

ASC Profiles 19, Marciana Heimerman, was researched and written by historian Sister Tarcisia Roths, ASC, with the assistance of Sister Charlotte Rohrbach, ASC.

It is one of a series of profiles of important women in the history of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

This profile traces the work of a woman whose spirit and missionary zeal led the congregation through the 1960's and 1970's into the new vision of Church and Religious Life promulgated in the documents of Vatican II.

Profile 19: Marciana Heimerman, ASC

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PROLOGUE

“We can thank God that our task as elected leaders is not to create a plan for the new to emerge. We are called to create a space . . . in which the Holy Spirit is free to work.”

Sharlet Wagner, CSC Presidential Address, LCWR, 2019

This quotation speaks eloquently of the person of Marciana Heimerman, and the role she played as a leader: first, as the leader in the Wichita, Kansas, Province of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ from 1960-1965, and then as General Superior of the ASC international congregation from 1965-1975. Marciana created the SPACE in which the Holy Spirit could be free to work.

She became provincial in Wichita after having been absent for 13 years while serving as a missionary sister along the Amazon River in Brazil. She came into this role knowing little of the turmoil which had divided the sisters in Wichita, but in her kind, loving, non-judgmental and gentle spirit, she provided space for the healing breath of the Spirit to do Her work.

In Rome, in 1965, Marciana became the first non-Italian to have ever been elected as the General Superior since the founding of the community 130 years earlier. Again, through her love reaching out in an embrace, which was life giving to all despite cultural and linguistic differences, she provided space for the Spirit of Saint Maria De Mattias to expand throughout the world with the Adorers who continued to found missions and bring God’s love to people in many lands.

Marciana knew her limits and her weaknesses, but she was totally open to each person and each need – without judging, without choosing sides, without bias or prejudice. She was truly “. . . a bridge over troubled waters. . .”

THE EARLY YEARS

In the tumultuous years of the 19th Century, when the various German states were being unified by Otto von Bismarck into what became the German Empire in 1871 under the Kaisers, many German families emigrated to the United States to find a more peaceful home. The father of John Paul Heimerman was among these early immigrants from Luxembourg who settled in Wisconsin. Other families, among which was the family of Anna Caroline Voegeli, immigrants from Alsace-Lorraine, settled in Minnesota.

The Heimerman and Voegeli families were typical of the emigrants who left the area of Alsace-Lorraine and the banks of the Rhine River, particularly from the south of Cologne and north of Frankfurt. They settled in states near the western Great Lakes. They resembled pioneers who stayed for a while and later, because of various circumstances, moved west and south to new territories. These territories welcomed settlers who had left the German states after the Civil War to come to the United States. Between 1865 and 1875, they became the backbone of the new state of Kansas (1861) as well as bordering states. Both the Heimerman and Voegeli families settled in a German-speaking area just west of the city of Wichita, which was incorporated in 1870. Both families secured lands in the village of Ost, Kansas, where numerous German families established farms.

The small town consisted mainly of the parish church, dedicated to Saint Joseph, a rectory, a school, and a convent for the sisters of the Most Precious Blood from Wichita, Kansas, who staffed the school. John Heimerman and his wife Anna Voegeli were members of the Ost village community.

To this couple were born 11 children; one son and one daughter died in infancy. The ninth child, Pauline Catherine, was born on February 21, 1911, during a raging blizzard. Fearing that the baby would not survive the storm, the parents sent an older son to bring the pastor, Father Greuter, to the home. He baptized the baby girl within three hours of her birth.

The Catholic Church was the center of life for the families in the area, and they sent their children to the parish school where the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood taught. Pauline and her siblings loved the many bible stories they learned in religion class, and spent hours re-enacting these stories on the banks of the creek running through their farm.

Life in the Heimerman home was joyful and there was much music and singing. Pauline had a special talent for music, which was nurtured in their home. She remembers hearing songs in church, and then coming home and picking out the melodies on a reed organ in the family room. This love for music, and her inborn talent, followed her throughout her life, enabling her to teach music in the schools, and often to provide for music in the churches where she ministered. It was a very natural way for the young girl to express her joy in life and in her family and schoolmates.

Another source of joy for Pauline were the beauties of nature: the flowers, the running waters in the creek, the trees, and birds. She loved the sunshine, but even more she loved the myriads of stars filling the night sky. It was on the night of her Confirmation, May 19, 1924, that she felt a strong movement of the Spirit. As she and her sister Teresa were walking that evening, Marciana pointed to the stars in the southern sky, and she said, "There is where I want to go – to be a missionary there, far, far to the south." At the time, she was 13 years of age.

When Pauline was 15, her sister Sophia, who had entered the convent of the Adorers of the Precious Blood in Ruma, Illinois, came home for her visit following her pronouncement of first vows as Sister Georgiana. She asked Pauline if she would go back with her, but Pauline's answer was, "Oh, I'm not ready. Not now. I'm not ready to go to the convent. I'm going to Andale High School." As the days of Georgiana's visit went on, and the two were out in the alfalfa patch catching grasshoppers, her sister once again brought up the idea of Pauline going back with her to Ruma, but Pauline answered, "I haven't even talked to my mother and father." So Georgiana dropped the subject.

That evening, as Pauline was helping to serve the supper, she heard Georgiana say to their father, "You know, Pauline would like to go to the convent." Pauline ran outside and sat on the porch. When Georgiana came out, she told her that her father said, "If she wants to go so badly, she can surely try it. She is a good girl and she would make a fine nun."

The next morning, Georgiana told Pauline to get her baptismal and Confirmation certificates, and pack her bag. And so began the new life for Pauline as she went to Ruma with her sister on August 15, 1926. After her years of postulancy and novitiate, Pauline made her first vows as Sister Marciana, on July 1, 1928.[1]

EARLY LIFE AS AN ADORER

In 1929, the religious community made the decision to divide into provinces, and one province was established in Wichita, Kansas. Sisters from that area who wished to return from Ruma were allowed to do so. Marciana and Georgiana returned, and for the next 18 years, Marciana was assigned to various parishes in Kansas and Oklahoma, teaching in the schools and assisting with the music in the school and in the parish church.

