

Irma Marilia Menezes



Serafina Cinque

ANGEL OF ALTAMIRA

ASC Profiles 12

Maria De Mattias,
by the gift of the Spirit which made her a Foundress,
signaled a daring, prophetic way
for a long band of followers.
Who are the other Adorers of the Blood of Christ?
Those who believed in her vision,
who trusted her steps,
and with her and after her,
have made the future possible.

This series

ASC Profiles

intends to bring some of them into the limelight,
beginning with the first followers, the Foundress' companions
up to the present time, choosing among the Adorers
those who in some way are
protagonists,
and about whom we have written documents
or testimony.



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Adorers of the Blood of Christ
Via Beata Maria De Mattias, 10 - 00183 Rome, Italy

Reconfigured and expanded by USA ASC Resource Committee Members
Sister Loretta Gegen, ASC, Sister Emmanuel Palus, ASC
and Sister Angelita Myerscough, ASC
from "O Anjo da Transamazonica"
by Irma Marilia Menezes, ASC

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PRESENTATION

With deep joy and sense of participation I present this book, a narration of the life of Serafina Cinque, Adorer of the Blood of Christ; a woman very close to us, who made her daily journey a masterpiece for God. The Archdiocese of Manaus has initiated the necessary process for the itinerary toward her canonization.

The life of Noemy Cinque unfolds against the background of luxuriant Amazonia, right up to its ideal fulfillment, the challenge of holiness. The Italian origins of this woman and the happenings of her ancestors, including abuse of power and riches---which will lead the family to emigrate to Brazil in the early 1900's, to the alluring call to the cultivation and commerce of rubber and then cocoa---form a dark and dense backdrop to Noemy's life.

The narration, which is history, has all the ingredients of an adventure. Varied and unusual, the lived experience of Noemy is tightly interwoven with social events, the most difficult and frontier-like of the Amazon territory.

Dramatic and impetuous, the events of her life follow closely upon each other and shatter in face of the meek boldness of the protagonist. Noemy is always ready to welcome them: every voice, every suggestion is an indicator for her.

Other peoples' lives cross hers and are changed into the demanding style of the Good News. She is a woman of our time (1913-1987), whose life did not pass unobserved.

It is the people, her people---the little ones, least known of the earth---who creating the memory of her, who are experiencing her loving presence also after her death.

For everyone, Noemy is Sister Serafina, the Angel of the Transamazonic.

Her woman's face, her angelic lightness, her Adorer's heart outline her profile. The gentleness of her charity, reflecting heroism signed by the Blood of Christ, invoke the people's recognition of holiness in Serafina.

Our sincere thanks go to Marilia Menezes, researcher and keeper of the memory of Serafina in Brazil, and to Adorers of the provinces in the United States, who enriched this account with additional memories.

Nicla Spezzati



«Sister Serafina Cinque»

drawing by Lillo Dellino

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF ORIGINAL
BRAZILIAN AUTHOR

"All memories and authentic histories bring to the present an impulse from what happened yesterday, which remains open, profound and permanent." --From

New Evangelization and Religious Life in Brazil, CRB, 1989

Given the brief amount of time between the death of Sister Serafina Cinque and the preparation of this biography, I have thought it best to use the journalistic technique of interviews for the development of this book. Thus many persons who knew Sister Serafina have had the welcome opportunity to share their knowledge and sentiments regarding her.

I thank the Adorers of the Blood of Christ and the many others who collaborated in this work, especially the Sisters who read the text before its final form and gave me their suggestions. To all who helped me in many other ways to write this story of Sister Serafina, I owe a debt of gratitude.

Sister Marilia Menezes, ASC

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We are very grateful to Sister Mary Vivian Miller for the literal translation of Sister Marilia's work from the original Portuguese to English. We thank the many Sisters of Wichita province who shared their memories of Sister Serafina, both during her postulancy and novitiate in the United States as well as during the time of their ministry in Brazil. Gratitude is also owing to those who helped in other ways to bring this English edition of Serafina's life to its present form. That process has included much more than a simple editing of the book. It has involved both reorganizing many sections of the original as well as writing additional portions to provide a more informative biography for English speaking readers. The title of the book has been slightly changed from its original form, as have also the chapter headings. The Appendix has been expanded to include a chronology of the life of Sister Serafina and a list of related resources in English. In addition to the two episcopal testimonials that formed the original Appendix, five sections of the Portuguese edition of the book have been moved to the Appendix as an indication of the legacy of this first Brazilian Adorer of the Blood of Christ.

Sister Loretta Gegen, ASC

Sister Emmanuel Palus, ASC

Sister Angelita Myerscough, ASC

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I - FAMILY ANCESTRY AND EARLY LIFE

Emigration of the Family from Italy to Brazil

In order really to know a person, one must look to the individual's ancestors because the story of every person is intimately connected with those who, with the help of God, gave them life.

At the end of the 19th century, in Calabria in southern Italy, four families found themselves involved in questions connected with land and titles of an ancient nobility to whom they belonged, or thought they belonged. The family names were Cinque, Di Benedetto, Bello and Verderossa. The Cinque family was related to the House of Orange of the old Dutch Principality, which later branched out to southern France and then to Italy.

The truth is that, at some point in time, the Cinque and Di Benedetto families were bitterly at odds with each other. Sarah Di Benedetto had married Vincent Cinque. Soon blood ran. Eventually and happily the two families managed to settle their difficulties. Research made by the Cinque family at the Italian embassy in Brazil did not clarify this shady past. Family members were interviewed, but the only information they were able to give was what they knew from Sister (Irma) Leonilda, a descendant of the Cinques and a religious Sister living in St. Louis, Missouri. When notified about receiving part of the family inheritance, she had replied: "I don't even want to see it because this money has a price of blood." (1)

This bit of history is significant as a backdrop for Noeme, another member of the Cinque family who later became Sister Serafina. She was called to become an Adorer of Christ's Precious Blood, and thereby, whether consciously or not, she could atone for ancient family crimes. As Sister Serafina, Noeme lived a life of abnegation and great love as she shared in the redeeming and reconciling mission of Christ's precious Blood.

To escape the violence in Calabria, both the Cinque and Di Benedetto families, as well as other Italian groups, emigrated to Brazil in 1911, seeking refuge in Amazonia. For quite some time, the Amazon region had been the center of world attention because of the great value of rubber or, as it was called, "black gold", which was cultivated in the native forests of northern Brazil. (2)

When the Cinque family arrived in Amazonas from Calabria in Italy, they received an offer to work in Urucurituba. This was a small town in the interior of the state of Amazonas located on the right bank of the Amazon River about a hundred kilometers distant in a straight line from Manaus, the capital of the state of Amazonas. However, when the Cinque family finally reached Urucurituba they were sadly disillusioned. They learned that just a year earlier, in 1910, the thirty year rubber boom had come to an end. This had happened some years previously after an English adventurer, Henry of Wickham, had smuggled 70,000 seeds of rubber trees to London. These were then sent to southern Asia to start rubber plantations, which became more productive than those of Amazonas. This development meant the end of Brazil's monopoly of rubber and the beginning of a great crisis which affected all of Amazonas.

Given this situation, the Cinques decided to engage in raising cacao, with a good return in the market, since it produced the famous Brazilian chocolate, which was greatly desired in other countries. Like other immigrants, the Cinques were determined to overcome obstacles. Through untiring work they managed to acquire ownership of a piece of land in the area of Urucurituba on the banks of the great Amazon River. In a short time, they became one of the principal proprietors of a plantation of cacao. In time they also opened a large store for the buying and selling of cloth. The Cinque family also seems to have acquired a rubber plantation, according to the testimony of a former resident of Urucurituba, whose father was a tapper of rubber trees that belonged to Vincent Cinque. It was said that he treated his workers well in the days when many owners of rubber plantations were still treating their hired hands as if they were slaves. (3)

It was into this family of Vincent and Sarah Cinque that Noeme was born on January 31, 1913, in the village of Urucurituba. She was the couple's second child, in a family that eventually included twelve children: Mario, Noeme, Aura, Renato, Miguel, Sylvio, Jose, Humberto, Attilo, Marieta, Nair, Alfredo, and Yolanda. (4)

Difficult Childhood and Adolescence

Noeme's birth was exceedingly difficult and almost caused the death of her mother. So severe was the trauma for mother and baby that Sarah Cinque became mentally disturbed. Without medical help in the isolated town of Urucurituba in the forest, her behavior was cause for concern. For this

reason, the infant Noeme was taken away from her mother and put in the care of another woman. Unfortunately this woman did not know how to care for a sick baby. As a result, Noeme had fragile health the rest of her life.

When the mother and child both improved in the course of time, the little girl was brought back home. It became evident that Noeme had a lively temperament and easily got herself into mischief. She was quick-tempered and independent. She was also intelligent, and her parents decided to hire a teacher to give her lessons at home.

Noeme made such progress in her studies that her father decided to enroll her in a good school in Manaus when she was eleven. The school he selected was St. Dorothy School in the center of Manaus, which had been established in 1910 by the Dorothean Sisters, who were well-known as excellent teachers. Vincent Cinque told the Sisters to be strict with his daughter and very demanding of her.

Noeme's relationships with her father were somewhat strained. Besides being authoritarian and over-concerned about his business, Vincent was also a womanizer, who found it easy to charm the local women, who were attracted by this stranger.

At the St. Dorothy School Noeme seemed to blossom. At home, she had often felt lost in the large house hemmed in by the forest and the river, suffocated by her father's business and the frequent child-bearing of her mother. Away now from her nervous mother and her demanding father, Noeme responded well to the teaching of the Sisters. They

knew how to win the heart of this adolescent girl and mold her character in a way that prepared her for a fervent Christian life.

While instructing Noeme for her first holy Communion, the Dorothean Sisters presented Jesus to her in a fascinating way. Much later Noeme wrote:

On the day that Jesus entered my poor heart for the first time, I felt a great love for Jesus and a great desire to belong entirely to him. With true fervor I made my own consecration, hoping that one day my desire would be fulfilled.

Though she remembered the sufferings of her early childhood, Noeme developed well under the guidance of the wise religious educators who provided surroundings suitable for her spiritual and intellectual growth.

When she was fourteen, Noeme received from one of the Dorothean Sisters a holy card of the Sacred Heart of Mary, which she treasured for the rest of her life. On it were these few words written by one of her teachers:

Dear Noeme, keep in your heart the ardent and sincere desire to one day deserve the beautiful title, 'Daughter of Mary.' Love Mary, and heaven will be yours.

The card was dated August 15, 1927, and was signed "Your teacher, G. Pereira, Religious of St. Dorothy." The School of St. Dorothy had indeed awakened Noeme Cinque to a new world.

A Time of Waiting

Even after five years in the boarding school at Manaus, Noeme had never forgotten her arrival at the school and the determination she had to belong totally to Jesus and to dedicate her life entirely to God and to the care of the people.

Although she had gone home for vacation annually while at the school, the year when Noeme reached her sixteenth birthday was different. She went home to tell her father that she wanted to become a religious Sister. She explained that the love and zeal with which her teachers had treated her since her arrival at the school as an eleven-year-old, had attracted her to the religious life. She had no desire to become a rich planter of cacao or a cloth merchant like her parents, brothers and sisters. She had other dreams--another hope for her future.

Vincent and Sarah totally disagreed with the decision of their daughter! Could it be that they still thought of her as an irritable, independent and difficult child? Or did they entertain plans for her to marry a rich Italian acquaintance? Was it their ambition to have Noeme, their well-educated daughter, to marry for money as a way to open for her brothers the way to become very successful merchants and shopkeepers? Or did they simply lack an understanding of a vocation to the religious life?

Her parents' refusal to allow her to become a religious caused Noeme great suffering. Her persistence and pleading did no good. On the contrary, her father took immediate and definite steps to point Noeme in other directions. He bought a house in

Manaus and sent his wife to live there with Noeme and his oldest sons while they continued their education. He removed Noeme from the school run by the Dorothean Sisters and enrolled her in a state school, the Institute of Education of Amazonas, to complete her studies.

Noeme's new home was located in the parish of St. Sebastian which was administered by the Italian Capuchin priests of the Umbrian Province. Young Noeme began attending church services and involving herself in the life and activities of the parish. Before long the pastor hired her as a catechist and Noeme dedicated herself with great enthusiasm to this pastoral service.

Meanwhile, her mother Sarah paid little attention to Noeme's involvement in the parish. She cared for the house and the needs of the two sons living with her in Manaus. Her thoughts and worries were centered most often, however, on her other children and her husband living at a distance in the interior of Amazonas at Urucurituba.

