.

From a very old chronicle of the Society, which was dug up at the home of Hermine in Steyr and which consists only of some loose yellowed type-written sheets, it follows that **Fr. Carl Dinkhauser** already in the summer of 1925 formulated the idea to join together to a community some of his penitents, who were doing service in families or otherwise working. At that time, he was not yet sure himself, as he remarked in his letter, when and how this should actually be possible, but he was hoping that eventually it could be put into reality. Fr. Carl Dinkhauser was at that time in charge of the Students Sodality in Vienna.

Some time afterwards, he was transferred to Bohemia where he soon became very close to the saintly **Bishop Gross** of Leitmeritz who had already been thinking for a long time about the fact that there obviously are vocations to an apostolate in the world, which would have to be fulfilled. This actually made Fr. Dinkhauser all the more determined in his intention. Late in autumn of 1934, he met with **Maria Elisabeth** to discuss the feasibility of the foundation. Even then he had some concrete ideas which matured through discussions, prayer and meditation. From the very beginning, he stipulated an oblation to God in the Society.

It was at **Whitsun in 1935**, when Fr. Dinkhauser was celebrating Holy Mass after a retreat in a convent in **Marienbad** that Maria Elisabeth took her vow of life-long chastity.

In the following historical account, the Chronicler (Ch) would like to give Maria Elisabeth herself (ME) a chance to comment on several points.

On the occasion of our Society's Silver Jubilee in 1973, she told us in a lively manner, during a festive evening in Maria Einsiedeln, about the history of the Society's origin. This was printed in a special commemorative publication.

Maria Elisabeth is referring to Whitsun 1935. She is explaining that this feast has been particularly important in the history of the Society.



Founder and first Director General of the
"Society of Our Lady of the Way"
Maria Elisabeth Strachotinsky

ME *„In the following months, the work more and more began to take shape; not that we worked on the Constitution. They came only later and actually in a very modest miniature form which was non-judicial. What we were then working on was the Order of the Day.“*

Ch In 1935, Fr. Dinkhauser was working at **St. Mary's Church in Steyr**. At Christmas in 1935, he was transferred to **Linz**.
In **1936** the Society was established.
On **Ash Wednesday, the 26th of February 1936**, Maria Elisabeth and two other women from Steyr entered on their lives of commitment, following the established Order of the Day. On the same day, the Society prayer was introduced.
A day to remember in any case was Whit Monday – **1st June 1936 – in Kremsmünster** where the celebration of the First Oblation in our Society with the proper wording for the oblation took place in the Subiaco chapel, which was then still very small.
Since then we celebrate in our Society the feast of the consecration at Whitsun.

ME *„The Constitution was not mentioned then, because it did not yet exist. The Constitution developed only gradually in many weeks and years of intensive work – in a monastery in Bohemia, on the Erentrudis Alp near Salzburg, at the Brothers of Mercy in Kainberg and at other locations – bit by bit. Once I was reading this first Constitution and thinking by myself: Looking at them now one realises how much is actually missing. Then, they always concerned again and again only the unquestioning commitment.“*