Sister Marciana was first assigned to the parish and school in Bushton, Kansas, with her former third and fourth grade teacher, Sister Stanislaus Wessel. Marciana was about 18 years old and it was somewhat lonesome since none of the young sisters lived nearby. The sisters did not have a car and waited on others to provide necessary transportation. Lacking transportation, they primarily remained in Bushton and walking was their usual mode of leisure recreation. On Sunday they often walked around the entire section when weather permitted. Marciana taught the first four grades and all of the music. When they could not go out walking, Marciana would go back to the school where they had a "really nice-sounding reed organ." Her only complaint was that she could not get enough bass to please her. In time she invented various sounds and then settled on the trumpet, which she provided herself with her mouth and throat. "I placed my tongue against the back of my teeth; then I blew until I finally got the bass sound I wanted via my throat. Half of my lips were closed and half open. When Sister Madeleine Kisner and I were together in St. Mark's, Kansas, she wanted to learn how to make the sound. Over the years both of us enjoyed making music together as well as separately providing entertainment for so many around the globe," she later explained.[2]

One experience during these early years was her work with Father Leon McNeill in his ministry to the Black community in North Wichita, at Saint Peter Claver Parish, where she spent four years teaching and doing social work. These years played a role in opening her heart and hands to persons of other cultures and races - a characteristic that continued to mark her ministry throughout her life, and prepared her to deepen in her sisters an appreciation of the internationality of the community of Adorers.

In the mid-1930's as part of Europe was being drawn into tensions created by the rise of Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany, a few sisters from Liechtenstein, Austria, and Switzerland were eager to join the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood serving in Altamira, Brazil. They were encouraged by the "missionary heart" of Sister Anna Walker. The local leadership of the Adorers were fearful of a breakout of another world war. Sister Anna approached the General Administration in Rome for approval to work alongside the Missionaries. The final years of the 1930's and the war years of the 1940's found these sisters totally cut off from their European roots. Limited assistance was provided by the Wichita Province in the 1940's. It was during this time that the Redemptorist Fathers from Wichita approached the sisters with a request that they consider joining their mission group further north of Altamira along the Amazon River. Sister Evelyn Gorges, a sister from the Wichita Province serving on the General Council, accompanied Sister Julitta Elsen to visit Brazil and ascertain whether sisters from Wichita should join the sisters in Altamira or respond to the invitation of the Redemptorists. It was determined that the best location for potential missionary growth and ministry would be with the Redemptorists along the Amazon River.

Years later, the two groups of Adorers in Brazil would merge.[3]

When Sister Evelyn and Sister Julitta returned to Wichita, they brought with them a young woman from Manaus, Brazil, Noemi Cinque, who had been waiting for the opportunity to join the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, the religious community the Redemptorist priests had told her about, and who were coming to establish a mission in Brazil. She entered the convent in Wichita and, after making her vows two years later, she - now Sister Serafina - returned to Brazil to help in establishing the new foundation.

The opening of the mission was approved by the General Assembly in Rome in the summer of 1947. [4] Sisters were invited to volunteer for the mission, and both Sisters Georgiana and Marciana were chosen to be a part of the team to go. Marciana remembered that when the pastor at their home parish admonished them that this would be a tremendous sacrifice for their father, Georgiana said, "Don't tell him where Brazil is. He won't know how far away it is." This was a fulfillment of the wish of Marciana so many years earlier on the day of her Confirmation, to be a missionary ". . . far, far away to the South."

A MISSIONARY IN BRAZIL

The four missionary sisters – Julitta Elsen, Georgiana Heimerman, Marciana Heimerman, and Jane Frances Baalman - flew to Belem, Brazil, on November 25, 1947. They were met there by the Redemptorist priests who flew on with them to the capital city of Manaus. The last stage of their journey to their destination in Coari was made by boat, a journey of five days. They arrived on Christmas Day after having celebrated Mass on Christmas Eve on the boat.

Their small home had been arranged in an empty building with rough board floors and small beds with straw mattresses. Each morning after Mass, Father Elsworthy, knowing how important a knowledge of the language would be for them, taught the sisters to speak and write Portuguese. Following the classes, their first concern was to set up a clinic for people needing care. Sister Jane Frances, the nurse, was soon deluged with patients suffering from the many tropical diseases in the region. Meanwhile, spaces were prepared for classes, and school supplies that had been sent from America were unpacked in preparation for classes to begin in March. Marciana had brought rhythm band instruments that she would use in the school as she taught the students in music.

However, a priority for Sister Julitta, superior of the mission, was to begin a novitiate to prepare young women of Brazil to become Adorers. The first group of seven young women came by boat from Manaus, and arrived on March 4, 1948. In a few days three more women arrived from Manacapuru and Altamira. Marciana was appointed to form the postulants in preparation for the novitiate.

When the school opened on March 15 there were 140 students in five elementary grades. Marciana helped with teaching as well as preparing students for the choir.

As plans for the novitiate began to emerge, it became evident to all that the location for this stage of the young aspirants' preparation for religious life should be Manaus, rather than in their present location in Coari. Most of the current postulants were from Manaus, and there would be other young

women there who would be interested in joining the community. As a larger city, there would not only be more priests available for instruction, but other opportunities for education, as the sisters would need to pursue certification for teaching, nursing, and social work. With the help of the Redemptorists in Manaus a site was located and construction on the novitiate began. Sisters Julitta and Serafina Cinque, the native of Brazil who had gone to Wichita for her postulancy and novitiate and had returned to Brazil in the summer of 1948, went to Manaus in January, 1949, to oversee the building project and purchase articles for the new home. Serafina was well known in the city, and so she was a great help to Julitta in making the necessary arrangements for the opening of the novitiate in that city.