Like her brothers who were also studying in Manaus, Noeme received a message and an allowance from her father every month. But where did this young woman, who dressed so simply and wore no jewelry, spend her money? How angry and upset her father became when, on a visit to Manaus, he discovered that Noeme gave the money he had been sending her to the sick and the poor she encountered. It was one more of Noeme's choices that was difficult for him to accept.

II - EARLY ADULT YEARS

First Teaching Experience

In 1930 when the cacao industry was failing, Vincent Cinque, tired and struggling from coping with the "Green Hell," felt compelled to send all his children to Manaus except Umberto, who remained in the family home. At this time, as periodically happened, the Amazon River dangerously changed its course, causing much devastation over a period of time. This situation brought great suffering to the people of the region. The city of Urucurituba gradually deteriorated. From the "Old Urucurituba", either voluntarily or by force of circumstances, families fled to what was called the "New Urucurituba."

In Manaus, Noeme finished the teacher training course at the Institute of Education. In 1934, to fulfill the obligatory requirements for new teachers, she was sent to the interior of the state to teach. Later on, it was agreed, she would be entitled to a position in the city. Noeme worked in the small town of Tabocal, in a school housed in the home of one of the families. Here she began her life as a teacher. Besides teaching Portuguese and mathematics, she also taught catechism to the children, preparing them for baptism. Other ministries that she carried out there were adult religious instruction and marriage counseling.

In 1936, when Noeme was transferred to her home area of Urucurituba, she experienced great joy in

having the privilege of teaching and preparing people for the reception of the sacraments in time for the periodic visit of a priest to their town. Through Noeme's leadership, an old abandoned chapel, which was being used as an animal shelter, was again transformed into a lovely chapel. There, on Saturdays and Sundays, the young teacher gathered the children for catechism lessons. In the evenings the older people came together with Noeme to pray the rosary and to receive religious instruction.

The following year Noeme went through yet another transition when she was sent to Manaus to a school called "November 15th". There, after further studies in religious instruction, she was awarded a catechist's diploma by Bishop Don Basilio Pereira. In addition, she took a course in typing from the Royal School of Manaus. In 1938, another teaching opportunity opened up for Noeme, that of teaching reading to adults in a high school in Manaus. ⁽⁵⁾

Noeme's greatest concern, however, was not to teach only reading but to form her students for life. At the School of Our Lady, Help of Christians, it was a joy for her to prepare several men for baptism and Communion.

Through the many transfers that Noeme was subjected to through the Secretary of Education, the Lord seemed to be making her more widely known among the people. She was particularly recognized for her zeal as a teacher and a catechist. Among other schools where Noeme was assigned were the Benjamin Constant and Saldanha Marinho schools.

Suffering during World War II

The people of Amazonas, Brazil, felt the repercussions of the Second World War with its accompanying horrors that became evident after its beginning in 1939. The war touched individual families and in a particular way it deeply affected young Noeme Cinque. On January 28, 1942, the Brazilian ships at the mouth of the Amazon River were destroyed by the Axis powers. This brought about a breakdown of diplomatic relations between Brazil and Germany and Italy, and by extension also with Japan. As a result, in the states of Para and Amazonas, persons of Italian, German and Japanese origin were considered enemy foreigners and were shunned by many of the people.

Because she was of Italian descent, Noeme suffered much from the open and often cruel hostility that she experienced personally during this difficult time. In the schools where she taught, the other teachers accused her of being a Nazi or a Fascist and of not teaching correctly. She was forbidden to teach religion and was under constant scrutiny.

During this time Manaus was under heavy and tight security. Strangers were forbidden entrance into the area. Properties of "foreigners" were threatened with burning. Lives were seriously endangered. In some cities in Amazonas and Para, convents and schools owned or staffed by Religious men and women of Italian background were stoned. On one occasion, thirteen-year-old Silverio Sarubi and his father, residents of Manaus at the time, were threatened to be returned to their jobs as wood carriers for foreign ships, which were fueled by burning wood

in that poor "port of wood" into which Manaus saw herself changed in order to survive after the great rubber crisis. (6)

Through these critical times, Noeme showed great fortitude of soul, giving support wherever it was needed, especially through much prayer. She encouraged her parents and others to overcome the difficulties of these terrible years with faith.

The intense pressures the people experienced during this trying time also brought on the death of Sarah Cinque whose health had already weakened notably. Noeme described the fact of her mother's death thus:

In 1944, I spent my last Christmas with my family, a year with a very sad memory, because my mother became very ill. On Christmas night, mamma fell into a coma, and on January 11, 1945, she died.

Zealous Apostolic Service in Manaus

Despite all the suffering because of the war and her mother's death, Noeme was very active in the Church. In the meantime she had enrolled in the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary, which was organized at the cathedral of Manaus. She also joined the Apostolate of Prayer and became one of its leaders. With enthusiasm Noeme also became a member of the Catholic Action group. (7) Somehow she also found time to join other members in visiting the inmates in the large prison in Manaus. (8)

Developments in the Archdiocese of Manaus in 1943 would prove to be significant for Noeme, who by then had reached the mature age of thirty. To meet the urgent needs for evangelization in the growing population of the Manaus area, Archbishop Dom Joas da Matta Andrade e Amoral invited the Redemptorist priests from the St. Louis province to come to the archdiocese. He wanted them to begin by organizing a new parish of Our Lady Aparecida, which would be an outgrowth of the parish of St. Sebastian.

Knowing the selfless dedication of Noeme Cinque, Archbishop da Matta asked her to assist the Redemptorist priests to learn the Portuguese language. He also invited her to join other parishioners in organizing the new parish. Even though she had little free time because her mother's death had left her with added responsibilities in caring for her younger brothers and sisters, Noeme responded joyfully to these requests of the archbishop. As a pioneer member of the new parish of Our Lady Aparecida, Noeme was able to get the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary organized. By her enthusiasm she attracted many young people to join.

While visiting the sick and elderly in the new parish, she felt deep anguish in seeing so many who needed urgent medical care, which they were not receiving. This experience prompted her to take a course to become a practical nurse registered in the Health Department of Amazonas. At the time she could not foresee how useful this new professional training would be in responding to other needs many years later.

Noeme also contributed her time and talent for the

festivals and bazaars that were organized to raise money needed for building the new church and the residence for the priests. She was active in persuading many others to join in these endeavors. In addition to all these activities Noeme continued to dedicate herself to catechizing. She taught with simplicity and humility, and also with courage, since the new parish bordered on an area on the outskirts of Manaus where there was much crime and violence.

Meantime Noeme continued to do all she could to help her brothers and sisters become independent through study and work.

As she carried out her professional service as teacher and nurse in addition to her volunteer efforts, Noeme never lost her desire to give herself totally to Christ as a religious Sister. She shared this dream with the Redemptorist priests who were now her confessors and friends. They encouraged her to continue to pray, and they reminded her that God would make clear to her when the right hour had arrived to respond to the call.

III - RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

Meeting the Adorers of the Blood of Christ from Wichita

Noeme Cinque would not have become Sister Serafina Cinque, A.S.C. had she not had the opportunity to meet the Sister Adorers of the Blood of Christ. ⁽⁹⁾ in fall of 1946.

It all happened in this way. As the Redemptorist priests from the United States expanded their missionary work in Manaus and in several towns along the Amazon River, the immensity of the area that had been assigned to their pastoral care became clearer to them. They experienced a great need for help in caring for the sick and catechizing the people, and for this reason they looked for women religious who would be collaborators with them in their work. They found willing volunteers in the United States among the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Wichita, Kansas.

It was a letter from Father John McCormick, superior of the Redemptorist missions, together with a letter of Most Rev. Joao da Matta, Archbishop of Manaus, that eventually brought the Adorers from Wichita as zealous and dedicated missionaries in the Amazon region of Brazil.

Father McCormick's letter was addressed to Mother Aloysia Barthelme, the provincial superior of the Adorers in Wichita. Mother Aloysia had attended the General Chapter of the Adorers in Rome in 1938, and she was aware that the pope at that time, Pius XI, as

well as his successor, Pius XII, strongly encouraged sending Sisters to missions abroad. It was with joy and a sense of God's provident care that she received the letter requesting Sisters for the great missionary field of Amazonas in northern Brazil.

Another request also influenced the decision of the Wichita province of Adorers to take up missionary work in Brazil. This was a letter from the general superior, Mother Alma Pia De Rossi, that the Sisters from Wichita consider taking over a mission in northern Brazil that had been staffed by Adorers from the province of Schaan, Liechtenstein, since 1936. ⁽¹⁰⁾

To respond to both requests, Sister Evelyn Gorges from the General Council in Rome and Sister Julitta Elsen from the Provincial Council in Wichita traveled to Brazil in October, 1946, to explore the situation. First they studied the needs of the people in and around Manaus and visited two Redemptorist missions located in Manacaparu and Coari further west up the Amazon. They also journeyed to the interior town of Altamira located on the Xingu River to visit the three German-speaking Adorers still working there. These Sisters were finding it very hard to remain in Brazil because of the lack of new recruits, the difficult climate, the shortage of financial resources and the increased isolation from their province as a consequence of World War II. The Bishop of the Xingu Prelacy and other Missionaries of the Precious Blood were also asking for Sisters to help with the missionary work in Altamira and the surrounding area. ⁽¹¹⁾

When Sister Julitta and Sister Evelyn finished their study of the situation in northern Brazil, they had no doubt about the great need that existed for Sister

missionaries, but at first it seemed like a very ambitious undertaking. However, when they got back to Manaus they spoke with the two Redemptorist missionaries stationed at our Lady of Aparecida parish, Fathers Normando Muckerman and Bernardo Van Hoomissen. The priests indicated that there would likely be young Brazilians who would wish to join the Adorers, and who could then help the Wichita Sisters in the mission work. They told the visiting Sisters about Noeme Cinque and her great desire to become a religious, and they introduced her to them.

Everything seemed to converge like crossroads. They learned of the opposition of Noeme's father to the idea of her becoming a Sister, but they also recognized in Noeme herself "the touch of God". Behind the fragile appearance of this frail woman, Sister Julitta observed the ascetic features and the firm yet kind eyes of Noeme. As they spent more time discerning together, they became convinced that Noeme was a person with a very special vocation. They believed that the Lord was indeed calling Noeme to be one of the foundation stones of the future group of Brazilian Adorers, which she and other North American pioneer Sisters would soon begin in Amazonas. So both Sister Julitta and Sister Evelyn encouraged Noeme to return with them to Wichita to begin her formation as an Adorer! It was a momentous decision that Noeme was called to make.

Noeme's Hour of Decision

For Noeme Cinque, it was really God's decisive hour for her. Promptly and with courage she accepted the invitation which Sisters Julitta and Evelyn

extended to her to leave immediately with them for the long trip to the United States. They explained that at the provincial motherhouse in Wichita, Kansas, she could make her postulancy, novitiate and profession of vows. Then she would return to Brazil as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ.

Noeme explained to the two Sisters, however, that she did not have the courage at that moment to tell her family that she was going all the way to the United States to become a religious Sister. Her father seems to have been at Urucurituba at that time, and to see him would have required a boat trip of several days.

When Noeme did summon the strength to tell her other family members who were in Manaus about her decision, they were terribly perplexed. They thought she must be out of her mind to go off to a strange land without even knowing the language, just to become a religious Sister. For them it was a real enigma which they could not then comprehend. Noeme, however, was firm in explaining to them her intentions. In the United States, she said, she could also advance further in studies for the nursing profession. She reassured them that she would be returning to Manaus.

The Redemptorist priests, especially Father Normando, were supportive of Noeme's decision, though they would greatly miss this woman who had truly proved to be the right arm of the priests of the parish. To a group of lay apostles of Aparecida parish Father Normando explained that Noeme was going ahead with a vocation she had long dreamed of, a vocation that would immerse her in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. (12)

Postulancy in a Foreign Land

Noeme was 33 years old when she was finally able to assemble her personal documents and passport to leave Brazil with Sisters Evelyn and Julitta to begin her first steps in religious formation. The long journey from Manaus to Belem began on November 7, 1946. In the United States they had a long stopover in St. Louis, Missouri, where Noeme had her first experience of a frosty winter day. In Wichita, still further west, the three travelers were warmly welcomed at the provincial motherhouse early in December.

Almost immediately Noeme was given a postulant veil and joined the group of fourteen other postulants. Despite differences in culture, nationality, experience, age and especially language, Noeme blended in very well with the group. She never asked for exceptions, or isolated herself from her companions, nearly all of whom were much younger than herself.