- CH On 20th September 1936 the founder of our Society was transferred to Graz. In the first circular letter, he enclosed the “Prayer to the Mother of God” drafted by him.
In the last days of December 1936, the morning and evening prayers were written.
At that time, secular institutes were still unknown and there was little information on associations of that kind. The first members came from the Marian Solidarity. They felt called to a closer imitation of Christ in the world. They observed a rather rigid asceticism, almost like in a religious order, they met quite often, but never had a common apostolate.
The institute had from the beginning a Marian-Ignatian spirituality. The Society grew and spread within the different dioceses of Austria. The ideal of an apostolate which consisted of commitment to Christ in one’s working place, the strong family spirit and the perceptible mutual love attracted many.
- ME *„As far as the question regarding approbation under Canon Law was concerned, we were actually approached about it from outside. As the Society grew bigger it became better known. There were questions coming from the side of the Church: What about this group? Is that some kind of a secret society?
And then it became obvious that it would be necessary to strive for a canonical form. Perhaps the same happens to all foundations – they spring from the devotion of the heart. The rest comes later.
I only want to say that next to our founder, we perhaps owe the most to **Cardinal Innitzer** from Vienna. From the Church side and from the hierarchy, he was the first who put his trust in us. This was not that simple at that time because it was a new way and it was not easy for him to have us accepted within the Chancery.“*
- Ch Maria Elisabeth was living in **Prague** at the time. All applications were submitted and everything was discussed carefully, but the last decision was left to the vicar-general and he was not known as a very open-minded man. He set three conditions which were difficult to fulfil: the affiliation to a particular church and there to a particular altar, as well as a name for the Society. But that had to be decided very quickly. Maria Elisabeth had just been in Rome a short time ago and told us about “Il Gesù” and the „Mother of the Way“. This is how the title „Our Lady of the Way“ originated.
In the years from 1937 to 1940, in connection with the approbation by the Church, the constitution was redrafted several times and published in a new version. The political changes in those years brought a number of unexpected difficulties for the new Society.
However, at that time Maria Elisabeth demonstrated a lot of courage, understanding and energy; she also made big sacrifices.
In the chronicle dated March 1938 one can read the following sentence: „The new circumstances demand that the outward Society life must be discontinued.“

- ME *„Meanwhile, March 1938 had come. The conditions in Vienna had become more difficult and different, even before the approbation to „Pia Unio“ had taken place. Secular institutes did not yet exist then.“*
- Ch For the approbation of the Pia Unio by the bishop, Maria Elisabeth at first turned to the Cardinal of Prague, DDr. Karl Kasper, who however advised her, because of the unsafe situation in Prague, to submit the matter to Dr. Theodor Innitzer in Vienna. Maria Elisabeth followed this advice and approached Cardinal Innitzer who established the **Pia Unio** on **6th Jänner 1939**.
- ME *„In 1939, we celebrated the feast of Epiphany, which meanwhile is firmly established in the Society, in the famous Habsburgergasse. It would lead too far to describe how that oblation in the private chapel under the supervision of the Gestapo actually happened: the **first oblation in the Pia Unio!** Then came the Nazi period with all the difficulties involved. We suffered a lot and some of us had trouble with the Gestapo. But the LORD never left us; he guided us marvellously through this time and protected us. During that time, we were very much separated from each other and also from the Church in Rome. And we knew so little of the things happening and developing outside the “thousand-year empire”. I myself could not get to Austria any more because I was not allowed to leave the protectorate. I returned only after the end of the war.“*
- CH On 23rd July 1939 the first election of the superior took place in Subiaco. In her speech, Maria Elisabeth remembered with gratitude the former provincial of the Jesuits, **Fr. Miller**, who cared for the Society in the most difficult time like a father. When Maria Elisabeth was called to him in 1947 he said: „I have heard something about it that in Rome a decision was made which meets the idea of your foundation.“ That was „Provida Mater“, which however arrived in Austria with delay.
- ME *„When we read together the Provida, we cried out at each sentence: „Yes, that has been written for us, because of us!“ Naturally in Rome they had no idea about this small foundation in Austria, and likewise we had no idea that at the same time similar foundations had emerged elsewhere. That was good because in the way we were not influenced and remained “original”. When we read this we realised that we now had to deal seriously with the formulation of the Constitution and then apply to Rome as soon as possible. But that was more easily said than done. It would not have been possible had there not been by chance at that time an international meeting in Rome to which I had been invited as a delegate and where the Nuncio helped a lot with the financing. In those days, it was pointless for us – even if we were ready to do it – to make big sacrifices, because it was not possible to change Austrian money into other currencies. And now we have to remember somebody to whom we in the Society owe quite crucial things, the abbot general **Matthäus Quatember**, who is buried in Spain. Cardinal Innitzer gave us stacks of written recommendations to bring to*

*Rome. I visited the abbot general who came from a monastery in Czechoslovakia and whom I knew very well. In fact I approached him as a personal friend. I was very proud to show him the stack of recommendations. He told me that all my visits would be useless. – „You only must go to the man who wrote *Provida Mater ecclesiae*; **Fr. Larraona**.“*

