

URSULINE INSTITUTE OF SANTA MARIA DEGLI ANGELI BRESCIA

Istituto "Santa Maria degli Angeli"
Via Bassiche 36/38
25122 Brescia
Telephone: 303772551
Fax: 0302906036
E-mail: scuolesuperiori@orsolinebs.it;
corunum@orsolinebs.it
www.orsolinebs.it

History

On April 18, 1827, Bishop Gabrio Nava approved the "Organic Plan" for the Institute of the Ursulines situated in the former convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli, an old monastery founded in 1478 by the Augustinian nuns and suppressed on March 9, 1799, under the regulations of the Executive Directory of the Cisalpine Republic.

Since 1816, in a petition to the Emperor of Austria, by then monarch of Venetian Lombardy, Bishop Nava had been asking for the establishment of an institute for girls' education and, at the same time, for the training of skilled teachers who could be spread all over the province, as and when a need was recognized. Then it was decided to entrust such an institute to the Ursuline nuns, in recognition that they were fit for that double purpose. Therefore, Bishop Nava's "Organic Plan" was approved by the qualified authorities. The Decree for the restoration of the educational institute, entrusted to the Ursulines in the former monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, was issued.

On March 10, 1828, a boarding school with seven girls was opened. The monastery and school were consolidated and established, as is testified to by the fact that, in 1835, two nuns and a sister accepted the request of Bishop Domenico Ferrari to move to Capriolo (Bs) in order to found an educational institute.

A long dispute with the Direction of State Property, as a consequence of the suppression of religious entities (1866), was positively resolved in 1874. Afterwards documentation emerged from the Archives of the Institute, both about a project of embellishing the church and extending the different buildings of the monastery to make it more and more suitable for the educational activities, and about the concern to conform its teaching to the syllabus of the Regulations for Italian schools of 1869. For this purpose some courses like music, drawing, sewing and embroidery were added in order to complete the students' qualification.

In 1904, after new construction in the southern part of the monastery, a day school was opened for girls from well-off families. Immediately sixty girls were registered.

In 1909 a technical school opened, entrusted to the presidency of Monsignor Zanmarchi (1915), who taught physics and organized an up-to-date, efficient laboratory for the experiments essential to that subject. Monsignor Zanmarchi also held the presidency of the training school for elementary teachers. In 1925 it was replaced by

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a technical school, which was suppressed in accordance with the law. In 1927, the first training school for secondary teachers opened.

In 1928 came the decree establishing the Roman Union; institutes of Ursulines from all over the world gathered and accepted its Constitutions.

In 1948, having cancelled its connection with the General Superior of the Roman Union, the Brescian Ursulines formed an autonomous congregation of pontifical right.

Scholastic activity, the main element of the Institute, continued to expand: in 1934 little boys too were admitted into the pre-school and, since 1956, they could attend the elementary school and then the middle school. In 1946, the senior high school specializing in science education opened alongside the teacher-training school, established since its foundation in the Merician spirit.

After the renovation and extension of the church in 1939, when the entry from via Bassiche was closed, between the 1960s and the 1980s the different buildings were refurbished in order to meet more practically and effectively the needs of the different kinds of schools living together in the Institute. It must be remembered that, at the end of the 1950s, an esteemed vocational Institute was opened. Its activity would close when the middle school began in view of compulsory school attendance being extended to the age of fourteen.

Today: Educational commitment

Today the educational guidelines of Angela Merici, a great educator of educators, are summarized and constantly reflected on, as put forth in the Institute's Educational Plan to the families and teachers of every level of school, from pre-school to elementary, from middle to secondary, because culture and education are the basic and irreplaceable basis of every social and human advance. The Christian humanism, so clear and rich in the educational contents of Angela Merici's writings, is expressed and shaped with the deepening understanding and significance of spiritual motherhood. This takes as its model natural motherhood and elevates it with a commitment to discern, through teaching, the mysterious but sure design of God in every student's soul. Therefore, the familial model consciously values welcome, understanding and advancement.

For this reason the family, which is the origin of every personal experience, suggests the method of education as a respectful and happy life together, and this is the aim of all the courses from early childhood to the threshold of adult life. In the perspective of this value of the person, always seen in familial and social community, the ability to recognize the value of women's contribution to the society has great relevance. Always attentive to women's education, the Ursulines kept a careful eye on individual personal identity, even when the course of time led them to open their school to mixed groups. Above all, they have always believed in the qualification of those hundreds of teachers who (until the 1980s, when the teacher-training Institute was suppressed by secondary school reform) have brought life to schools throughout the province, with a teaching appreciated for its didactics and its humanity.

In order to keep ties with the more and more numerous groups of former students who had attended the Institute where they had



been welcomed and educated, in 1930 the sisters founded a small, modest publication for connecting, “Cor Unum”. Since then, generations of former students “meet” here, speak about themselves and their lives, share joys, sufferings, work and family experiences. The spiritual unity which pervades all the stories with a specific Merician imprint is given by the “mothers’” remarks, encouraging their former students to understand the signs of the times with mature skill of judgement, like true Christians. Meetings, lectures, plays and other initiatives for students, parents and teachers contribute to keep alive the partnership between the “Ursuline world” and the civic society whose signs, often conflicting, may be read from an educational perspective.