By February, the building was far enough along for Marciana and the 10 postulants to come to the city for a retreat in preparation for their entrance date, March 4. On February 21, they boarded the Redemptorists' boat, the "Estrela de Mar," for the two-day journey on the Amazon River to Manaus. Julitta and Serafina met the boat and took the group by bus to their new home. After their tour of the convent Marciana opened up the small portable organ she had brought, and all sang, "Holy God."

During their retreat, the bishop, Dom Alberto Ramos, came to conduct the canonical examinations for the postulants. He expressed his delight and pride in the first novitiate in the history of Amazonas. On March 4, the church was filled with the many people who had come to witness the ceremony. The 10 postulants wearing bridal dresses were received into the community, and donned their white habits. The bishop handed each of the novices a lighted candle for their procession out of the church. The Governor of Amazonas and all the state and city officials were there. One woman in the crowd was heard to say that now she was ready to go to heaven because she had seen the most beautiful thing in the world. What a wonderful witness and solemn beginning for the Community of Adorers on a new continent!

Marciana continued her service as Novice Director from 1949 until 1960. While she had hoped to be a missionary "on the front line and in the trenches" so to speak in working directly with the people, she accepted this assignment in her usual, joyful manner. She served in an indispensable arena in forming the young women who would continue the work of establishing the community of Adorers in Brazil. This community would become an integral part of the life of the Church along the Amazon River in future years. She also continued her ministry in the liturgical and musical life of the convent and the parish.

Marciana loved her life in Brazil: the simplicity of the people and their warmth, and the building of Christian communities in the villages along the Amazon River without the presence of resident pastors. Here she experienced the reality of the Church as the "People of God," one of the teachings so strongly promoted by the Vatican Council II.[5]

PROVINCIAL SUPERIOR, WICHITA, KANSAS

In 1960, while on a visit to Wichita, Marciana received a telegram from the General Superior in Rome, Mother Lea Corradi, telling her that she was not to return to Brazil, but that she was appointed the provincial superior of the Wichita Province.

She came into the role as provincial in the midst of a very troubled time, knowing very little of the division among the sisters which had involved a visitation of the community ordered by the General Superior. As she later expressed her feelings at receiving the assignment she said, "I wasn't involved in the controversy, which perhaps was why I was appointed to the position of provincial, though I thought it was the end of the world for me." She also admitted that this was the most difficult assignment for her in her entire religious life. She recalled being in her room that night, alone, looking at the crucifix on the wall, and finally having the courage to say "Yes." Her gentle, loving, non-judgmental spirit enabled the members of the province to move through the coming months to put an end to the disruptions of the previous years, and to reach a peaceable resolution. Marciana later looked back on this period as a call to her to be ". . . a bridge over troubled waters" to bring the Holy Spirit of reconciliation to all of the sisters. In her history of the Congregation, Antonietta Maraone wrote of this decision: "To Mother Marciana Heimerman fell the task of bringing peace to souls lacerated by divisions. She had lived many years in Brazil and personally was a lover of peace. She seemed the best person to bring back serenity to the province." [6]

The sisters in Wichita had just moved into the newly constructed "Motherhouse" in 1959. On July 1, 1960, Bishop Mark Carroll dedicated the building with these words: "A Motherhouse is . . . a fruitful spiritual laboratory where young women are taught how to acquire the triple equipment that is so necessary in the religious life: knowledge, love and service." [7] The years of Marciana's role as provincial superior brought many developments needing her attention in what was a stark change from her life and ministry in Brazil. Very early in her term, the Wichita Diocese was looking to turn over the sponsorship of Villa Maria, a care home for the elderly in Mulvane, Kansas, to the Adorers. The sisters under the direction of the diocese, had been operating the home since 1950. With the new convent having just been completed, Mother Marciana explained that the community was heavily indebted and consequently had no funds to buy the Villa. The diocese turned it over to the province for \$1.00.

Another sponsored ministry was Sacred Heart College. The college had been established in 1933, primarily to prepare ASC Sisters and sisters of other communities to teach in the many Catholic schools throughout the Wichita Diocese, particularly in the new parishes being established in Wichita. The college operated as a two-year institution until 1952 when the requirement of a baccalaureate degree for a teaching certificate necessitated its expansion into a four-year institution. In 1960 the college needed a new president. Marciana and her council, after discernment, appointed Sister Sylvia Gorges to this post. This decision in hindsight proved very providential, as Sylvia transformed the college from a "convent" school for women into an independent corporation governed by its own Board of Trustees, becoming a coed college in 1965. During her tenure the college attained accreditation by the North Central Accrediting Body, now named the Higher Learning Commission. These years also saw remarkable physical expansion of the college's facilities. In appreciation of Marciana's support of the college, the newly constructed science facility was named the "Marciana Heimerman Science Center."

These years saw an increasing emphasis on sisters attaining higher degrees, many geared to filling faculty roles in various disciplines at Sacred Heart College, but also for roles of administration and nursing in the Order's health care facilities. Other sisters began catechetical ministry for adults, training them to undertake religious instruction in the parishes where there were no Catholic schools.

Marciana was able to carve out time in 1962 to visit her beloved Brazil and the community there. What a joy it was for her to see all that she had helped to build! The community was by this time a vice-province in the Congregation, flourishing as a substantial and dynamic presence of Adorers along the Amazon River.

The missionary thrust of the ASC Congregation brought further changes to the Wichita Province, beginning during the time of Marciana's tenure and undoubtedly stirring her missionary heart. A visit from a Korean priest began the investigation of a possible establishment of a foundation in South Korea, and the first young women arrived to begin their formation.

In addition to the many decisions concerning expanding ministries needing Marciana's attention, her heart was open to, and excited about the movement among religious women throughout the United States in the 1960's which came to be called the Sister Formation Program. This was in response to a challenge from the pope to the American Sisters to reform their lives. The change was to be based on looking at three things: the call of Christ in the Gospel, studying the foundress of the order and discerning what she would be doing if she were living in this time and place, and asking what the signs of the time were calling them to do. Sisters were attending meetings, reading books, listening to lectures, discussing their call, and looking at their lives in light of this call to transformation.