*I never had heard about him, but I went. He was sitting in a back room of the Congregation for the Religious, and at that time he was not a cardinal or the secretary of the Congregation for the Religious, but he was the author of „*Provida Mater*“ and the greatest expert in this field. That was the way of providence!*

This was the only way that allowed us to actually be one year later one of the 13 institutes which received the approbation by Rome.“

Ch **Pope Pius XII** showed great interest in our Society. In 1947, Maria Elisabeth went to Rome with her friend whose father was Austrian ambassador in Munich at the time when Pius XII was Nuncio in Munich. So there was a personal friendship and, therefore, the possibility for an audience. Maria Elisabeth was taken along, and she made use of the opportunity to put the original of the petition for the approbation by the Church into the Holy Father's hands and to address a copy of it to the Congregation for the Religious.

When he read the petition, the pope seemed to be personally touched because he was a great admirer of Our Lady of the Way. His memory dated back to childhood because his school was very close to the church "Il Gesù". In order to reach his home, he had to cross the busy Corso street. His brother, who was one year older, had to stay in school longer. Therefore, Eugen went meanwhile to the church to wait for his older brother in the chapel of "Our Lady of the Way". From there, the big brother fetched the little one in order to guide him safely across the Corso. – This was told by the pope to Maria Elisabeth on that occasion.

ME *„After the retreat 1947 in Rodaun, Fr. Dinkhauser exclaimed with enthusiasm: „Now we have the Constitution! Maria Elisabeth will be going to Rome again; we now just have to discuss where and when we shall have the oblation ceremony in the secular institute in 1948.“ But suddenly there was the voice of **Prelate Tomek**, who was an old friend of the Society, saying: „You are planning too early. You do not know Rome. Roma aeterna est.“ But Fr. Dinkhauser's optimism and confidence triumphed: **Linz** was the first place of our **First Oblation in the Secular Institute – on 8th August 1948**.*

Ch This big feast was celebrated in the church of the "Kreuzschwestern" in Linz. Bishop Leopold Brellinger SJ, who had been working in China for a long time, celebrated on behalf of the Cardinal Archbishop Dr. Innitzer the Pontifical Coral Mass with a big assistance. All members and candidates participated in the service.

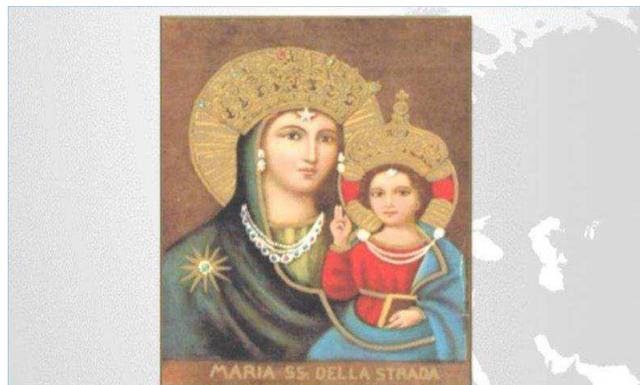
The old calendar of feast days reveals that on that day, 67 sisters made their oblation in the newly established institute. The establishment to an

Institutum saeculare of Diocesan Law was documented to have taken place already on **7th March 1948**.