She was always cheerful and never showed the frustrations she may have felt, especially as she struggled with learning the English language. In preparation for the ceremony of investiture at the beginning of the novitiate, Noeme sewed the long white gowns and made the cords that all fourteen postulants wore at the investiture ceremony. ⁽¹³⁾

In her autobiographical notes Noeme wrote:

I traveled to the convent in the United States with the Sisters. I cannot describe the satisfaction I felt. It was a dream that I had hoped to realize for more than 20 years. Now it was becoming a reality. I did not think of the language that I did

not know, nor of the distance and climate. I thought only of the attainment of the goal that I had desired for so long--the desire to dedicate myself totally to God.

In Wichita, Sister Florence May was the first one to direct my religious formation. She was kind and lovingly dealt with the slowness of my comprehension. Because the language was so foreign to me, I felt I understood nothing. When my classes finally began, I could comprehend somewhat better, but the lessons were so difficult! God in his goodness, however, always consoled me.

Noeme considered the Sisters who guided her years of formation to be true instruments of God in her regard. They kept her from the discouragement that could have easily enveloped her, thus giving her the interior freedom she needed to continue her religious journey in peace.

Pictures taken during Noeme's formation years in Wichita show a jubilant group of 15 young women. The photos reveal Noeme's joy and satisfaction as the lone Brazilian amidst the other American novices and Sisters of the Wichita province.

Reaction of Noeme's Father

Before she entered the novitiate of the Adorers in Wichita, Noeme wrote to her father in Manaus telling him how she was and how things were going with her. The following letter was very meaningful to her and brought her great joy. The letter was dated from Manaus, February 3, 1947.

My dear Noeme,

Yesterday I received your letter of January 22 and also that of January 7 to which I am replying. I am very happy to know that you are enjoying good health and that you are content and satisfied. May God grant that on your return you will be much better, because here you were quite exhausted. The change of climate and customs must be agreeing with you.

I was a bit ill for three months but am much better now. It was a mild sickness which did not interfere with my customary duties, so you need not worry about me.

Now let us pass to that which I want to say. You asked my consent to enter the religious life in that Congregation, in order to realize your desire. I was not surprised at this change of plans and proposals which took you there, since I know the human heart, and especially that of women, in responding to their heart's desires.

If this is your firm desire, I do not oppose it because I am sure I would not be able to change your mind. I would feel remorse if I persuaded you to do differently. Thus, my dear daughter, follow what your heart counsels and be sure that your joy will be my joy. I pray to God that I can always be with you in all the aspects of your precious life.

As your father, I will remain here, hoping and asking God to give me life long enough to await your return. You are old enough to have a clear

understanding of what you feel to be your call, therefore, I think it would be useless and superfluous to add more to my counsel.

I am now alone at the Garcas. Umberto left because he felt he couldn't stay here constantly. He gave the home to Naito for five years. To satisfy your desires and those of the others, I will come to Manaus on July 1 of this year. I will then return to Garcas with Nair as companion. She and her little ones will stay with me for a while.

As you must know, your teacher's permit has been suspended because of your own neglect to apply for renewal. It could be that later one might arrange something to have it renewed, but this possibility is doubtful.

Accept the greetings of Aura, Yolanda, Nair, Renato and Silvio, as well as of the nieces and nephews.

I kiss you and ask you to bless your father.

Vincent Cinque ⁽¹⁴⁾

Novitiate and Profession as First Brazilian Adorer

As Noeme began her novitiate in Wichita on July 1, 1947, she was given her religious name, Serafina. One wonders why the superiors chose the name "Serafina" for the Brazilian novice. Perhaps it was the floating manner in which she walked. Perhaps it was chosen because she tried to imitate the angels in adoring prayer. Whatever the reason, it was a name that was



Sister Serafina, newly professed in 1948

very fitting for Sister Serafina as she united her contemplative stance before the Lord with her loving service to others in the years that followed. Such a union of contemplation and active ministry forms the very roots of the Congregation of Adorers of the Blood of Christ to which she now belonged.

As a novice, Serafina entered wholeheartedly into the program of the novitiate, profiting by the guidance of the novice directors and sharing the prayer, work and recreations of her companions. She herself commented thus in her autobiographical notes:

The year of novitiate was much better because I could understand the classes quite well since much of the teaching was familiar to me. I was sorry when the novice mistress, Sister Ventura, was elected provincial superior. She was succeeded, however, by Sister Aurelia, a generous and holy Sister who helped and encouraged me with her kind and motherly care.

During her novitiate year, as during her entire stay in the United States, Serafina's thoughts and prayer were often focused on far away Brazil and the work God had in store for the Adorers there.

She joined enthusiastically in the farewell festivities when the first four American Adorer missionaries to Brazil were given the mission cross by Bishop Mark Carroll on November 23, 1947. These were Sisters Julitta Elsen (appointed superior of the new mission), Jane Frances Baalman, Marciana Heimerman and Georgiana Heimerman. Serafina welcomed the good news that this pioneer group had made a safe journey, arriving in Coari on December 25, 1947, their hearts

filled with gratitude as they celebrated "a strange Christmas in a strange land." A year before, Serafina as a postulant had herself experienced her first Christmas, too, in a land that was strange to her!

In the early months of 1948, novice Serafina rejoiced as news arrived in Wichita about the mission work in Coari, where the Sisters had begun a school and were keeping some boarders, principally from the rural areas of the forests where no schools worthy of the name existed at the time. ⁽¹⁵⁾ She learned from letters that the Sisters also had initiated a health care center and a small hospital. She was delighted to hear how they were soon conducting Christian doctrine classes and were teaching sewing and embroidery, even as they continued struggling to learn the Portuguese language. Already in March, under the direction of Sister Marciana, they had opened a high school dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Help under whose special protection they hoped their mission in Amazonas would flourish. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Following her happy year of novitiate, Sister Serafina pronounced her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience on July 1, 1948, thus becoming the first Brazilian Adorer of the Blood of Christ. She had been delighted when she learned earlier how on March 4, 1948, the Adorer missionaries in Coari had begun an aspirancy for young women interested in joining the Congregation. ⁽¹⁷⁾ That news gave Serafina the blessed assurance that it would be for only a brief time that she would be the only Brazilian Adorer. Others would soon follow!

Several years later, when the sixth group of Brazilian women would make their profession in

Manaus as Adorers, Sister Serafina would write the final hymn used at the Mass that day:

The hour has come to sing with joy That Maria De Mattias now has a place in our hearts. Mother Foundress, Adorer, your charism is our ideal. Maria De Mattias of the Cross, the servant of Jesus' Paschal Mystery! Alleluia, let us be grateful for the Congregation she gave to us. As red roses on the altar, our vocation belongs to the Lord!

Return to Her Homeland in Brazil

In November of 1948, a few months after her first profession, Sister Serafina was more than ready to return to Brazil. With heart filled with joyful emotion and hopeful expectation, she was resolved to witness to other young Brazilian women that the way of life that the pioneer North American missionaries had pointed out to her was both beautiful and possible to follow. According to the charism of the Congregation founded by Maria De Mattias, that way of life consisted in adoration of the Blood of Christ joined to loving ministry to the "dear neighbor".

Traveling with Sister Serafina were two new missionary Adorers, Sister Bernita Marie Leiker and Sister Johanna Murguia; and the provincial superior, Mother Ventura Schulte. The group traveled on Pan American Airlines as far as Belem. It was November 18 when Sister Serafina once again set foot on her native soil. Her heart was filled with gratitude to the good God. The Redemptorist priests in Belem offered the travelers warm hospitality and saw them off to Manaus on another plane, where they arrived the next day.

What happened during their short stay in Manaus was recorded soon afterward by the Wichita missionaries in their newsletter, *Tropical Spice*:

While they were in Manaus, they had time to see the town, to get a bouncing over the wonderfully "smooth" streets in the Fathers' station wagon.... On Sunday evening the Padres and the good people of Aparecida parish in Manaus had a reception for the Sisters. This was especially a home-coming celebration for Sister Serafina who had left Manaus just two years ago to become the first Brazilian Adorer of the Most Precious Blood, in our Community. We cannot conceive the feelings she must have had on returning to her fatherland and to the good people whom she served so well before her entrance into Religion and whom she will serve more abundantly now. They, indeed, are very proud of her and in their joy of having her back again, they embraced her so hard that her watch broke. ⁽¹⁸⁾

A short while later, along with the rest of the group newly arrived from the United States, Sister Serafina was warmly welcomed by the Adorers and Redemptorist priests at Coari.

She was happy to see all that the Sisters had accomplished in so short a time.



Sister Serafina ready to board the plane for her return to Brazil, in company with two new Adorer missionaries and the Wichita provincial superior. Left to right: Sister Serafina, Sister Johanna Murguia, Mother Ventura, Sister Bernita Marie Leiker

IV - SERVING GOD'S PEOPLE AS AN ADORER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

A New Novitiate in Manaus

Already while Sister Serafina was still a novice in Wichita, it was becoming evident to the missionary Adorers in Coari that they needed a larger convent and novitiate in the city of Manaus. Construction of such buildings became a possibility soon when the local government consented to donate a large tract of land for this purpose. This happy news had been conveyed to Sister Julitta and the other Adorers in distant Coari through a letter of Redemptorist Father John McCormick.

Father Bernardo and Brother Gabriel accepted responsibility to supervise the construction of the buildings. Sister Julitta and Sister Georgiana went to Manaus to see about plans for the new novitiate building, which it was hoped would be the first to be completed. On November 7, 1948, the new Archbishop of Manaus blessed the site for the new novitiate and convent.

The building project moved along quickly. A festive ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone of the novitiate building took place on December 29, 1948, while Mother Ventura Schulte, provincial of Wichita, was still in Brazil. Sister Julitta and Sister Serafina stayed on then in Manaus to follow the construction work, and enjoyed the hospitality of the Salesian Sisters for the next few weeks.

One of Sister Serafina's immediate concerns was raising funds to help pay for the construction of the new buildings in Manaus. She was aware that students and friends in Wichita were giving financial help. However, she knew that her own fellow citizens would also contribute. With her gifts of persuasion and communication she did much to get donations for the construction. In Manaus she visited government offices and places of business. Her humility and persistence and spirit of sacrifice were persuasive in obtaining generous contributions.

Toward the end of February, things were far enough along that Sister Marciana and the candidates prepared for a transfer from Coari to the new novitiate in Manaus. After a special Mass and blessing, in the midst of a rainstorm, they climbed into two well-packed boats the morning of February 21, 1949. With stops at Codajaz and Manacapuru the trip took only two and a half days. Sister Serafina and Sister Julitta were at the unfinished convent to welcome them with open arms.

After a quick look around at all the nooks and crannies of the new but still unfinished novitiate building (which did not yet have windows and doors), Sister Marciana opened the little portable organ and they all sang a resounding Portuguese "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name."⁽¹⁹⁾ Sister Serafina was delighted!

Though recently professed herself, Sister Serafina was soon filling the role of an older sister among the young Brazilian candidates. She understood well how important it was for them to have a solid formation. Sister Serafina greatly appreciated the

dedication and love with which Sister Marciana was forming these young women. She was confident that they would be well guided through the year long novitiate in preparation for their profession of vows.

Her joy and pride were immense when this first group of Brazilian candidates, newly transferred from Coari, received the religious habit and began their novitiate. The date chosen was the Foundation Day of the Adorers, March 4.

The ceremony was held in the still unfinished Church of St. Gerard across the street from the new novitiate, where an overflowing crowd of parishioners gathered for the celebration. Sister Serafina had spent much of the night before helping Sister Marciana prepare bouquets of red and white roses for the altar in borrowed vases, while the workmen across the street were busy readying things at the church. On March 4 after breakfast Sister Serafina helped the candidates dress in their white bridal gowns, which she had sewed for them. She walked with them across the road from the convent to the church.

After the Archbishop blessed the habits, Sister Serafina, with big sisterly pride and care, helped the young women step into the nearby hut to change from their bridal gowns into their new habits. Along with the rest of the gathered crowd, Sister Serafina smiled as the new novices reentered the church in procession in their snow white habits, veils and wreaths, as the choir sang the traditional "Veni, Sponsa Christi". It was a beautiful celebration and many were moved to tears of joy.