It was obvious to Marciana that this transformation would require changes in the Constitution and Bylaws of the Congregation, as well as in the style of life in community. She followed with great interest and excitement the documents being produced in Rome at the Vatican Council II, which had been called by Pope John XXIII to "open the windows" to the Spirit of God, and to transform the entire Church into a new identity as the "People of God." Her years in Latin America had opened her heart to the cries of the many people who, largely due to the absence of ordained clergy, often felt abandoned by the Church. This sentiment was demonstrated by the tenets of the "Liberation Theology" prevalent among many theologians working in countries where the Church was often dominated by the wealthy ruling classes. A quote from the annals in looking back on Marciana's years as provincial highlights this impetus: "Mother Marciana had been provincial during Vatican Council II and in that office helped put in motion the program of renewal and adaptation which the Council called for. She urged the sisters to study the Constitution and submit recommendations relative to needed changes in the Constitution of the Order. Local, provincial and inter-provincial meetings were held, in which Mother Marciana took a leading part. Every effort was made to help the sisters become more active in community affairs and to discuss them intelligently." [8]

Prayer forms were adapted to meet the needs of active sisters, while emphasis was strongly on the growing understanding of the charism of Maria De Mattias. Daily use of the Lauds and Vespers of the Church's liturgy were introduced, and the formation programs for women joining the community and the study of the vows were formed by new insights.

There were tentative experimentations and discussions regarding the religious habit and slowly some changes were put in place; however, the wide differences among the sisters regarding changes were respected, and the changes came slowly.

GENERAL CHAPTER 1965

As the time for the General Chapter of 1965 came near there was a great sense of expectation in the air for the members of the ASC Community. The need for a revision of the Constitution had been anticipated at the previous Assembly in 1959. The guidelines provided by Vatican Council II included the application of important principles: subsidiarity and collegiality, a need to promote the sense of personal maturity, and a greater flexibility in apostolic commitment.

In Europe, most provinces of the Adorers looked to the general administration to initiate the study for these revisions. For one reason or another the task was not begun by the general leadership, who decided to await directives on religious life that were expected to come from Vatican Council II. The Adorers in the United States, however, had begun these discussions as a part of the Sister Formation Program.

In 1964 the General Superior appointed a commission of Italian Sisters to look into a revision of the 1934 document. When news of this commission reached the United States, the three U.S. provinces resumed the work which had been begun earlier. Their work now took a new direction suggested by the orientation of Vatican Council II. This work corresponded to the charism of Maria De Mattias as it appeared from recently completed work in researching original sources. Mother Lea, General Superior, called members of the Provinces to Rome in mid-July to form an international commission, but differences in approach made any collaboration difficult if not impossible. Sisters were invited to submit proposals to the Assembly but were limited to only two subjects: observance of obedience and the common life, especially with regard to poverty.[9]

This spirit of expectation influenced the sisters elected to attend the General Chapter of the Order in Rome in the summer of 1965. There was a growing concern among the sisters in the United States to call the international community to seek meaningful changes in lifestyle and practices. A group of sisters had drafted a revised document called the "Life Charter" to take to the General Chapter for discussion. There was also a growing sense that there might be an American Sister elected to the position of General Superior. This however would be a tremendous shift, since from the time of its founding by Saint Maria De Mattias there had always been an Italian Sister in this role. As the delegates made the weeklong ocean voyage to Rome, there was much discussion among them about the upcoming Chapter.

The 11 delegates from the U.S. Provinces and Brazil had much time to gather on the ship, the Michelangelo. They met each afternoon on one of the decks, and discussed matters for the Assembly, especially the drafting of a new Constitution. The "Life Charter" which was being proposed as a prologue to the statutes was a beautifully expressed outlook on religious life for today's world, and how the charism of the foundress Maria De Mattias could be lived out in the lives of the sisters.

There was also discussion about the prospect of electing an American General Superior; two names circulating among the delegates were Mother Catherine Girrens, Provincial of Ruma, and Mother Marciana Heimerman, Provincial of Wichita.

The delegates arrived a week before the Assembly would begin, and several days were spent in this

touring the sites in Rome. For Marciana, this was her first visit to Italy, and she was overwhelmed by this experience: to see the major basilicas and Roman ruins, and just thinking of Saints Peter and Paul having lived and been martyred there. While visiting the catacombs, Sister Angelita Myerscough from Ruma stood beside Marciana and said quietly, "Sister Marciana, here is where you must pray, because come next week you are going to be the martyr." Oh, no, that can't happen!" she answered.

Later they visited the Quo Vadis Chapel on the Appian Way where Peter, while determined to leave Rome for fear of persecution, met Christ and asked him: "Master, where are you going?" Christ replied, "I am going back to Rome to suffer." Again, as they knelt in the little chapel to pray, Angelita whispered to Marciana, "Now here is another place where you must pray, pray hard here, too, because come next week if you are chosen you cannot run away from Rome. Just like Peter, remember Christ is going to meet you."

"No, no, no. It can't be me," Marciana responded. "Mother Catherine would be the one." Angelita only answered, "You are going to be the one."

That evening back at the Generalate, when Angelita told the other American delegates about Marciana's reluctance to face the possibility of being elected, they sent Sister Vivian Miller who had been with Marciana in Brazil to go to speak with her. As they stood looking out into the courtyard, Vivian tried to persuade Marciana that if she were elected she should accept this as the will of God for her. Marciana remembered later that she had shed tears, but simply tried to put the thought from her mind.[10]

The delegates engaged in three days of spiritual preparation and recollection before the opening of the Assembly. On the evening before its opening Cardinal Trolle, the Cardinal Protector for the community, met to interview each chapter member especially about their choice for superior general.

On the morning of August 20 after prayers before the Blessed Sacrament, Cardinal Trolle led the delegates to the Assembly Room. He proceeded down the red carpet to a small stage and the election process began.

As the voting through the first and second balloting showed a growing number of delegates indicating their choice of Marciana, she became increasingly uneasy until finally, after the third balloting, the Cardinal announced: "Marciana Heimerman has received the majority of votes, and she has been elected. We will now ask her whether or not she accepts."