- ME *„Immediately Fr. Dinkhauser was planning on: „We must start now to work towards becoming an institute of papal right.“ ...
We thought that this would be impossible. In this connection, I have to mention that Cardinal Innitzer provided our Society with the opportunity that the units could develop independently in the different dioceses.“*
- Ch *...Then came a difficult time, because our founder was separated from the Society. But he sent us messages on repeated occasions saying: „Don’t forget, the institute of papal right!“ Maria Elisabeth did not believe in that possibility and went with great reluctance to Rome. She was to procure a magazine of the Claretines. Again she would get in touch with Fr. Larraona, whom she already knew. She did not know, however, what order he was a member of.*
- ME *„I would like to tell you that because the little things show us that it is not human power, but always God himself who interferes in some way...
As I went to Rome again because of the papal approbation for the institute there had just been a big change in the Congregation for the Religious: Fr. Larraona was appointed Secretary, and at that time, the duties were just handed over to him and the Congregation for the Religious was closed! It was impossible to get an appointment. That was a load off my mind, because it seemed like an acknowledgement from above that it was too early for our Society to apply for the papal right. It was in 1950, the Holy Year. Five years after the first approbation was traditionally the earliest possible date for a promotion to an institute of papal approbation - and Fr. Dinkhauser wished this earliest date for his foundation. – I had my doubts.
Again I had something to do at the Claretines because of their magazine, but in the consulting room there was another father from the last time. I insisted to talk to the other one again, but did not know his name and described him as well as I could. Eventually they understood whom I meant – and he came. I discussed the business with him, then he asked me whether I had come to Rome for the Holy Year. I said no and told him about my unsuccessful mission. He asked me whether I could show him our files. I could, because I had my heavy briefcase on me.
Then the father stepped out for a while. When he returned he said: „You can now proceed immediately to the Congregation for the Religious. I already ordered a taxi for you.“ – I replied that this would be impossible because the Congregation for the Religious was closed. But the father answered with a smile: „Please go, the Secretary, Archbishop Larraona, is expecting you; he accepts with pleasure the request from his general.“ I was flabbergasted since I had no idea that my friendly father meanwhile advanced to his order’s general and that Fr. Larraona was a member of that order.
At the end of that long, decisive evening talk in the Congregation for the Religious, Archbishop Larraona asked me what day I would like for the approbation, and so I mentioned our Approbation Day, Epiphany.“*

Ch On 3rd January 1953 the Society received the Decretum Laudis by which it became a **Secular Institute of papal right**.

ME „Then came the **Approbation Day 1953** – five years after our first approbation! However nothing at all about a decree from Rome! As usual, Cardinal Innitzer came for the mass and the oblation ceremony. The mass started. At the end of his sermon, the cardinal took a sheet of paper from his pocket and said: „Just when I was about to step into my car a messenger came and gave me a telegram. I only read it on the way. It concerns you my dear children!“ – Then the cardinal read the telegram from the Congregation for the Religious advising of our Society’s installation as an institute of papal approbation.
„I am at the same time proud and sad“, said the cardinal, who was really touched. „I am proud about the honour which was given to the Society and at the same time the diocese; and sad because I have to dismiss you now from my diocesan power. But never forget that I shall remain the father of you all!“
Just before the renewal of vows, they slipped me a telegram from Rome which was addressed to me with the same information.
You can imagine what moved me during this renewal of the vows: the workings of providence, our father and founder’s confidence which had been heard so obviously and the responsibility which had been entrusted to our weakness.“



Old picture: „Madonna della Strada“

Ch The Society spread also outside Austria. The first members from the neighbouring countries Germany and Switzerland joined – and around the year 1958 the spread to other foreign countries and overseas, mainly to the USA, was successful.

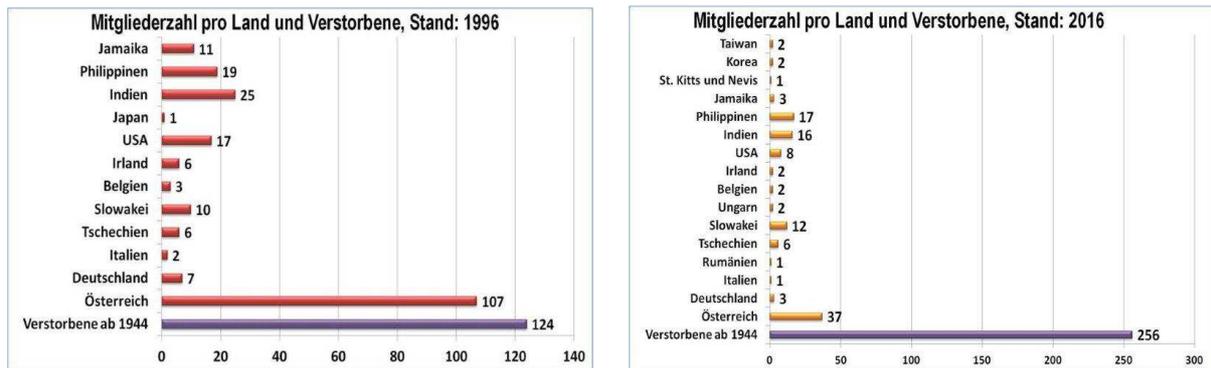
From original documents
Einsiedeln 1973

In the years from 1960 through 1970, a number of groups and units were established abroad:

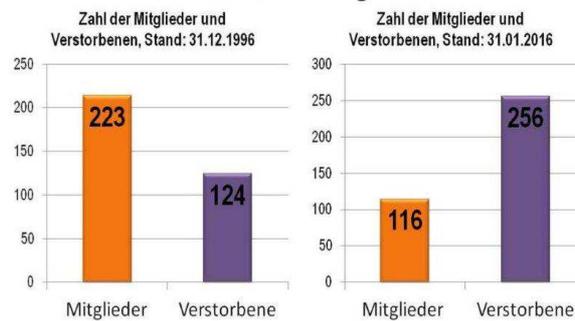
San Francisco 1958, Bridgeport, Cleveland, Los Angeles in the early 1960s, Jamaica 1960, Bombay, Jaipur, Ernakulam 1969, Ireland, Belgium, Hungary 1976, Philippines and others, that no longer exist.

During the 60 years of the Society’s existence more than 100 members have gone to eternal rest.

Here a look at our institute 20 years ago and today



Statistik der Mitglieder



unit	1996			2016		
	temporary vows	final vows	initiation probation	temporary vows	final vows	initiation probation
Graz		13			3	
St. Pölten		12			5	
Vienna	2	28	1		4	
Innsbruck		8				
Klagenfurt	1	6				
Linz	1	33			15	
Salzburg	1	13			14	
Belgium		4			2	
Ireland	2	3			2	
Munich		5				
Czech Republic	4		1	2	4	
Slovakia	4		3	1	9	2
Hungary		3			2	
Los Angeles	2	11				
Bridgeport/Cleveland		7			6 (USA)	
Jamaica	1	7	3		4	
Bombay	5	8		2	4	1
Ernakulam	1	8			5	2
Jaipur		3		1	3	
Manila	1	8		1	4	
Visayas	3	5	2	2	12	
Taiwan					2	
Korea				2		
SUMME	28	185	10	11	100	5
SUMME GESAMT		223			116	

These current statistics show that our institute is still alive, somewhere else, in the Eastern part of the world. Here there are new and dynamic members who, like us before them, chose the way that will lead them into the third millennium after Christ with Marian and Ignatian spirituality.



Sign by Director General Maria Josefa: AMDG –
Ad majorem Dei gloriam

At about the same time as the Society celebrated its 60th jubilee something very pleasing for us here, in „old Europe“ happened. In the country neighbouring us to the East, practically around the corner, we came into contact with ladies from Czechoslovakia, as it was then called. We owe Anna Elisabeth, a member from the Vienna unit, who is here with us now, much more than we will ever be able to say and thank her for, namely the Central European future of our institute in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Let us now listen to Anna Elisabeth tell us the exciting story, which came about through her great personal commitment and became of great importance to us all.



Directors of the Prague and Orava units –
Zlatica and Miluse

The Slovakian unit in retrospect (1976 – 1992)

1st stage

God can be found in different ways and sometimes in a very special way.

The first stage of our search took – in human terms – quite a long time, nearly twenty years, but in terms of eternity it was only a moment.

We, Maria Jozefa and Zlatica, realised that God was calling us and we were filled with a longing to serve Christ in consecrated life. So in the years 1976-1977 we left our town of birth, Snina in East Slovakia, and moved to the region of Orava in Mid Slovakia. The sisters of the Holy Cross worked there, among others Marta Gabaríková. The state had prohibited the sisters to continue to live and work in their religious community in 1973. They had to look elsewhere for somewhere to work and somewhere to live. So they came to Orava in plain clothes. A group of ten young women gathered around them, who were interested in their way of living.