An Adorer visiting the people in one of the villages



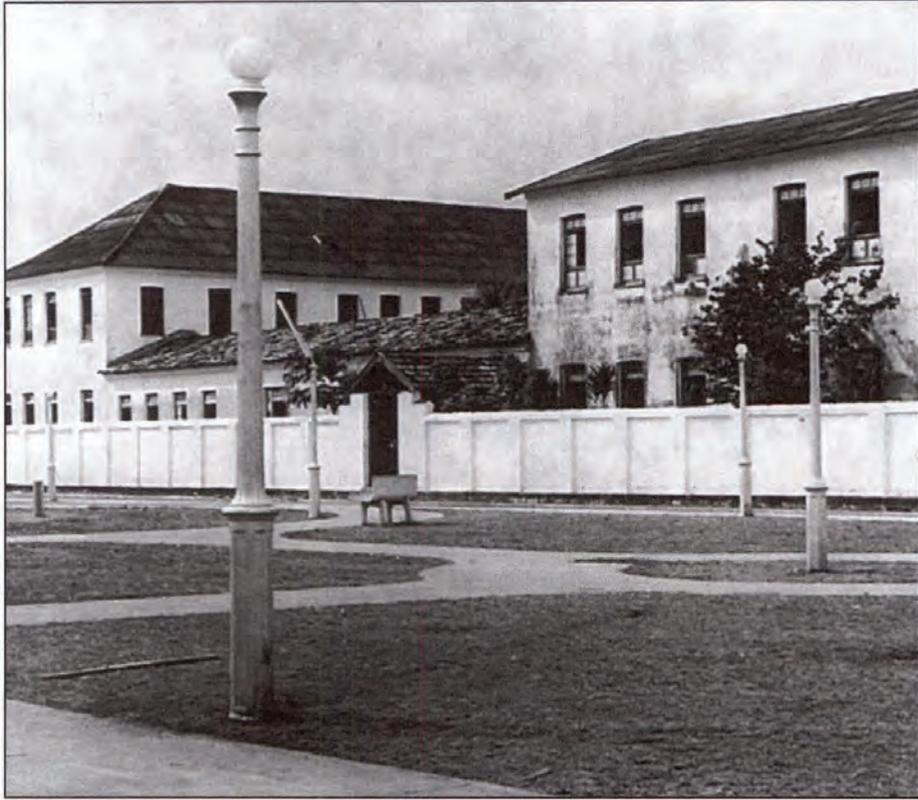
A typical street scene in Codajaz



Sister Serafina comforts a little toddler



A blessing for mother and baby



The school at Altamira in the 1950s



Teaching future teachers

First Assignment in Obedience

Little did those around her on that eventful March 4, 1949, realize that earlier that morning Sister Serafina had received from Sister Julitta a small piece of paper on which was written the place and work to which she was assigned for the coming year. It contained only six words: "Coari, Director of the High School." This was her very first "obedience" as a professed Sister.

"Obediences" were simply small pieces of paper, but they were in reality pieces of history, pieces of an Adorer's life. They were the assignments written on small slips of paper that the superior of the foundation gave to each Sister annually, beginning in 1949, as she sent them on their missions.

The convent records show that Sister Serafina left for Coari on March 5, the very next day after the investiture of the first group of Brazilian novices in Manaus.

At Coari, Sister Serafina opened her heart to the people of that small town, which was the birthplace of the Wichita Adorers missionary work in Brazil. It was a special place with many challenges because it was the only co-educational school in the entire state of Amazonas.

Coari was also special to Sister Serafina because it was the first of many obediences, many small slips of paper, that she would receive and treasure during her lifetime. These little pieces of paper on which her assignments were written were kept with love by Sister Serafina. They were found among her few possessions after her death. This collection was like a

symbol of the spirit of obedience with which she carried out the ministries that Christ willed for her. They marked the geography of her life journey, indicating the mission places where she carried out her duties and lived the obedience which she had so eagerly and so joyfully vowed in Wichita less than a year before on July 1, 1948.

Perpetual Profession

For Sister Serafina, July 1, 1953, the feast of the Precious Blood of Jesus, was a very special occasion in her life as an Adorer. Celebrated with great solemnity as the Congregation's titular feast, for Serafina it was a day of special rejoicing and gratitude as she pronounced her perpetual vows. Thus she sealed her love for Jesus, a youthful, maturing love, open and ready to follow the Lord Jesus wherever he would lead and through whatever difficulties lay ahead.

The feast of the Precious Blood was ordinarily the day for reception of the habit and religious profession among the Adorers in many parts of the Congregation. This particular July 1 was even more solemn because it marked the silver jubilee of Sister Marciana Heimerman, as well as the reception of the religious habit by fourteen postulants, who would be the fourth group of novices in Manaus. For Sister Serafina it was a source of added joy to be part of this eventful community day.

Sister Serafina, now wearing the gold heart of a perpetually professed Adorer, was a determined woman of action, not a writer who kept careful notes that would record her feelings about important events.

However, after her death a small notebook and several papers that belonged to her were kept and placed in the provincial archives of Manaus. Among these was a typed paper with the following thoughts she had noted from a retreat:

Request to fulfill God's Will. Grant me, dearest Jesus, your grace so that it will be in me until the end. Help me always to desire that which is most pleasing to you. May your will be done. With you, I have only one desire. I cannot wish or not wish anything but that which you desire or do not desire.

From the thoughts expressed in these notes, as well as from the witness of her life, especially as affirmed by those who knew her, it seems clear that the most important desire of Sister Serafina was to do God's will. This was manifested in the great spirit of docility with which she accepted and lived out the different "obediences" that her superiors asked of her from year to year.

The year after her perpetual profession in 1954, Sister Serafina was sent to Codajas, where she served for three years as local superior and director of Our Lady of Grace School that had been inaugurated in 1951.

Three years later, in 1957, Sister Serafina was again transferred, this time to Altamira as superior of the community of Adorers there, and as director of the Institute of Maria De Mattias, which had been opened in 1953. With dedicated persistence and with her usual enthusiasm for education, Sister Serafina prepared the necessary documentation and, after much prayer, she received from the authorities in Belem permission to begin the Pedagogical Institute of Altamira in 1958, thus satisfying a great need to train good teachers for

that city. In going where she was sent to minister, Sister Serafina was confident she was doing what God wanted of her.

Meanwhile, the year 1954 had been especially memorable for Sister Serafina and all the Adorers in Brazil. On June 13 that year, their group of missions were officially formed into a vice-province of the Congregation, because of the large number of new members. That decision had been made the previous year at the General Chapter in Rome. This date for the official change was selected because on June 13, 1954, Gaspar Del Bufalo was canonized by Pope Pius XII in Rome. He was the founder of the Precious Blood Missionaries and the one who had inspired Maria De Mattias for her life work. Sister Julitta Elsen was appointed the new vice-provincial superior and from then on was lovingly called "Mother Julitta".

Another event, a sad one, had occurred that touched deeply the life of Sister Serafina. Toward the end of June, 1955, she was called to Manaus to be with her father in his last illness. She stayed with him, giving him the comfort of her tender love. She was with him in his final moments, confiding him to the mercy of the Blood of Jesus as he drew his last breath on July 2, 1955.

Memorable Visit to the Birthplace of the Foundress and Her Own Ancestors

The year 1959 was especially memorable for Sister Serafina. Early in that year she was assigned to Santarem in the state of Para as local assistant in the community of Adorers there. She was also appointed to be directress of a new high school in the city

dedicated to St. Raymond Nonata. Sister Serafina enthusiastically put her energies into the development of this new high school as a continuance of the parochial elementary school that had been opened in Santarem two years earlier.

Another event which made 1959 so memorable for Serafina was her election as delegate to the General Chapter of the Congregation of Adorers. For this purpose she traveled to Italy in the company of Mother Julitta in July of that year. For Sister Serafina it was an immense joy to visit the great basilicas and other churches of Rome, and to meet other members of the international Congregation of the Adorers of the Precious Blood.

She was deeply moved by the opportunity to walk the cobblestone streets of Vallecorsa and Acuto, rich with memories of the foundress Maria De Mattias. The visits to these towns and to Rome greatly strengthened Serafina's devotion to the foundress and her attachment to the Congregation.

Being in Italy was also a reminder to Sister Serafina of her own ancestral roots, as she reflected on how her parents had left Italy many years earlier when they emigrated to Brazil.

On her return from the General Chapter in Rome Sister Serafina took up again her duties as directress of St. Raymond High School in Santarem. Two years later, she was transferred back to distant Coari as teacher of the pedagogical course which had been started six years earlier. Serafina took seriously this work of providing a sound education for local teachers. She was also first assistant of the large

community of Adorers at Coari, most of whom were temporarily professed Sisters. She continued to serve there until the end of 1962.

Sister Serafina never could forget the strong impact that the trip to Italy in 1959 had made on her. She spoke of it often and began listening to the Vatican radio station when she could, so as to be more deeply bonded with the center of the Church in Rome. She encouraged other Sisters to listen also so as to strengthen their union with the universal Church.

Sadness following Vatican Council II

Sister Serafina's second period of service at Coari lasted only two years. In 1963 she was called by her superiors to be a teacher and secretary at the Teacher Training School that the Adorers had developed in the town of Manacapuru on the banks of the wide Amazon River. There she also continued her various pastoral works as she had done elsewhere.

Serafina loved her students and showed great patience with them. In counselling young professed Adorers who were also teaching at Manacapuru, she urged them not to be too severe with their students.⁽²⁰⁾

During the years since her return from the United States, Sister Serafina had rejoiced in the growing numbers of young women who joined the Congregation in Brazil. By 1965 there were 135 professed Adorers serving in twenty communities scattered up and down the Amazon and its tributaries. Mother Julitta had often exclaimed: "God's blessings are so many on this mission that it is impossible to

count them." Because of its growth, the General Chapter of 1965 decided to form the Vice-Province of Manaus into a Province. Sister Serafina joined the other Adorers in their great joy as this very significant change went into effect on October 25, 1965. ⁽²¹⁾

Unfortunately, sadness soon began to subdue such rejoicing. Along with news of the great achievements of the Second Vatican Council that was concluded in late 1965 in Rome came a wave of misunderstanding of the real significance of some of the Council's decisions. For many Sisters in Brazil and elsewhere, the poorly understood changes mandated by the Council raised doubts and questioning of the value of their religious vocation. As a consequence many of the young Adorers in Brazil chose other options and withdrew from the Congregation. Sister Serafina was deeply troubled by this unexpected exodus. She herself was puzzled by some of the changes that were introduced in the province of Manaus.

Under date of May 18, 1971, Sister Serafina formulated a letter addressed to the members of the General Chapter which was to meet in Rome later that year. The letter showed her strong attachment to the province of Manaus and also her concern about certain changes happening in the life of the province. She was asking what she could do to help remedy the situation. Whether she sent this letter on to the General Superior or not, it surely indicates the anguish she was enduring at this time. ⁽²²⁾ Given her deep faith, Sister Serafina must have made her suffering a part of the daily chalice that she offered in the Eucharist.



Sister Serafina taking care of a new-born at the House of Divine Providence



Sister Serafina (left) and Sister Patricia Viana in Codajaz in 1958



Aerial view of the city Altamira, with the Xingu River in the background



The House of Divine Providence at Altamira



Mothers participate with Sister Serafina at the evening Mass at the House of Divine Providence



Mothers with their babies at the House of Divine Providence in Altamira as they pose for a photo

V - CHANGING MINISTRY IN CHANGING TIMES

Heart Divided Between Teaching and Nursing

In 1966, Sister Serafina was sent to the community at Nova Olinda do Norte, in the Borba Prelacy of Amazonas. The people of Nova Olinda, a small city along the Madeira River, were excited by the news of the discovery of petroleum in the subsoil of that area, a development which caused a sizable increase in the population of the city.

The North American Franciscan priests of the Third Order had invited the Adorers to this new field of action. Already in 1965 the Sisters had opened a parochial school and a health care clinic there, happy to respond to the invitation of the Franciscans to work with them. Their projects flourished and in 1968 the parochial school became the Nazareth High School. Sister Serafina taught at the school and worked in the clinic as well.

Because of the shortage of doctors in the interior, many sick people died, a situation that caused much pain and anguish to Sister Serafina. She often arranged to transfer to Manaus those who needed immediate assistance too serious to be handled at the clinic. After the tiresome boat trips, the more critical patients were placed in the hospitals for the treatment.

A former Adorer who worked at one of the hospitals gave the following statement about Sister Serafina's ministry:

As a temporary professed Sister, I was sent to Nova Olinda where I personally witnessed Sister Serafina's dedicated love for the poor and the sick. Hers was the witness of a true saint as she assisted with the births in the maternity ward and with various general services in the clinic. Those who know the difficult circumstances in the interior of Amazonas can understand the major health problems and hazards that pervaded this region.