Marciana made her way up to the Cardinal's chair and knelt down before him. He took her hands in his, and said, "Now, Sister, you should remember that the sisters chose you," and he assured her that this was a sign of God's will for her. He then said, "If you can at all, say yes. This is a very serious obligation."

Marciana's tears were running down on the Cardinal's hands, and he spoke very quietly to her for some time. At last, Marciana responded with her "Yes." With his congratulations, the Cardinal handed her the seal of the Congregation. Then all returned to the chapel for Benediction and Adoration.[11]

The implications of Marciana's election were enormous. As was stated earlier, no one other than an Italian Sister had held this position. In addition, it had become the practice to elect a General Superior for a second term, allowing many delegates to assume that Mother Lea Corradi would be re-elected. Marciana realized that, despite the many sisters who rejoiced at her election, many of the Italian delegates were upset with the election of a non-Italian. However, by this time in its history, the community now had provinces throughout Europe and North America, with far-flung missions and foundations. Moreover, with the Spirit emanating from the current Vatican Council II urging transformation throughout the universal Church, the election seemed providential.

For Marciana, however, it was an unexpected blow. At the time of her election, she was 54 years of age. She later recalled that, after the delegates had expressed their obedience to her as General Superior, she gave a short speech acknowledging her need for their prayers, her feelings of weakness, and her sense of inability to meet the challenges of the office. However, she added that God had given her two gifts that would stand her in good stead: an international heart to love all peoples of diverse cultures, and – laughingly – she admitted to having an international stomach![12]

The members of the general administration, elected on August 22 were Rosaria Carbone, Catherine Girrens, Elena Fabiani, and Fabiola Bockmann as general assistants, with Antonietta Maraone as secretary and Alessandra Ortolani as treasurer.[13]

During the days of the Assembly following the elections, the members discussed and voted on proposals. However, many proposals were delayed in light of the coming revision of the Constitution. On September 2, Mother Marciana spoke of the need for much work on the task of revision and more time for studying the preliminary drafts that had been submitted. She suggested delaying any decision until the revision was finalized. A proposal was made to request that the Sacred Congregation send a delegate to assist the members on how to proceed with the revision.

Father Guay, who offered his help on September 10, counselled against finishing the revision of the Constitution before the end of Vatican Council II. He suggested that the preparatory work be continued, with a single text translated into all the spoken languages. He also pointed out the need to elect a new commission since the earlier one had ceased to function. For three days the meeting was suspended while Father Guay, in collaboration with some delegates, prepared a document around points which would need to be considered in the work of revision. When the meeting re-convened, a decision was made that the work on the Constitution be entrusted to a post-conciliar commission to be appointed within six months of the close of the Assembly. This commission was to involve all community members and to prepare a definitive work for a special General Assembly.

Voting on other matters submitted in proposals to the Assembly was completed between September 15 and 18. The most challenging chapter in the history of the congregation was officially closed.[14]

IMMEDIATE STEPS LEADING TO SPECIAL ASSEMBLY, 1968

As Marciana and her council began their work as the General Administration, Marciana saw her duty outlined for her in the documents of Vatican Council II, particularly in the **Perfectae caritatis: Decree**

on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life. “The spirit of love and openness, of poverty and simplicity, form the core of renewal. It is simply a return to the spirit of the Christ in the Gospels,” she said.

In her history of the Congregation Antonietta Maraone wrote of this time: “Mother Marciana, the Superior General, had natural gifts and a rich apostolic experience which helped her in carrying out her difficult assignment. Already during the General Chapter, everyone could experience her great love of peace and her appreciation of the various cultures. Her enthusiasm for beauty, the simplicity of her ways, and her respect for the human person quickly won for her the affection of the sisters who approached her.”[15]

Certainly for Marciana there were experiences in her life to help her to adjust to her new role: one was her years in Brazil, learning the language and culture of the native people along the Amazon River and loving them deeply; secondly, having learned to speak the Portuguese language the transition to Italian was somewhat easier than it might have been; and finally, in her earlier work among the African-American parishioners at St. Peter Claver Parish in Wichita, she opened her heart to people of a culture different from her own. Also, her experience in the Latin American Church, with an awareness of Liberation Theology, and the current spirit coming from the Vatican Council, opened her heart to the “new ways” God was leading the Church. Marciana later said, “Being in Rome during the last months of the Council and attending several of the final sessions in which I felt the power of the Spirit moving the Church was one of the greatest happenings in my life.”

Marciana brought her own spirit of simplicity into life at the Generalate. The members of the General Administration began eating their meals with the community of sisters, rather than in their own quarters which was the prior practice. This was a significant change in their relationship with the sisters, establishing a genuine community life within the group. As one sister told her some weeks after the beginning of her term, “The spirit in the house is altogether different. It is now full of love.”

A very important contribution that Marciana made early on was to provide the opportunity for herself and the sisters, particularly in Italy, to get to know one another, by making visits to the various communities. Her jovial spirit and smile, her attitude of listening to each sister, were important in helping the international congregation to come together and lose their fear of having an American General Superior. Her own life of faith and her spirit of prayer contributed to her acceptance by sisters of other nationalities.

Another very visible change that came with Marciana’s administration was the lessening of authoritarianism and the frequent intervention of the General Council in situations at the provincial level, which often interfered with the authority at lesser levels of elected leadership. Particularly in the United States in the Sister Formation Program of the 1960’s there had been a growing emphasis on principles of flexibility, collegiality, and subsidiarity.

In the year following the General Chapter of 1965, the centennial of the death of the foundress Maria De Mattias on August 20, 1866, was celebrated with great solemnity throughout the congregation. The recent work having begun in the translation of Maria’s letters and materials about her life and times was invaluable in making known to the wider community the particular charism that had

inspired her in founding the congregation, especially her love for the “dear neighbor,” and its implications for members in their apostolic spirituality.

REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTION

The revision of the Constitution however was the greatest responsibility given to Marciana and her Council by the General Assembly. Vatican Council II signaled a new direction for the Church. “To live the Council” became the watchword in the period immediately following it. *Perfectae Caritatis*, issued on October 28, 1965, advised religious communities to “. . . a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community and the adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the time.” This meant that not only the constitutions, but also the customs, prayer life, directories, and other similar books were to be reviewed and modified based on the documents coming from the Council, deleting rules which were no longer current.

On February 19, 1966, the General Council chose members for the international commission and charged them with coordinating the work of reviewing the documents, keeping in mind all the countries where the congregation had provinces. The commission was given the name CIRCA (Commission International for the Renovation of the Constitution of the Adorers). Members of the commission invited the involvement of all members of the congregation in their work, and were pleased by the response they received. The extraordinary General Council to act on the revised constitution was scheduled to assemble on June 14, 1968.

When the delegates arrived in Rome, they were divided into five committees assigned to deal respectively with five topics: religious life, apostolate, formation, government, and administration. A coordinating committee under the direction of Catherine Girrens drew up the daily agenda. For the first time there was simultaneous translation and the voting was done electronically. Adorers throughout the world were kept informed of developments by means of news bulletins. The sessions continued until August 28. On September 14, Mother Marciana promulgated both the Chapter Acts and the tentative Constitution “ad experimentum.” The experimental text of the Constitution included an introductory section stating and explaining the principles upon which it was based. The main text was subdivided into “Life Charter,” “Statutes,” and “Rules.” It was a very new text which put into greater relief the principal sources of the community’s spirituality and was fully in harmony with the new direction taken by Vatican Council II. A significant decision contained in the Chapter Acts was the change in the Congregation’s title from “Adorers of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ad.PP.S.) to “Adorers of the Blood of Christ” (ASC). In light of the spirituality of the congregation, the Acts strongly encouraged the taking of Communion from the Cup.[16]

POLAND PROVINCE

With the intensive work on the revision of the Constitution having been completed, Marciana and her Council were able to give their attention to a situation which had developed in the Province of Poland in the late 1940’s. The community of Adorers had had a difficult time in becoming established in that country. The first Polish women to become Adorers were from the Polish immigrant families who had fled from Poland to Yugoslavia to escape the Nazi scourge in their homeland, and had entered the community of Adorers there. The Polish immigrants had remained strongly bound to their

own nation. At the end of World War II, the Polish government decided to recall the Polish people scattered throughout the world. Many convoys brought back to their nation Polish people who were living in Bosnia and Croatia. Sister Lidwina Sikora had become an Adorer in Yugoslavia, but had long desired to establish this community in Poland. Therefore, at the invitation of the Polish government Lidwina and seven other Polish Sisters requested permission to return to their homeland. They made the journey on July 26, 1946. Later, on August 9, they received permission from the Bishop in Wroclaw to live in that diocese. This intent of the Polish Sisters had been discussed at the General Assembly in July, 1946. Permission was given to the Provincial of Croatia who was sympathetic with the sisters' desire to gain the permission of a Polish Bishop, and then make a regular request to the General Council. However, events moved more quickly, so that by the time the news reached the General Council in Rome the sisters were already in the Diocese of Wroclaw. The General Council gave approval for the establishment of the house after the fact.[17]

Immediate communication with Rome was difficult because of distance, but during this period, it was further delayed because of the devastation during and following the war years. Through support of local clergy and the people of the region, the sisters obtained a place to live, and they worked hard in their own fields to survive. Despite their extreme poverty, other young women came to join them, and three other Polish Sisters, who had remained in Yugoslavia, came to join the community. For many years, they lived through alternating periods of hope and disappointment. The government, now under a Communist regime, made their life extremely difficult. For many years, they were not allowed to teach, and for some time they were not allowed to receive new members. For a long period, no contact with Rome was permitted, and no member of the General Council was allowed to visit this new community. So it was that for 20 years the sisters were isolated from the broader ASC presence throughout the world, and also from the general headquarters in Rome. In light of this, the community in Poland relied more and more for directions from the ecclesiastical personages in the Church in their diocese rather than from the General Superior and her Council in Rome.

By 1957, conditions had become more favorable, and the sisters now had ministries as well as better food. In 1959 Sister Calista Zielonka was elected to go to the General Chapter in Rome and was able to explain to the General Council the situation of the sisters in Poland. In August of 1960, the General Council designated Poland as a Delegation. In 1965, the Polish Delegation, by the express order of Cardinal Wysznsky, became a Province. In her notes regarding this development, Marciana wrote that the only reason he gave for this change was because of the Communist rule in Poland. Not being able to know the conditions in Poland at the time, she and her Council acceded to his insistence.[18]

It was in light of this difficult period in the history of the Polish Province and in response to the current crisis that Marciana, as the first General Superior to be able to visit Poland, spent time from December 1, 1968, to January 3, 1969, with the 56 sisters in the eight local communities. In each community Marciana explained the new Constitution that the sisters would be receiving and spent time praying with them and sharing in their daily life. Her presence and her joyful spirit were a notable encouragement to the young community and did much to bridge the 20-year isolation from the rest of the Congregation.

On December 6, 1974, Cardinal Wysznsky ordered an apostolic visitation of the community, which unfortunately created disorder and division among the sisters and inflicted wounds within the

Province. It re-surfaced the tension among the sisters about the two authorities: the General Council in Rome and the ecclesiastical superiors in Poland. Marciana heard of this development through a call from a sister in Poland on January 5, 1975, who requested that either Marciana or one of the Councilors come to Poland. On the advice of her Council, Marciana went to Poland on January 25 and remained until February 21. Her time there enabled her to come to a clearer idea of the problem, but she was careful not to interfere with the visitation that was still ongoing.[19]

During the General Assembly of 1975, a special session on the situation of the sisters in Poland was held. At the conclusion of the Assembly Marciana, who had just completed her role as General Superior, and Sister Alma Pia Spieler were delegated by the Assembly to return to Poland to address the situation. They arrived in August, but other than being a symbol of support for the sisters and making every effort they could to resolve the conflict, they left after four months, having failed to bring the conflict to an end. It was only through the next several years and the continued efforts of Mother Catherine Girrens and her Council that the difficult situation was eventually resolved and the divisions within the community were healed.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1971