We were officially admitted to the community by the provincial superior before we moved to Orava, the admission was of course kept secret from the state. The responsible superiors did not contact us for quite a while, maybe because they did not know how things would develop under these circumstances.

The group in Orava existed thanks to the authority of Marta (whose religious name was S. Žofia), and also thanks to the spiritual guidance of Jesuit Father Vojtech Mikula SJ (his nickname was Jozef). They endeavoured to keep the flame of vocation burning in us. Because of our contacts to Father Mikula the Sisters of the Holy Cross nicknamed us “Jesuit ladies”.

We started the official novitiate with the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1979. As there was concern over the „spirit of the community“ we received tuition in spiritual matters from Father Jan Ev. Vícha, Capuchin superior. At the same time we studied theology with the Franciscan Father Jan Bárta.

In spite of our efforts the sisters hesitated to let us take our first vows. The novitiate was continuously extended. We insisted and with the support of Father Vícha we were permitted to take our first vows (first oblation) with the community of the Sisters of the Holy Cross after five years. At this occasion we were allowed to wear the habit – a new one was sown especially for us. As the church was persecuted in Slovakia and some sisters – including Marta – were summoned for questioning by the police, all this happened in secret.

At the same time there was a permanent problem: the superiors did not trust us, they did not want to accept our way of life. A crisis in the community developed and grew. The provincial superior prohibited us to meet.

Shortly after our friends – Franciscan fathers including Father Bárta –were released from prison our superiors demanded us to care for the elderly sisters in the house of the Caritas. The condition was we had to do it in our habit.

We felt serious moral doubt whether this would look like promotion for the regime. The world could think that the situation in Slovakia was normal and that religious freedom existed. Some of the sisters told the superiors of this doubt, but these answered: if we do not come of our own free will the state will force us violently. Sister Žofia (Marta) was again taken to the police for questioning. Marta, who had already taken her final vows, was called many times to the provincial superior for discussions. She was prepared to care for the

elderly sisters but not in her habit, so as not to become promotion for the regime. Her attitude was rated as disobedience and therefore she was dispensed from her final vows on 7th August 1985 by the bishop's court in Trnava. Although she appealed she received no answer. We, Zlatica und Mária Jozefa, decided in this situation not to renew our vows. For the same reason many sisters were dispensed from their final vows at this time. Some broke off contact to the community, some married.

As Marta's and Marcela's dispensation had been granted illegally, they had to turn to the general superior in Ingebohl. This way they received a valid dispensation from Rome.

2nd stage

After the affair, which was the result of our withdrawal from the community, we had no more courage or desire to start somewhere new.

A long period of time started, in which we tried to get to terms with what had happened. It was a time of searching for a new balance, a time of fighting for our belief and also for our vocation. The four of us stayed together - Marta, Mária Jozefa, Marcela and Zlatica – and we did not stop meeting regularly. Sometimes a Jesuit joined us: Father Mikula SJ. He encouraged us and in his hands we laid our private vows.

After the political change 1989 secular institutes began to introduce themselves in Catholic newspapers. F. Mikula sent us an excerpt from a newspaper about Charitas Christi. We sent them a short letter. A member visited us. When she heard about our orientation so far she told us that there were also secular institutes with Ignatian orientation and promised to send us information.

In the meantime Father Mikula SJ continued his search. On 13th January 1992 he sent Mária Jozefa another excerpt from a newspaper with the words: „Finally a secular institute with Ignatian spirituality. Write to them immediately!“ – This was the first information we received about the Society „Madonna della Strada“. We wrote a letter. Miluše from Brno answered on 12th Februar 1992. On 11th March 1992 Father Mikula sent us pictures of Madonna della Strada with the question: „Will she be yours?“ Our long search ended here and a new path began.

Later we met Anna Elisabeth and Miluše in Dolný Kubín personally. From 28th to 31st May 1992 Mária Jozefa and Zlatica took part in an informative first encounter in Vienna.

(Excerpt from the chronicle Mária Jozefa wrote: unit ORAVA)