Sister Serafina's untiring zeal and unlimited service in attending to the sick at any hour, especially to those who came from distant rural communities, was not always understood by some of the Sisters. They were concerned about Sister Serafina's personal physical condition. Some felt that adhering more regularly to a community schedule was fundamental, while Sister Serafina gave greater priority to caring for the needs of the poor at whatever hour they presented themselves. There were also those, however, who admired her humble acceptance of the criticisms and even offenses she received from some of the Sisters. Sister Serafina always defended her sick and poor, but at the same time, she also treated each Sister and every person with kindness and gentleness.

Some of the Sisters witnessed to the fact that Sister Serafina seemed to exemplify a new way of being involved in community and ministry at that particular time of renewal in the Church. In the midst of all her involvements with God's people in need, Sister Serafina did not forget nor neglect the primacy of prayer. She was seen

many times in the chapel. Her concern for priests during the difficult Post-Conciliar period was likewise evident. She counseled younger community members to listen to the priests and to pray much for them. (23)

One particular instance that demonstrated Sister Serafina's care was the time when Sister Genoveva became quite ill with typhus. With her insightful nursing skills, Sister Serafina recognized Sister Genoveva's very critical condition and was instrumental in getting her to a hospital in Manaus for the treatment she desperately needed.

Sister Serafina had the nursing skills and gentle caring love that reached out to the poorest of the poor, a gift that would be even more evident in the future. Years later, each Sister in the Manaus Province was asked to indicate her preference among the five areas of ministry: education, nursing, social work, domestic service and vocational work. Sister Serafina marked "nursing", and added: "In this work I feel fulfilled and I am very happy."

A Serious Illness

For twenty years Sister Serafina had spent herself in the service of others. She had not measured the consequences of her strenuous work and had not given herself time for a real and prolonged vacation that her exhausted body so badly needed. Consequently she fell victim to tuberculosis in 1969.

Her physical condition, which had always been frail, continued to weaken day by day. The superiors

called her to Manaus where she could rest and receive treatment. She remained at the provincial house all of 1969. The long months of inactivity were very difficult for her since she had been so actively involved in helping others for more than two decades.

Added to the weight of the cross of her poor health was Sister Serafina's great sorrow at seeing the collapse of the oil boom in Amazonas. The oil industry had brought at least some relief to the misery and sufferings of the poor. Now the oil workers were leaving the area in the same type of sad exodus as the rubber workers had made decades earlier. When Sister Serafina tried to intervene with the authorities she was told, "The petroleum of this poor region has no commercial value...it does not pay!" Soon the vacant buildings and outposts used by the oil workers stood abandoned in the jungle. A few were transformed into schools for children within walking distance. Others were left to go to ruins where they stood as reminders of what could have been.

Sister Serafina was at a loss to see that the Governor of Amazonas had so little interest in helping the poor whom she loved so much and who suffered so much poverty and illness because they lacked the basic human needs.

Although she felt keenly the uselessness of her efforts to alleviate the sufferings of the poor, she witnessed much courage to the Sisters who visited her. She would often say, "Sisters, let us offer everything for the province and for the Church."

Because her health did not improve satisfactorily during the year in Manaus, Sister Serafina was sent to

Marituba in 1970 where the Adorers were collaborating with the Redemptorists at their minor seminary. She had served as the secretary for the seminary in the past and was happy to take up residence with the Sisters there.

The air and the environment around the seminary were good for Sister Serafina. The town was close to Belem and was situated near the newly constructed road connecting Belem with the interior capital of Brasilia. In due time Sister Serafina regained her strength sufficiently to return to Altamira. Once again she took up her work among the poor of the Xingu River region whom she so dearly loved.



VI - "ANGEL OF THE XINGU"

Reassigned to Altamira in the Prelacy of the Xingu River Area

Following Vatican Council II, the Church in Latin America underwent many changes as did the rest of the universal Church. As the bishops of the Latin American countries continued to implement changes, they courageously faced the challenges which grew out of the social injustices and the plight of the poor of their regions. As a result of the conferences of Church leaders held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, and in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, additional changes were outlined. Priests, religious and laity were urged to give preferential option to the very poor and to become actively involved in working for justice and the improvement of the existing social conditions of Latin America.

The province of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Manaus responded wholeheartedly to the call of the bishops and became leaders in the struggle for improving the plight of the poor. Well versed in the social doctrine of the Church and responding to the challenges held out by their bishops, the Adorers committed themselves to work zealously for social justice and for the care of the people who lived in dire poverty wherever their ministry took them throughout Amazonia.

Already in 1934, Pope Pius XI was concerned about

Latin America when he instituted the Prelacy of the Xingu. In the gigantic area of the Green Forest with its 332,542 square kilometers and sparse population, the Pope erected the largest geographic diocese in Brazil and in the world. He drew from the boundaries of the Archdiocese of Belem in the state of Para and from the dioceses of Santarem and Araguaia. The See City of the new diocese was located in Altamira on the Xingu River, a large tributary of the Amazon deep in the forests of Amazonia. The papal decree recognized the isolation and great needs of the area and stated that the new diocese was being formed because the good of souls demanded it. (24)

Sister Serafina was sent to Altamira in 1972 for a double ministry. She was asked to work in the parish health care center to serve the needs of the sick and the poor. She was also assigned to help train teachers by working with other Adorers in their Pedagogical Institute in Altamira. This dual outreach to the people enabled Sister Serafina to learn very quickly the many needs of the area and to hear the cries of the poor in their miserable conditions of degradation and poverty. The people came to her not only from Altamira but also from the isolated communities on the shores of the Xingu River which cut through the center of the diocese.

Day after day, and month after month, Sister Serafina grew in her compassion and dedication to the people she served. Her Christ-response to their continuous needs intensified her desire to work ever more zealously to improve the social conditions that were causing such suffering to the people who lacked even basic human needs.

As the months passed, Sister Serafina understood better and could appreciate the heroism of the early Missionaries of the Precious Blood who had come to the region from Germany as early as 1930. ⁽²⁵⁾ She held in admiration Dom Clement Geiger, who administered the Prelacy from 1935 and then served as its first bishop from 1948 to 1971. She greatly esteemed the many accomplishments of Dom Erich Krautler, who was a member of the first team of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and then served as the second bishop from 1971 until his health failed in 1978. ⁽²⁵⁾ Pope John Paul II chose as his successor Dom Erwin Krautler, who had come from Austria 15 years earlier as a missionary in the Diocese of the Xingu. ⁽²⁶⁾

As Sister Serafina became more and more immersed in the social and pastoral work of the area, she grew in her appreciation and dedication and sacrifices of the Missionaries who had been working in the far-flung and very isolated communities in the interior and along the tributaries of the Xingu. As she tended the sick and ministered to the poor she could only marvel at the great sacrifices made by the first Adorers of the Province of Schaan who had worked in Altamira from 1936 to 1953.

The many sufferings of the past, however, were soon to be overshadowed by even greater and more complex ones! The entire diocese was violently affected by the influx of people who would soon be enduring unimaginable hardships because of the building of the Transamazonian Road that began in 1972. It was the stated intention of President Medici to construct a 3170 mile long road as a means of connecting by land the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It

was to extend from the eastern frontiers of Brazil to western Peru. The President was hoping it would move the people from the very dry section of northeast Brazil to the rainy areas of the interior where there were so few inhabitants. Under the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1984, those in authority listened neither to many Brazilian scientists and sociologists, nor to foreign environmentalists, who foresaw the sad consequences that the road would bring to the people and to the ecology of the world. (27)

Little did Sister Serafina and others of the region realize in 1972 the negative impact that the construction of the new road would have on their work. Little did she realize that the cries of the poor would only get louder as their unmet needs increased by leaps and bounds. It would not be long before she would understand why the poor would be calling the Transamazonian Road the "Road of Tears."

Pastoral Work amid the Tragic Consequences of the Transamazonian Road

Along with Church leaders and missionaries working the vast region of the Xingu, Sister Serafina was amazed and overwhelmed by the rapidity of the changes that happened as work on the road went forward. As the federal government opened clearings in the jungle for the Transamazonian Road, people were brought into the region from every direction in response to the glowing promises of the government, promises which quickly proved to be an illusion.

People from the state of Para hurried to the newly opened spaces. They were eager to escape the slow traffic of centuries where they had only "liquid roads", tributaries of the mighty Amazon River through which they could paddle their small boats to their interior villages. With great expectations they left their homes behind and arrived with their meager belongings and high hopes for a better life. They were intrigued and awestruck as they watched the tractors and heavy equipment knock down the trees and cut their way through the jungle. "Finally, progress is arriving," they exclaimed.

All too soon, however, they were to realize that this "progress" would overrun them with violence, untold sufferings, and even death. It would cause many to return to the small river communities from which they had come. It left others stranded and only wishing that they had the means to leave.

People from the northeastern states of Brazil also saw in the new road hopeful possibilities for a better life. They had suffered continuously from the terrible droughts, which caused their crops to dry up and their cattle to die. The proposed agricultural reform and government assistance still existed only on paper. Within a very short time after the beginnings of work on the Transamazonian Road, hundreds of thousands hurried to find their dreams of a better life realized in the small clearings along the highway. All but the wealthy among them were also bitterly disappointed, as were others who emigrated to the area from the east, the central and the southern states of Brazil.

In their disappointment, many workers with their families cleared for themselves small trails that led from the road construction sites back into the jungle areas, where, contrary to their hopes, life became even more difficult for them. They lived in fear of the scattered Indian tribes whose land was being invaded by the construction of the highway. ⁽²⁸⁾ They feared the wild animals that roamed throughout the jungle area. They suffered from the chilled air during the six months of the rainy season when many became ill with various fevers and unfamiliar illnesses. The farmers constantly suffered threats of being expelled from their bit of land by armed men, hired by wealthy men who wanted the land. ⁽²⁹⁾ These small farmers also lacked the means of transportation that could take the produce from their small gardens to be bartered or sold to the people crowded together at the various clearings along the Transamazonian Road.

As these newly tried farming ventures failed to prosper, many of the young people moved to the growing cities, leaving only the adults, the elderly and the children to fend for themselves. ⁽³⁰⁾ The more populated areas, the fast-growing cities, were quickly becoming places of violence and social evils unknown to the people who had so recently migrated from their isolated and more sheltered homes. Indeed, all too quickly the people of all ages began to realize that their dreams for a better life along the Transamazonian Road had turned into a nightmare.

The cries and hopeless pleas of the people were heard by Sister Serafina as more and more of them arrived at the clinic in Altamira where she cared for their emaciated bodies. She listened to their

tales of how the jungle was reconquering the land, how the tropical plant known as "witch's broom" was unmercifully overtaking their small gardens, how the sun was burning the tender plants before the vegetables were ready to harvest, how the torrential rains washed away the dirt trails they had made to connect themselves to the road, how loved ones were mauled by wild animals as they looked for precious woods in the forest, and how wounded men, pregnant women and sick children died in the small clustered populations along the unfinished road because they had no medical care.

Day by day Sister Serafina moved from her care of the sick in the clinic to her teaching duties with the other Adorers in the Institute of Maria De Mattias. Challenges there were of quite another nature. The population in the town of Altamira had mushroomed from 14,000 in 1970 to over 125,000 in a short time. Thousands of children now looked for schooling from the Adorers where only a couple hundred had been enrolled before the Transamazonian Road construction began.⁽³¹⁾ The poverty, the long and weary journey to the unfamiliar region, the insecurity, and the usual sufferings of migrant people continued to add to the work and long hours of service that the teachers came to expect.

The cries of the poor were indeed loud and clear. Sister Serafina heard their cries, and her heart beat with compassion for them. She poured out all her energy and skill as she cared for their many needs. When she had nothing more to give, she enveloped them in her love and prayerfully turned them over to the loving care of the Lord.



A tiny life snuffed out too soon



Hopeful expectation of a kind word and needed help

Beginning of a Special Ministry: the Story of Benedita

Benedita is one example of the tragic situations that Sister Serafina encountered as she began her second assignment to work in Altamira in 1972. She was among the first to feel the compassion that Sister Serafina would extend to thousands of others who were victims of the tragedies which replaced the dreams of those who migrated to the so-called "promised land" along the new Transamazonian Road that was under construction. Benedita and the many others who shared her plight were fortunate, by the mercy of God, to encounter the new Good Samaritan in the person of Sister Serafina.