To prepare for the General Assembly in 1971, the sisters throughout the Congregation continued to move forward in the changes which had come through the experimental Constitution. The delegates convened in Rome on July 7, and on July 26 Marciana Heimerman was re-elected as General Superior for a second term. Councilors elected were Antonietta Maraone, Catherine Girrens, Vianney Schneider, and Alma Pia Spieler. A ruling that changed the length of the office of the General Administration from six to four years was passed. The Assembly also encouraged the General Administration to work collegially as a team and when suitable to include the secretary and treasurer. A directive that visits to the Provinces should include Council members was enacted. This was done to enable the Council as a whole to understand better the different realities in which Adorers throughout the world were living and working. The final revision of the Constitution was delayed, and the work of the Assembly was completed on July 30.[20]

The Acts of the 1971 Assembly provided for an interprovincial meeting to be held midway between General Assemblies. The first of these meetings occurred in Ruma, Illinois, from June 17 to June 30, 1973. In her introductory address, Marciana stated that the purpose of the meeting was to be able to exchange ideas, intuitions, realizations, hopes, fears, orientations, and plans. It was at this meeting that a need for a history of the Congregation was emphasized, and a decision was made to have it completed by 1984, the 150th anniversary of the Congregation's founding. Sister Antonietta Maraone was assigned to research and write the history.

During the final two years of Marciana's term, she and her Council addressed the problem existing in the division of the Province of Rome into two distinct Provinces, Rome and Latina. In 1964 the division had been made without previous consultation of the other Provinces or of the sisters involved in the division. This led to discontent among many of the sisters involved. Mother Marciana quickly became aware of the situation and in July of 1966, she met with the provincials of the Italian Provinces to study the matter. The provincials approved of a reunion of the two provinces, and Marciana invited the sisters of the two provinces to express their opinions. While the vote was favorable, the

decision was delayed for some time until the General Council determined that the reunion should be effected. This happened on February 27, 1974, when the Province of Latina was dissolved. The reunion went into effect with the naming of the members of the new administration on August 15, 1974.[21]

GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1975

The preparation for the General Assembly in 1975 was determined by the serious commitment to the events of the former 10 years. The theme chosen for the Assembly was “the search for a more authentic ASC apostolic spirituality.” In her letter convoking the Assembly Marciana wrote, “Apostolic spirituality does not come ready-made. Much less ready-made is an apostolic spirituality springing from and concretely making visible our particular God-experience as a Congregation. . . . Thus we, as a Congregation, have before us the challenging and magnificent task to develop from lived experience, insights, discernment, reflection on Scripture, the documents of the Church, and the documents of our own Congregation a new and vital reality: a spirituality which will be at one and the same time more thoroughly APOSTOLIC and more thoroughly ASC.”[22]

The Assembly was preceded by a Holy Year pilgrimage to the four basilicas of Rome on June 22. The days of the Assembly addressed the theme of apostolic spirituality, as had been raised by Pope Paul VI. In his address to religious of apostolic life, he wrote: “How can we act at the levels where the new culture is being formed, where a new kind of human being is coming into play, one who believes he has no need of redemption?” He challenged religious with what he saw as a necessary condition: “You must follow with eyes wide open to the necessities of men, their problems, their searches, testifying in their midst by prayer and action the efficacy of the Good News of love, justice, and peace.”[23] This topic of apostolic spirituality was addressed during the first three days by Father Giulio Martelli, C.P.P.S., and by conferences by Sister Angelita Myerscough. The atmosphere created was one of trust among the sisters present.

On July 14, Cardinal Ugo Poletti presided at the election. Mother Catherine Girrens was elected as General Superior, with General Councilors Guiseppina Fragasso, Angelita Myerscough, Loretta Gegen, and Alma Pia Spieler. Sister Maria Iometti was elected secretary and Sister Rose Arena as treasurer. The Assembly officially closed on July 26, 1975.[24]

It was after the conclusion of this Assembly that Marciana and Alma Pia went to Poland to share with the sisters there during the tense period they were undergoing. When Marciana returned to Rome in April, the Italian sisters had a farewell for her. During her 10 years as General Superior, she had endeared herself to all of them.

Before returning to her home in Wichita, Marciana, in response to a request from Mother Catherine, went to Spain to be of assistance to the newly elected superior of that Delegation. She stayed with the sisters in Madrid until the following June, when she returned to her Province of origin in Wichita, Kansas.

SOUTHWEST REGION

As evidence that Marciana's missionary heart still burned brightly, she volunteered to be a member of the Southwest Region which the Wichita Province was starting in 1977. During her 12 years there, she lived for a time in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and in El Paso, Texas, assisting in the formation of the young Hispanic women seeking to enter the community. Her love of the Hispanic people of the region had a strong basis in her years of missionary activity in Brazil; her loving and joyous spirit were a welcoming presence in the community there. She modelled hospitality in her openness to all who came to the door, often feeding the homeless. Her musical talent was put to good use in the parishes, where she played the organ and assisted with the choirs.

Marciana's prayerful, gentle spirit was always evident in her interaction with the young women discerning their vocations. As one of the women said of her: "She was a great model of wisdom and love, with open arms and a goodness that went beyond the call of duty. In my opinion, she was a great prophet with few words, and one who stepped lightly, but with a firmness to live out the Gospel in action."

FINAL YEARS

After her return to Wichita in 1989, Marciana spent the next eight years with her sister, Sister Georgiana, in ministry within their home parish at Ost, Kansas, teaching religion to the young people. Marciana also provided the music for parish liturgies. No doubt, the two missionaries relived their years in Brazil, when they had immersed their lives with those of the native Brazilian people.

