

Gannina Cutajar

<http://museumsdcsociety.blogspot.com/2007/01/superior-generals.html>

The first Superior General of the Society of Christian Doctrine M.U.S.E.U.M. Female Section.

At number 44 Paola Square another child was born for Family Cutajar. On the 13th of February 1893 Angelo and his wife were blessed with a child and they gave her the name of Giannina. She was the only girl in the family and had two siblings, one of them with the name of Carmelo who had been enrolled with the same Society of Christian Doctrine, that time known as 'The Society of Papidi' (followers of the Pope).

Fr. George Preca used to visit the branch (Qasam) of Paola quite often as it was one of the first branches opened. When visiting the members of Paola Fr. Preca never missed the opportunity to visit Family Cutajar which was known as one of the wealthiest families at the time.

Angelo, Giannina's father, was a tradesman of wine. They had a massive house with two warehouses which lead to the other side of St. Monica Street. Fr. George had a dream

and was thinking of making it come true with the help of Giannina. Therefore, Fr. George talked this over with Carmelo, Giannina's brother, and told him about this dream, that is that female members start teaching catechism to the girls. Giannina was only sixteen years of age at the time, and when her brother Carmelo told her about Fr. George's proposal, she accepted and obeyed realizing that this was the will of God shown to her by means of Fr. George Preca.

Giannina was a simple young lady who was eager to learn. When Fr. Preca got to know that Giannina accepted the proposal he decided to go and talk to her personally. In the year 1909 Giannina stated in front of the Church's authority 'I was invited by Fr. George Preca to start teaching Catechism and to dedicate my life for this kind of apostolate.' Fr. Francis Attard, parish priest of Tarxien, had a close relation with the parish of Paola, and he gave permission to Giannina to start on this mission, that is teaching catechism.

On the tenth of January 1910 the first female branch of the Society of Christian Doctrine was opened. The Paola Parish Priest knew Giannina to be of a very good character and thus he did not find any objection to give her the permission to start teaching catechism. On the contrary he

gave a good helping hand and cooperated with Giannina to help this society to flourish in Paola, especially now that from July of the same year Paola was no longer attached to Tarxien parish.

Fr. George Preca found it a bit difficult to frequent the female branches that were increasing gradually, contrary to the male ones which flourished quite quickly. This is because it was already out of the ordinary to have lay people teaching catechism as this was attributed only to clergy more so having females teaching catechism. It was very hard to accept the fact that a woman was to take this role.

In the meantime Fr. Preca felt the need to give good formation to Giannina so that she will later give this formation to her fellow members. Besides, he did not want to interfere much in the female section. Giannina was sure that she will receive the necessary help from Fr. George Preca, so she committed herself fully for this apostolate. She took it so seriously that later on the inquisitive commission (Kummissjoni tal-inkjesta) attributed the founding of the female section to Giannina and not to Fr. Preca. Giannina was the local superior of Paola as she herself declared, "I started the branch in Paola and was its superior. The first female members did not have anywhere

to meet except the warehouse of my father Angelo. New members were joining the society: these are some of them - Carmela Rizzo, Gulia Rizzo, Carmela Darmanin, Lizzie German, Vincenza Borg, Rebekka Gibson, Guzeppa Cutajar, Guzeppa De Giovanni, Giannina Caruana, Rosaria Sofia, Carmela Galea and Pawlina Abela . The meeting place that is the garage of Angelo was very small and uncomfortable, they did not even have chairs to sit on. So, Giannina and her colleagues used to carry stone, on which they put a plank of wood to serve them as benches.

Giannina now is a mature young lady, who can be trusted as she proved to be responsible and dedicated with anything that she was entrusted. She lived her vocation with love and dedication. Giannina used to gather young girls to teach them during the week and then to take them to confession once a week. Her pleasure was when every now and then Fr. George Preca used to visit them and give them a talk to help them grow spiritually.

It was also a pleasure for Giannina to teach young children and it seemed that even the children who attended for her classes enjoyed the lessons they received from Giannina as they looked forward to go to the catechism lessons. Some of those girls who are still alive today say that they were so

glad that they used to go out from class singing in the streets of Paola this rhyme:

'Come, come let's go to the MUSEUM.

We go with gladness

because we learn a lot of prayers

we go to Giannina where we learn catechism'

Of course in Maltese it rhymes very well. It goes like this:

'Ejjew ejjew ejjew,

immorru l-Museum.

Il-Museum immorru bil-qalb,

ghax nitghallmu hafna talb

Immorru ghand Giannina - biex nitghallmu d-duttrina.'

The number of children attending catechism classes increased. Thus the warehouse that Giannina was using got small for the number attending. Therefore, Angelo, Giannina's father, rented a small house in St. Monica Street to the female section for little money. Children were now being prepared for their First Holy Communion, and on this occasion Giannina used to give a small party for the children and during the same week she invited their parents to celebrate this great event. This she also did at Christmas time.

Giannina's devotion to the Holy Eucharist made her ask the parish priest to give them permission to have the Holy Sacrament in one of the rooms of this place which later on it was turned into a chapel, the members used to make adoration day and night. This chapel is still in use till today.