Benedita and her husband were farmers. They lived in a small clearing along one of the trails that led into the interior about 120 kilometers up the developing highway. They were trying to survive with their five children. Their cares increased as Benedita approached the last stages of her sixth pregnancy. Benedita had contracted malaria and was extremely weak. She lacked all medical help to relieve her feverish condition and to prepare for the birth of her child. The mid-wife of the region had left the area for Belem, and the closest hospital located in a distant farming village did not accept pregnant women. There were very few doctors to care for the many sick people.

Benedita's condition worsened as the time for her delivery approached. Her worried husband persuaded her to travel the 120 kilometers to Altamira where she might be able to have the care of a doctor.

Accordingly, Benedita left the four older children in the care of her nearly blind mother, who lived with the family, and prepared for the difficult journey. She knew she had to take the eighteen-month old Josias with her because she was still nursing him.

Her husband succeeded in finding the money, well beyond their own means, and helped her early one morning into the back of a truck that was making a trip to Altamira. The road was as yet only a dirt road and there were many washouts along the way. The truck bounced its way through the gullies caused by the tropical rains. At times the passengers had to get out and go on foot because temporary bridges had been washed out. Some times the heavy equipment along the way, and the many trucks carrying supplies to the workers, raised billows of dust that covered and threatened to suffocate the unprotected passengers in the back of the truck. Complaints were few, however, because they knew that it would be worse during the rainy season when they could be stranded for hours or days because the truck would likely get stuck in the mud.

Around 7:00 o'clock in the evening the truck finally arrived at the hospital in Altamira. Benedita's extended womb and the weight of Josias and their few belongings in her arms were making it difficult for her to breathe. Josias was crying from hunger and thirst, and Benedita tried to comfort him as the nurse agreed to summon a doctor for her. After a hurried examination of the exhausted woman the doctor remarked casually, "Lady, you must have made a mistake in calculating the time for the child's birth. It will not be soon. It may even be a week or more."

"Then what am I to do now, doctor?" asked the frightened and weak Benedita. "I live 120 kilometers from here. With this baby in my arms and no money for a return trip, I can't go back home. What am I to do?"

"We have rules to observe in the hospital," the doctor replied. "We can only receive women who are ready to give birth. Come back in a week or so. In the meantime, try to find someone who will take you into their home."

On swollen and trembling legs Benedita left the hospital. The guard closed the gate behind her as she left the hospital grounds. Hungry, exhausted, and unable to take another step, Benedita sank to the ground. She leaned back against the wall surrounding the hospital property and hugged little Josias more closely to her aching heart. How could she spend the night on the outskirts of this large city so full of new dangers and violence? Her mental anguish was only intensified as a wave of pain swept over her from the movement of the child within her.

The cries of Josias were barely silenced as he sucked hungrily at her skimpy breast when a flash of lightning cut through the sky above them. Benedita crouched closer to the wall and cried aloud in despair, "O my God, besides all the problems I already have, now there is this rain! Help me. Save me!"

Too tired to rise, Benedita sat on the ground as the rain fell around her and her nursing infant. Suddenly a thin woman with white hair stood before her. With kindness and compassion the lady stroked Benedita's

hair, now stiff with the road dust that was turning to mud with the falling rain.

Benedita felt immediate confidence in the unknown lady. "Could it be that I am dreaming?" she thought. "Could it even be Our Lady?" She learned quickly that she was not dreaming and that it was not a vision of Our Lady who stood before her. It was Sister Serafina, A.S.C., who listened kindly to her story and then reached out her hand to help Benedita get up from the ground.

Sister Serafina carried Josias and their few belongings as Benedita leaned on her for support. They walked to the convent where Sister Serafina prepared a bath for them, gave them some soup, and then tucked them in bed for the night.

It was a happening that was to become a way of life for Sister Serafina in the remaining years of her life!

Reaching out to Expectant Mothers

Benedita was the first of hundreds of women whom Sister Serafina found wandering around the streets of Altamira in advanced stages of pregnancy. Without money they could not find housing or food. Many could not physically endure a return trip over the rough roads even if they could find place on one of the trucks. Their very lives and that of the babies they carried in their wombs were in great danger if they tried to make the strenuous and jolting trip back to their homes in the interior. The road that might

eventually be a highway through the jungle of Brazil was indeed, for them, a road of suffering, a trail of pain.

Sister Serafina reached out to these women with great compassion and sensitivity. At first she would take them to the clinic where she worked part time. There she cared for them and tried to console them in their fear and loneliness. She became more and more distressed with the conditions and dangers these women suffered as they roamed the streets looking for food and some nook where they might find relief from the tropical sun or rain during the day and where they might rest their exhausted and extended bodies during the night.

Sister Serafina studied the situation. Walking the streets of Altamira she was greatly moved by the conditions she encountered. Not only were pregnant women without the help they had journeyed so far to receive, but there were also countless sick. Growing numbers of people were falling victims to pneumonia and other illnesses brought on by hunger and the make-shift shelters in which they lived as they resettled and looked for work with the construction crews. When their cases seemed hopeless, the sick and aged were often abandoned in cities like Altamira. Sister Serafina was determined to do something to alleviate such great distress.

She tried to have the rigid policies of the hospital changed so that women in the final days of their pregnancy could be admitted for care. Her efforts were in vain. She took as many as she could to her clinic, but the small building was even inadequate for its outpatient services. Sister Serafina soon discovered

that space was not the only problem. She found herself begging for money to buy food and medicine for her suffering poor.

When she saw the hopelessness of caring for the needy in her clinic, Sister Serafina looked for other possibilities. A former student of the Adorers was head of the National Institute for Agricultural Reform. Sister Serafina approached him and was happy to be given a room in his building for her use. When that room became too small, he helped her obtain additional space owned by the Secretary of Health. A fourth and larger place was needed and was found adjacent to the diocesan seminary building.

As time went on, Sister Serafina felt it necessary to gather the sick into shelters where they could be treated with dignity, where women could have food, medicine and rest as they awaited the moment of birth, and where they could receive some instruction to better their lives when they returned to their distant homes in the clearings of the forest.

During the time Sister Serafina used the space at the National Institute of Agricultural Reform, she found encouragement and support from another former student of the Adorers who worked at the Institute. Touched by Sister Serafina's charity she would frequently offer her the car of the Institute and accompany Sister Serafina as she ministered to the poor and suffering people on the streets. Come rain or shine, in the Institute's car or on foot, Sister Serafina was out on the streets begging, explaining the plight of the poor to officials, pleading for medicine and food, and searching for clothes and blankets for the poor whom she found everywhere. (32)

It was not an easy task to open the hearts of many people to the needs of the poor and the abandoned. In regard to the pregnant women it was even more difficult! As their numbers in the streets increased so did the angry murmuring of the people of the town:

Why do these women have so many children? Why aren't they using birth control pills? Why did they choose to live out along the road clearings? Where are the husbands of these women? Why did they begin having children so young?

Sister Serafina did not waste time with such questioning. She understood the social, political and economic effects of the new road construction. She realized the negligence of the government in resolving the problems that flowed from the so-called progress they had envisioned in their endeavor to overtake the jungle. She empathized with the difficult times through which Brazil was passing. For her it was not a time to simply question the situations in which people found themselves. Human beings were living in subhuman conditions. They were poor, sick, abandoned, hungry, and suffering.

It was a time for action.

As Sister Serafina prayed and continued her work among the poor, she felt more and more certain that this was the ministry to which the Lord was calling her. She asked her Provincial Superior, Sister Inacia Pereira, for permission to be relieved of her assignment as part-time teacher in the school so that she could devote herself full-time to her work among the poor. The permission was granted.



Waiting to see Sister Serafina



A mother cares for her newborn at the House of Providence

The "White Angel" of the Transamazonian Road

Responding to the health needs of the region was not new to the Church of the Xingu diocese. In fact, the Church had pioneered in health care for the people in the interior. The diocese had constructed St. Raphael Hospital and eventually obtained the support of the federal government for its maintenance. However, Bishop Erich Krautler and his nephew and assistant, Dom Erwin Krautler, were worried about the explosion of population caused by the Transamazonian Road project. Like Sister Serafina, they were concerned about the sick and poor and the pregnant women of the region. They recognized that with the influx of so many who were sick, that it was impossible for any but the most critical patients to be admitted to the hospital. The doctors and staff were sympathetic with the efforts of Sister Serafina but were often unable to do anything except to offer consultation in some of the emergencies she faced in her service to the sick and suffering. ⁽³³⁾

In addition to the usual illnesses that were common in Altamira, an increasing number of people were falling victim to new fevers and blood disorders. As more and more of the trees of the forest were destroyed in order to make way for the new roadway, mosquitoes and other insects had their natural habitats destroyed. They swarmed into other areas and became unmerciful pests and the source of illness to humans. This was just one more problem that made the dreams and promises of the benefits of the Transamazonian Road turn into nightmares and suffering, especially for the poor.

Despite the seemingly insuperable odds, Sister Serafina persisted in her outreach to the needy, convinced that she was doing God's will. With humility and much patience she continued to receive the pregnant women who came from the rural areas and to seek out the sick and the abandoned. Space for them was always a concern, and before long she even began crowding the John XXIII parish hall with those who needed shelter, treating them with love and great respect for their human dignity.

One day Sister Serafina called Father Jose Gruber, C.P.P.S. to the parish hall, where she had taken in two abandoned elderly men who were badly in need of a haircut. She asked him to do the honors, which he did. He became a great admirer of her efforts and, like many others, found himself getting more and more involved with her in her charitable care for others. ⁽³⁴⁾

She often called on him when she needed someone chauffeured in the parish car. One day she asked Father Jose to go with her to a house of prostitution in the city. She had heard that there was a woman there who had tuberculosis and who was not receiving any care. Sister Serafina wanted Father Jose to bring the car so they could take the woman for treatment. Even the anger and resistance of the man who ran the house of prostitution did not deter Sister Serafina. She stood her ground until the tubercular woman went with them for help. Subsequently she kept in contact with this woman and guided her both in her physical and spiritual progress. Eventually the woman was cured, married, provided a good life for her children, and became a close collaborator with Sister Serafina in her charitable work.

Many other such unfortunate women also clasped the outstretched hand of Sister Serafina when she encountered them on the streets of the city or its outskirts. One prostitute later recalled the time that she was embraced by "that Sister filled with charity", as she described the meeting. This woman was well along in her pregnancy and had been thrown out of her parents' house when they learned of her condition. Sister Serafina took her in and cared for her until the baby was born. The compassionate care she received made such an impression on her that she, too, became one of Sister Serafina's faithful helpers.

The assistance that so many people needed was varied and without end. The women who accompanied Sister Serafina on her regular begging trips through the city asked for food, for clothing, for medicine, for blankets, and for money to help supply the needs of the poor. They walked for hours carrying heavy baskets with their donations until someone with a truck would, on occasion, offer them a ride.

Even after only one year in Altamira, Sister Serafina had become well known by the town folks and the poor who were settling in the clearings along the new roadway. They had either witnessed, heard about, or experienced her courage and zeal in working with the sick and the poor. It was, therefore, a great joy for them when, in 1973, after only one year in their midst, they celebrated with Sister Serafina her silver jubilee as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ.

Newspapers and magazines of the region carried articles describing the celebration, and some of them referred to her as "The Angel of the Transamazonian Road" (35)

As people followed Sister Serafina's work and became better acquainted with the outpouring of her love for the poor, they began comparing her to Mother Teresa of Calcutta and referred to her as "Mother Teresa of Altamira". On her part, however, Sister Serafina was simply content to be doing God's will as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ reaching out to meet the needs of her "dear neighbor".

The Refuge

Sister Serafina once told a group of Adorers who greatly admired her dedication to the sick that one morning while alone at personal prayer in the community chapel of the Institute of Maria De Mattias, she heard the voice of a man calling from outside the window, "Sister Sarafina, help me! I'm dying!" Running to a window, Sister Serafina saw a poor man clothed in rags, trembling and unable to walk.

He explained: "Sister Sarafina, look at my leg! I was bitten by a snake five months ago while I worked on the road! I spent a month in the hospital and yesterday they told me to leave because I will never get well. My family lives at Kilometer 150 ⁽³⁶⁾ and it seems that they, too, have abandoned me. Help me, for the love of God! I don't want to die. I can't walk!"

Sister Serafina responded immediately to his pleading and helped him to "The Refuge". With medicine and bandages obtained from the hospital, Sister Serafina gently and expertly bandaged the man's leg and then prepared a meal for him. She borrowed a hammock and sheets from the priests and made the poor man as comfortable as she could.