Marciana's last years were spent at the Provincial Convent in Wichita, continuing her apostolate in her prayers. Her loving spirit continued to be an inspiration to the sisters with whom she lived. Her desire to ever be united more fully with the God whose love had been her mainstay throughout her life, in her many and varied ministries, was her constant goal. This goal was fully and eternally achieved in her death on May 24, 2001.

Marciana's legacy lives on in the hearts of the many who were privileged to know and love her. It remains in Brazil, along the Amazon River, where she helped to sow the seeds of the ASC presence among people thirsting for signs of God's love. It lives on in the Province of Wichita, Kansas, where she led her sisters through the years which saw the healing which can only come from God's merciful love. It remains in Rome, Italy, and in the many places throughout the world where the Adorers have carried Maria's charism to the "dear neighbor," in the spirit of Vatican Council II and the call to religious women for renewal in their lives.

Indeed, her legacy will continue as she, "like a bridge over troubled waters," watches over her beloved community and showers them all with God's blessings as they endeavor to bring about "that beautiful order of things which the great Son of God came to establish in his Blood!"

Requiescat in pace, Marciana!

END NOTES

1. Heimerman, Autobiography
2. Heimerman, Remembrances
3. Maraone, p. 282
4. Ibid, p. 283-84
5. Heimerman, Remembrances
6. Maraone, p. 280
7. Streck, p. 188
8. Maraone, p. 298
9. Ibid, p. 292
10. Heimerman, Remembrances
11. Ibid
12. ibid
13. Maraone, p. 293
14. Ibid, p. 294
15. Ibid, p. 298
16. Ibid, p. 301
17. Ibid, p. 250
18. Heimerman, Report on 1975 Visit to Poland
19. Ibid
20. Maraone, p. 302
21. Ibid, p. 305
22. Ibid, p. 306
23. Ibid, p. 306
24. Ibid, p. 306

MARCIANA HEIMERMAN, ASC: CHRONOLOGY OF HER LIFE

- February 21, 1911 Pauline Heimerman, the ninth child of Anna Voegeli and John Heimerman, was born on their farm near Ost, Kansas.
- Pauline attended Saint Joseph Parish Catholic School in Ost through the first eight grades. She was taught by the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.
- August 15, 1926 Pauline left home to enter the convent in Ruma, Illinois.
- July 1, 1928 Pauline pronounced her vows as Sister Marciana, in Ruma.
- 1929 With the establishment of Wichita as a Province, Marciana and other sisters from the area returned to Kansas.
- 1929-1947 Marciana taught in parish schools throughout Kansas and Oklahoma. She often provided the music for school and church.
- 1947-1959 A Missionary in Brazil, primarily involved in the formation of the novices.
- 1960-1965 Served as Provincial Superior of the Wichita Province.
- 1965-1975 Served as General Superior in Rome, Italy.
- 1977-1989 Formation and Pastoral Ministry in the Southwest Region of the Wichita Province.
- 1989-1997 Pastoral Ministry with her sister, Georgiana, in their home parish of Ost, Kansas.
- 1997-2001 Wichita Convent Health Care Center.
- May 24, 2001 Returned to God in death.

TRIBUTES TO MARCIANA HEIMERMAN, ASC

“Mother Marciana was the HEART of our post-Vatican II renewal. In a difficult time she was a wise, simple, and convincing leader by exercising the role of superior with a style that benefited the congregation more than many conferences. I loved and appreciated her. I remember many things about her, even her trumpet playing.”

Catarina Ronci, ASC General Superior, 1983-1991

“Being deeply struck by the news of the death of our dear Mother Marciana, I want to express my deep-felt and affectionate sharing in the sorrow of Sister Georgiana, Sister Marian, and all the sisters who have had the privilege of knowing and loving her. We will hold the most grateful memory of such a woman who, in such a delicate time and with her excellent gifts of nature and grace, knew how to lead the Institute in love and in the spirit of our founders. May the certainty that she will continue to be a source of blessing for all of us from heaven be our comfort.”

Antonietta Maraone, ASC Author of ASC History: 1834-1984

“I’m sending to all the Adorers in USA my heartfelt sympathy for Marciana’s death. She belonged to all the Adorers around the world during the springtime after Vatican II. She was for our ASC Congregation as John XXIII was for the Church. She fostered UNITY within North-South-East-West, celebrating the diversity of personal gifts and of cultures. Please tell all the sisters my nearness and my prayers not only in this moment but always.”

Giuseppina Fragasso, ASC General Superior, 1991-1999

“We received the news that Mother Marciana died. Some of us remember the first meeting with her. We know that Mother Marciana did so much good for us and because of this she will remain in our hearts. We are praying for her joy of living with God.”

Bozena Matomisz, ASC Provincial Superior, Wroclaw, Poland

“Please accept our condolences for Sister Marciana’s death. May the Lord reward her for all that she did for the good of the Congregation and of the Church at large. In union of prayer.”

Marisa Nardoni, ASC Missionary in Tanzania

“It is with deep sadness that we have learned of the death of Mother Marciana, whom all of us remember with great esteem and affection. We assure you of our prayers for her and our nearness of spirit with all of you. May the Lord, Source of Life, welcome Mother Marciana among God’s friends and give her the crown and reward of the just.”

Rosalia La Verde, ASC Provincial Superior, Acuto, Italy

Fly, Marciana.

Soar with the eagle,
and Beyond.
Free from this body
That limits you
To time and space.

And as you sail through eternity,
You will continue to be an
Inspiration
To those of us
Who still flit with the
Hummingbirds,

In preparation for our own flight
Into the loving hands of the
Father
Who gave us our wings to fly.

Fly, Marciana!

Marian Wilson, ASC
Niece of Marciana

Pictures



As a young girl, on the family farm in Ost, Kansas
(Marciana is on the far right)

First four missionaries leaving for Brazil

left to right: Sisters Jane Frances Baalman, Marciana Heimerman, Georgiana Heimerman and Julitta Elsen





First chapel, Manaus, Brazil



Convent and Novitiate, Manaus, Brazil

Provincial House, Wichita, Kansas





Marciana Heimerman Science Center,
Newman University

Rome: Marciana with Pope Paul VI



