

Celebration of the Rehabilitation of Mother Clara Pfaender February 18, 2020

Introduction: The following reflection consists of excerpts from various parts of our history to unfold some of the story leading to the restoration of Mother M. Clara's name, and why this was important to us as a Congregation.

Let us begin with an excerpt from Mother Clara's letter to Archbishop Roncetti, Papal Nuncio in Munich, June 1880:

Now I'm going to clarify about the fact of why the Sisters don't want to remain under my leadership. The Superior told the Sisters that I was excommunicated and in order to make them believe it, the sacraments have been denied to me under various pretenses....They managed to prevent me from confession and receiving holy communion from April 6 to June 7th, until the day before yesterday when you allowed me to go for confession and to receive communion...Besides this he instigated the Sisters against me, who had encountered me always with love and respect, and he calumniated me while I was trying to follow his desire and commands.

It wasn't until the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Sept 14, 1912 that the picture of Mother M. Clara was restored to honor in the Motherhouse. Dean Schunck, when he learned of the authenticity of the existence of the secretive authority of Bishop Konrad Martin through Sr Germana, exclaimed: "Then we have all wronged Mother Clara; then she acted without sin."

The documents about our Congregation from 1875-1882 could not be found in the Diocesan archive. This was confirmed in 1956 and again at a later intensive research. At the encouragement of Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger in 1956, Mother M. Brunilde Probst completed her book based on the material that was available at that time. This book is "**The Burning Seal**", published in 1957.

Twenty years later the original Founding Constitutions of 1860 was found in the library of the Salvatorian Fathers. One can only conjecture how this document ended up there.

During an International Commission meeting at the Generalate in Rome in 1977, Mother M. Aristilde Flake received a call from the Rector of Campo Santo Teutonico. They discovered a file of papers relating to our Foundress that they were sure we would be interested in seeing. Among the contents was the original paper of the secret authority of Bishop Konrad Martin, written in the district prison of Paderborn on January 9, 1875.

The documents from Campo Santo Teutonico was another important step in the process regarding the rehabilitation of Mother Clara. With these as well as other documents, Mother Aristilde took over doing further research after finishing her term of office in 1976. This research brought more light on the life of Mother Clara and lead to the writing of a new book. Because of the prophetic words of Mother Clara, "...the sun remains above and brings again light into this darkness", Mother Aristilde gave the title of the book she wrote in 1982:

"Light into the Darkness".

Following the publication of Mother Aristilde's book, the Sisters heard from various outsiders regarding Mother Clara. On the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the death of Mother Clara, Benedictine Archbishop Augustinus Mayer said that it is right to speak of the "light into the darkness", but that clearly Mother Clara was "A light from the darkness".

He went on to say:

"A light from abandonment, a light from the Garden of Gethsemane and Mount Golgotha. Yes, this light was filled with the light of the Lord's love and the power of His resurrection. It can be said that your Foundress has truly sought to know HIM, only HIM and the power of his resurrection, but first participating in his suffering. We want to be grateful for her life example and ask: enlighten our way and encourage us to go the predetermined way with new joy, gratitude and humility."

Mother Aristilde wrote at the end of her book that further research was needed to clarify the canonical questions regarding Mother Clara. This was affirmed at the Plenary Council meeting in 2005 in Indonesia, that further research be done. Sr. M. Carola Thomann, who in her years in Rome had continued a search for further information on our Foundress, did in depth research on Mother Clara when her term of office was finished in Rome.

On the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the death of Mother Clara, Archbishop Agostino Gardin, OFMConv, reflected:

"The story of this fearless and untiring woman lets us ask the question: where had this disciple of Jesus and of St. Francis found, despite all the serious investigations and lasting opposition, the strength to go on further? If the conviction, to be loved by Christ, penetrates deeply into the heart of a person, a power and an inner strength is born that does not come from a human source...Let us remember with admiration and inner stirring the life this woman lived, who gave us a very difficult but heartfelt following of the Lord."

Over time many precious words came from outsiders. Prelate Johannes Schaefers, the last superior of the Congregation, recorded in his historiography: “We can rightly say that Mother Clara, like Bishop Konrad Martin, became a victim of the Kulturkampf.”

Sr. M. Carola continued the research on Mother Clara, along with the accompaniment of Msgr. Prof. Althaus, and presented the **Documentary 2016** to Archbishop Hans-Josef Becker of Paderborn on October 14, 2016. He received the documentation and promised his support to bring Mother Clara to honor in the Chapel of the Angels in the Cathedral in Paderborn.

This research confirmed and brought to light what was previously unknown. In the book one can see how Mother Clara was misinterpreted and judged, condemned and expelled, and what she had to go through from the priests as well as her Sisters. Yet at the end of her life she could write: “I have forgiven all my enemies and pray for them every day.”

From the Documentary 2016, Sr. M. Carola completed the latest book on the life of Mother Clara in 2018:

“The Sun Remains Above”

The restoration of Mother Clara’s good name became official on February 18, 2018 when Archbishop Hans-Josef Becker, in the presence of many of our Sisters, blessed a sculpture and memorial plaque in the Chapel of the Angels in the Cathedral of Paderborn. The plaque expressed Mother Clara’s own words:

“Our ways are mysteries of Divine Providence that lead us according to His will, even though we do not understand it.”

Mother Clara’s name in the Chapel of the Angels is there among the companions on the journey of her time: Bishop Konrad Martin, Mother Pauline von Mallinckrodt and Mother Theresia Bonzel.

Today we celebrate and lift up Mother Clara’s life, remembering her prophetic words: **I have to perish but the work will go on.”**

Prepared by Sr. Mary Lou Wirtz
February 2020