Soon after Dom Erwin Krautler was made bishop, his Vicar General, Father Frederico Tschol, had seen to the construction of a shelter for Sister Serafina's sick. It consisted of a dining room and a dormitory, which had accommodations for twelve people. However, with extra blankets, the shelter often provided for as many as 50 persons. So as not to be sent away, the sick or injured who could do so volunteered their help with the cleaning. Medicinal plants provided tea, and a garden produced vegetables. Because gas was very expensive, wood was gathered to fuel the large wood stove. (37)

Without this practical "Refuge", as it became popularly called, Sister Serafina would have felt quite distressed in serving the steady stream of needy who called out for her assistance. Each person and every family had its painful and often tragic story to relate, whether they came from the settlements along the Transamazonian Road, from the banks of a river, or from deep in the interior.

According to each one's condition, Sister Serafina would either take care of them at The Refuge, or get them admitted to the hospital for treatment if at all possible. At times she would manage to send to the Adorers' Guadalupe Hospital in Belem patients in a critical condition who could not be properly cared for in Altamira. She would get the message through to the Adorers working at the hospital so they could be prepared to receive these patients. It happened rather often that she would have sent word that two patients were coming and then, if there was the possibility of room on the plane, she would send one or more additional patients who could get better care in Belem. (38)



Sister Serafina, as the people of Altamira knew her
in the later years of her ministry

VII - THE HOUSE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Bishop Erich Krautler's Support for the Project

Sister Serafina dreamed of a permanent building to care for the many, many pregnant women who kept arriving in Altamira after an often perilous journey, hoping for a safe delivery for their baby. Impressed by the inexhaustible love of Sister Serafina for the needy and suffering people of his Prelacy, especially for these poor women, Bishop Erich Krautler became her friend and supporter.

He was shocked by the faces of the pregnant women who sought assistance in their destitute situation. Dirty, tired, afflicted, they came with nothing more nor less than their human condition. Wrapped in the great mystery of maternity, they braved hours and even days of travel on foot along solitary forest paths or in rickety buses and trucks that were crowded with people and baggage. Spending most of what was already their very meager means, they arrived in Altamira with but one hope in their hearts--to save the life of the son or daughter they carried within them.

Dom Erich was destined by God to hear the cries of those children, many of whom died before help could reach them in the interior regions where the rate of child mortality was extremely high. More than anyone else, Dom Erich understood the special charism of Sister Serafina. Undisturbed by the criticisms and the name calling directed at her by some, he admired how

calmly she ignored the accusations of those who said she was "giving fish to these people instead of teaching them to fish."

The bishop recognized that more was needed to care for the pregnant women than the simple shelter that The Refuge could provide as so many sick and injured continued to crowd this shelter. On a visit to Europe, he made the need known and had a good response. He received substantial sums of money from friends in the parish of Biberach in southern Germany and also from the Governor of Voralberg in Austria for the construction of a house for the pregnant women who were coming to Sister Serafina for assistance. The Congregation of the Precious Blood Missionaries praised the initiative of Bishop Krautler, and encouraged him to pursue further efforts to support the project financially.

After the Bishop spoke to some journalists about the project, one of them wrote the following impressive phrase in an Austrian magazine: "Our women no longer want more children. So let us help those who still have the courage to have them!"

Construction of the House of Divine Providence

On returning to Altamira, Dom Erich asked Father Frederico Tschol, who was very knowledgeable in the field of construction, to direct the building of the house for the pregnant women. It was to be built on land donated by the Diocese of the Xingu. This was a plot of land on Antonio Vieriea Street, 214 Bairro Brasilia. The Bishop's involvement in the project explains why the Sisters considered him the co-founder of the work

and noted the close connection of his missionary life and service with the welfare of mothers.

From time to time the construction was delayed for various reasons. Sister Serafina prayed earnestly to Blessed Maria De Mattias for the realization of her dream. She also encouraged the women to pray to Blessed Maria for the successful completion of this project that was so important for them and for other women. Sister Serafina reminded them that in her lifetime Blessed Maria had done much for the promotion and needs of women, and that she would be a powerful intercessor for this project in Altamira.

Begun in 1979, the construction of the new building was finally completed in 1984. It was a spacious and practical facility, including a lovely chapel and the many rooms needed to serve its purpose of providing a suitable place for the pregnant women coming from the interior who so hoped to give birth in safety to healthy babies. In addition, a section was provided for a local community of Adorers who would staff the facility.

On the front of the building was a large mosaic of Our Lady of the Most Precious Blood. A statue of Our Lady with the Child Jesus also was placed there to extend a warm welcome to the pregnant women and the children they were carrying in their wombs.

Some friends relate that when Sister Serafina returned from a trip and first saw the large, beautiful structure, she cried with emotion and almost fainted as she admired its size and beauty. Larger than she had envisioned, she wondered how she would ever manage to maintain it. However, she quickly recovered

her courage, saying "This building belongs to Divine Providence. God will provide." At that moment, Sister Serafina confided to the Lord the five dormitories for pregnant women, the cribs for the babies, the laundry, the reception room, the garage and the surrounding land.

On April 4, 1984, Sisters Serafina, Inacia and Marieth joined the staff of the House of Providence and prepared for its official opening. That occurred on May 13, which in that year happened to be Mother's Day. The House of Providence was inaugurated with the celebration of the Eucharist by Bishop Erwin Krautler and Father Frederico Tschol. (39)

Maintaining the House of Providence

After the facility was constructed, the heroic example of Sister Serafina and the encouragement of the Sisters motivated the people of Altamira to contribute to the maintenance of this good work. In her determination, Sister Serafina continued to canvass the communities in the city and the interior regions along the roads to seek assistance from families and persons of greater means. She begged for beds, sheets and many other needed furnishings as well as money.

However, since God's works are usually accomplished through much suffering, Sister Serafina met up with difficulties in this effort. Many times she was met with ill treatment. On one occasion a man they encountered along the way told them they should make those "witches" work instead of allowing them to "make" children. Another time, when Sister Serafina was accompanied by a woman who had given birth

earlier and who was now offering her help, a storekeeper shouted, "No one should give anything to this old witch who only knows how to beg." Sister Serafina approached the man, thanked him for the 'compliment' and continued quietly on her way.

At times some of the other Adorers would accompany Sister Serafina on her begging trips. She and her companions were grateful for the food contributions they would receive along the way. There were so many women and sick who needed help after their long travels from the interior, some coming even three or four hundred kilometers in rickety trucks or busses. In her generosity, Sister Serafina could never say "No" to those who came for help. Her powerful example inspired many others to say "Yes" to their sisters in need. As a result, she would often return from her begging trips with the truck belonging to the Diocese loaded with sacks of rice, beans and coffee, as well as corn and peppers to preserve the beans. On long trips she would exchange perishable produce, such as eggs and fruits, for other non-perishable food supplies.

"The House of Sister Serafina"

Long before the construction of the building had been completed, Sister Serafina told the Sisters and their collaborators: "This house must be called a 'House of Providence' because it is God who will provide for its maintenance and continuity." Her trust in the good God was unshakable.

The majority of the people of Altamira recognized the goodness of Sister Serafina herself, including the

doctors at the local hospital. At times they felt they had to refuse to care for some woman. Yet if the woman would mention that she was a patient of Sister Serafina or that Sister Serafina herself had referred her, the doctor would immediately accept her as his patient and give her the medical treatment she needed.

Because of their admiration for Sister Serafina, rather than refer to the place as "The House of Divine Providence" many local citizens, especially the poor, preferred to call the building "The House of Sister Sarafina". In all the region of the Transamazonian Road the figure of this humble, loving woman was engraved in the hearts and minds of the people, who proclaimed by their trust and admiration, "Long live Sister Sarafina!"

VIII - SERAFINA'S TRUST IN THE GOOD GOD

"How good God is!" This phrase was often on the lips of Sister Serafina. One could say that it gave meaning to her whole life. So simple and so profound, this beautiful expression opens for us a window which helps us understand a little better her interior life. In the various circumstances of her life journey she felt she was touched by the love of God, whether that was in her family at home, or in the years when her vocation was developing, or in the United States during her religious formation, or while she ministered as an Adorer in Brazil in the states of Amazonas or Para.

Sister Serafina explained divine love in terms of the pure and simple goodness of God. She felt utterly unworthy of this love with which she and others were so gifted. The evidence of God's love led her to rationalize thus: since God is good and God's goodness is limitless, God certainly will never abandon those who are the object of God's love. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Sister Serafina's faith in God's goodness and love was the source of her unshakable confidence in Divine Providence. She recognized God's loving providence active in every moment of life, guiding her always in her life of love, zeal, care, mercy and attentiveness to others in their need.

Besides so much other evidence of this trust in Providence throughout her life, one incident that happened in 1983 stands as a particular example. In community with her in Altamira at the time were Sister



A moment of relaxation in front of the Manaus provincial house.
Left to right: Sister Bernita Marie Leiker, Mother Marciana Heimerman,
and Sister Serafina

Dorotea Nery, one of whose duties was to teach Portuguese to Father Dario, an Italian Xaverian Missionary in Altamira, and Sister Rosa Telles, who was the principal of Maria De Mattias Institute and the local superior of the ASC community. One day, in great anguish, Sister Serafina asked Sister Rosa to loan her a large sum of money to pay off, with great urgency, a part of the debt of one of the men who was working on the construction of Divine Providence House. Knowing Sister Serafina's holiness of life and seeing in this request a call from God, Sister Rosa went to the bank and took out the amount that Sister Serafina was requesting and gave it to her. Sister Serafina accepted it for the poor worker with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God. However, Sister Rosa was really quite worried, because that meant both the large school and the Adorers' community were now without any money at all left in the bank. She prayed, asking God to take care of the situation. The very next day, Father Dario arrived unexpectedly at the Sisters' house, and told Sister Rosa that he would have to be traveling. In thanksgiving for

the classes that Sister Dorotea had been giving him, he wanted to leave some money for the Sisters. As it turned out, the money he gave Sister Rosa was exactly the amount that she had withdrawn from the bank and given to Sister Serafina for the needy worker. ⁽⁴¹⁾

Sister Serafina tried to transmit her own mystical faith in Divine Providence to others. In so many different circumstances, she repeated that refrain as a sort of leit-motif: "How good God is!" Among the varied circumstances, we find these in particular:

- She inspired the teachers in the classroom, and in her communication outside the classroom she influenced students and their parents.

- As true friend and sister, she shared her confidence in Providence with other Adorers with whom she lived in local community, whether things were going well or badly, peacefully or with difficulty. She saw it as providential when on one occasion she was not permitted to enter the community home because she had spent the entire day on the road without having let anyone know she would be absent.

- She communicated trust in God's goodness to the sick, especially the lepers who seemed to have lost all hope.

- She said it was evidence of God's Providence whenever she received help of any kind from anyone, as for example, when the Prefecture of Altamira promised to pay for the cost of water and light for the House of Divine Providence.

- When she received the honorary title, "Citizen of Altamira" from the city government in 1984, or when other forms of honor and recognition came to her from authorities in Amazonas and Para for her work among the poor, this also was for her a manifestation of God's provident goodness.

- When the House of Divine Providence functioned normally this also was cause for deepened faith in God's unlimited goodness.

- When she lacked money to buy supplies or to repay debts for maintenance of the sick or expectant mothers, and some person would suddenly appear to bring her the amount she needed, she would thank God's Providence and recall similar occurrences in the life of Maria De Mattias. (42)

- Seeing a community of three other Adorers who participated in her ideal of helping the pregnant mothers and the sick, too, evidenced for Sister Serafina the mystery of Divine Providence.

- Receiving her share of the inheritance from her parents and being given permission by her superiors to use all of it for the House of Divine Providence was cause for her to praise the limitless love of a good God.

At prayer, Sister Serafina often thanked the Lord for the many graces God gave her, and she murmured: "Truly, God is good! I am happy to be with God, to live in God, and to recount all God's works!" (43)

The year 1986 brought to Sister Serafina a special reminder of God's continuing Providence in her life. For the fortieth anniversary of her entrance into religious life she had the joy of coming to the United States for a reunion with the group with whom she had shared postulancy and novitiate in Wichita. (44) Following that, she celebrated also with her Brazilian Sisters in the provincial house in Manaus. In Altamira there were other commemorations, which the Sisters used as vocational promotion. All these celebrations were very happy events for Sister Serafina as she thanked the good God for the many, many blessings of her forty years since she joined the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

IX - "IF THE GRAIN OF WHEAT DOES NOT DIE"

Final Illness and Death

These happy events of the year 1986 were also for Sister Serafina a sort of "swan song". Her Sister companions at the House of Providence community had begun to notice her increasing weakness. They gave her better food when they noticed that she was not feeling well and encouraged her to eat, since she seemed to have lost her appetite. They asked her not to walk so much in the city and to rest more. Some times she would heed this sisterly counsel and would lie down to rest when she arrived home very worn out. If someone came looking for her during that time, the Sisters would not call her. However, more often than not, Serafina would hear the voice of the poor or needy persons who were calling for her, and she would get up and take care of them in her typically simple and kindly manner. (45)

One day Sister Serafina's Adorer companions became especially alarmed when she fell on the street and was picked up by Doctor Clara Brandao and taken to her home. (46) At that point the Sisters insisted that Sister Serafina enter the hospital at Altamira for care. After tests and treatment she recuperated somewhat and was able to be discharged. A special joy that awaited her was the new automobile that arrived just then for use in the work of the Refuge and the House of Divine Providence. It had been bought from donations given by friends.

However, Sister Serafina was not to enjoy the convenience of this automobile for very long. She soon became much weaker. By August, she was willing to yield to the urgent advice of her Sisters in community and that of Bishop Erwin Krautler that she go north to Belem for treatment there at the Hospital of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This decision was necessary, but it was a great sacrifice for Sister Serafina to leave her beloved expectant mothers and the sick poor in Altamira.

At the hospital in Belem, tests revealed that Sister Serafina had cancer of the lymph glands. Despite the best of care, her body was unable to resist, weakened as it was from her long years of strenuous labor for others. For a few months, she stayed at Saint Gaspar House in Belem, where Sister Bernita Marie Leiker cared for her and took her back and forth to the hospital for chemotherapy. During those months, Sister Serafina endured great physical pain and suffered much on account of the chemotherapy. She lost all her hair, felt great weakness, and endured terrible itching from a rash over her whole body. Through it all she was very patient and amiable. Despite her own weakness Sister Serafina was very persistent in wanting to help Sister Bernita Marie with the household tasks. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

As her condition deteriorated, the superiors decided it was time to bring Sister Serafina to the provincial house in Manaus where her care could be continued at the newly constructed Nazareth Infirmary wing there.

During this long illness, Sister Serafina continued to live the virtues that had characterized her when she

was at the peak of her active service of others: patient acceptance of suffering, meekness and gentleness toward the Sisters and everyone else, the spirit of prayer, and complete surrender to God's will. As she thanked the Sister nurses for the added work that her illness required of them, she tried with faith to understand and to accept the mystery of pain and helplessness, when there was still so much that she had hoped to do.

Even though she had a great desire to recover and live longer so as to be able to return to Altamira to serve the sick and the pregnant women there, Sister Serafina surrendered herself with trust into the hands of the good God. She offered her suffering for the province of Manaus, for the entire Congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, and for the whole Church.

Her sister, Yolanda Cinque Monteiro de Castro, came from Rio De Janeiro to be with her, to comfort her and to listen to the prayers and hymns of the Sisters around Sister Serafina's sick bed. Her nephew, Orange, whom Serafina had called "my heart" when as a child he came to pray at the convent in Manaus, also arrived to be with her. Seeing her in such a weakened condition, he could not hold back the tears. Many priests also came to visit and pray with Sister Serafina. They knew that the holiness of priests was among her special prayer intentions, and that she had a very particular appreciation for the Eucharistic sacrifice.

As her condition grew worse, Sister Serafina was taken to the public Hospital Getulio Vargas in Manaus. During the last three weeks of her life she could no longer speak, but we can be sure that deep in her heart

she must have repeated her special refrain, "How good God is".

It was October 21, 1988, that the good God gathered his beloved Serafina home to heaven. Certainly St. Gaspar Del Bufalo, whose feast was being celebrated that very day, and Blessed Maria De Mattias, whom Sister Serafina loved so dearly, were waiting to share with her the joy of praising forever the Lamb of God who has redeemed us in his precious Blood.

Sisters, family, Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Redemptorist priests and friends mourned the death of their beloved Sister Serafina. Her family's request was granted, and her body was buried in the Cinque family tomb in St. John the Baptist Cemetery in Manaus.

END NOTES

- (1) Interview granted in April, 1995, by Mr. Orange Ribeiro Cinque, son of Mario and Nair Cinque. He received the name Orange because of the above-mentioned connection with the great-grandparents of the House of Orange. He is married to Conceicao Ribeiro Cinque and has a son, Mario Vincent (names of the grandfather and great-grandfather).
- (2) The name Amazonas was given to the region as a result of the poor health conditions experienced there by Francesco Pizarro, 16th century Spanish explorer. Pizarro called it "malas-zonas" meaning the "bad area". It has also been called "Green Hell" and, more positively, the "Lungs of the World." Cf. Antonietta Maraone, *Le Adoratrici del Sangue di Cristo nella Chiesa e nel Mondo* (Pia Unione del Prez.mo Sangue, Rome, 1984), pp.493-494. For a description of the Amazon area and the great river itself, cf. also Sister Loretta Gegen, *Amazonia, A Study of People and Progress in the Amazon Jungle* (Pageant Press, New York, 1963), pp. 15-18.
- (3) Interview with Mr. Silverio Sarubi, March, 1995, an Italian merchant, resident of Itacoatiara who worked with the Cinques in Urucurituba.
- (4) Interview in March, 1995, with Mrs. Isabel Viera, teacher and daughter of Raimunda Viera Benedicto. This Benedicto is a shortened name for "di Benedetto", the name of Noeme's uncle. Isabel, informed that her father out of friendship with di Benedetto, also a great landowner, added to her name a Portuguese title "di Benedicto", which at the beginning of the century signified bonds of dependence and friendship among the owners and workers in the rubber fields of Amazonas.
- (5) The name of the school was Preferito Chagas Aquiar. Among Noeme's students there were several soldiers of the 27th Batalhao de Cacadores do Amazonas.
- (6) Some times the people of Manaus are called to remember those difficult times when the city was a "Port of Wood," as is heard in the present Amazonian song.defending ecology which is constantly

threatened by the devastation of the jungle. A line in the song says: "Port of Wood, you will never be Liverpool".

- (7) Based on an interview granted to Sister Evelina Trindade, ASC, by Sister Serafina, contained in a written monograph entitled "The Angel of the Transamazonian Road--An Apostle of Charity".
- (8) Interview of Teacher Maria Ruth Menezes with her sister, Sister Marilia Menezes, in 1995. Maria Ruth was a militant member of Catholic Action working in Manaus in 1943-44, when she accompanied Noeme in her visits to prisoners.
- (9) At that time the title was Sisters Adorers of the Most Precious Blood (Ad.PP.S.) At the General Chapter of 1968 this was changed to Adorers of the Blood of Christ (A.S.C.) The latter title is used throughout this book.
- (10) See Tapestry (Vol. 5, Summer, 1994), p. 6, for a brief note on this matter taken from Sister Julitta's personal memoirs. For information on the mission of the German Adorers from Schaan province, and on the trip of Sisters Julitta and Evelyn Gorges, see Antonietta Maraone, *The Adorers of the Blood of Christ in the Church and in the World* (English translation by Sr. M. Pauline Grady), pp. 221-222 and 282.
- (11) Actually it was not until 1953 that the last three remaining German Adorers in Altamira would be replaced by Brazilian and North American Adorers. See Maraone, *ibid.*, page 284.
- (12) Based on information given in 1995 by Paulo Feitosa, active member of the parish of Our Lady of Aparecida since the arrival of the Redemptorists in Manaus.
- (13) Based on interviews in Wichita, Kansas (1999) with Sisters Florence May and with Sisters Elaine Lodes, Rita Robl, Tarcisia Roths and Donna Ronck, who were among Noeme's formation companions.
- (14) Sister Serafina kept this letter all her life. It was found among her papers after her death.
- (15) For a description of the town and people of Coari and the beginnings of the Adorers' ministries there, see Sister Loretta Gegen, *Amazonia*, pp. 31-42.
- (16) Among those assisting as a teacher in the high school was an

aspirant, Felismina Machado, who joined the Adorers and is known today as Sister Bernadette Machado.

- (17) For a firsthand account of this beginning of the aspirancy in Coari, see Helen Streck, *ASC, West-Wind, Spirit-Wind* (Wichita: Adorers of the Blood of Christ, 1984), pp. 165-166.
- (18) *Brazilian News Notes*, Letter Number 8, *Tropical Spice*, December 11, 1948, p. 11. Copy in archives, Wichita province center.
- (19) This account as well as that of the first investiture are based on interview with Sister Marciana Heimerman at Wichita, 1999.
- (20) Based on interview with Sister Helen Augusta Wolcott in Altamira, November, 1995.
- (21) At the General Chapter that same year, Sister Marciana Heimerman, a pioneer Adorer missionary in Brazil and the first directress of novices there, had been elected General Superior of the Congregation.
- (22) The letter, unsigned, was found folded among Serafina's personal papers. It began with the phrase, "as one of the first members of the Province of Brazil..."
- (23) Interview with Zeneida Abreu, August, 1995, Manaus. The predilection of Sister Serafina for nursing as a means of caring for the poorest would be shown later. For a general overview of the health problems in Amazonas, see Gegen, *Amazonia*, pp. 83-99.
- (24) A prelacy is the equivalent of a diocese, but in a largely missionary territory. See the Code of Canon Law, Canons 369, 370 and 371. For more information on the Prelacy area and the work of the German Missionaries of the Precious Blood, see Erwin Krautler, *My Life Is Like the Amazon*, C.P.P.S. Resources Number 17 (The Messenger Press, 1994), pp. 1-4.
- (25) For a better understanding of the life of Dom Erich Krautler and the beginnings of the work of the Precious Blood Missionaries in the Xingu area, see Erich Krautler, *Blood on the Stones* (The Messenger Press, 1972).
- (26) Erwin Krautler, nephew of Erich Krautler, has worked in the Xingu area since 1965, and has been bishop of the Xingu Diocese since

1981. Within the Brazilian Conference of Bishops, he has served for eight years as President of the National Council of Foreign Missionaries, and has also served in important positions dealing with the welfare of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. For more information and background on the wide area of the Xingu diocese, see his most interesting book cited in note 24, which is based on his journals.

- (27) The Transamazonian Road (sometimes called a highway) is not a wide concrete or even asphalted highway as this word is used in the United States, but rather an often uneven two-lane gravel and dirt road. In 1995, according to an interview with Bishop Erwin Krautler, there were only 8 asphalted kilometers, leading from the airport to the city of Altamira.
- (28) The region of the Xingu still has several Indian tribes. In 1995 there were 21 Indian villages in the Diocese of the Xingu with about 4000 Indians who had survived massacres in various regions of Brazil.
- (29) Reported by Bishop Erwin Krautler to the 3rd Assembly of the People of God in the Xingu Diocese, January, 1995.
- (30) Interview in October, 1995, with Father Oscar Albino Fuhr, pastor of one of the parishes along the western stretch of the road. He has worked 21 years along the road as it was being constructed as well as in Altamira. He was often persecuted by the cattlemen who did not like his call for justice for the new immigrants in the area.
- (31) In 1995 the Maria De Mattias Institute had 1800 students in the central school and in two other schools in other areas. There was also a state school that the Adorers directed which had about 500 students.
- (32) Interview in August, 1995 with Mrs. Jofthe de Moraes Feitosa, on the staff of the National Institute of Agricultural Reform in Altamira. She was a former student of Maria De Mattias Institute.
- (33) Interview with Dr. Claudio do Nascimento e Silva, Director of the hospital in Altamira, and also a doctor at St. Raphael Hospital.
- (34) Father Jose Gruber, C.P.P.S., Austrian by birth, has served as a missionary in the Xingu area since 1965. During his early years in the mission he had not yet been ordained and worked as a brother in the parish where he became a great admirer of the Adorers. He was

ordained in 1981 and now provides pastoral care at the House of Divine Providence, where he celebrates the Eucharist weekly for the staff and women, as well as providing spiritual counseling and the sacrament of reconciliation for them.

- (35) "White Angel" was the name some of the people of Altamira and the Transamazonian Road area gave to Sister Serafina. According to an article in the magazine Grande Sinal, Dec., 1996, by Marilia Menezes, ASC, this was because of the color of the habit worn by the Adorers at one time in Brazil.
- (36) The planners of the Transamazonian Road had programmed a clearing to be made at designated intervals to attract settlers. The settlements that grew up were often named simply by their location on the road. This man used the simple language of the people who often called her Sarafina instead of Serafina.
- (37) The building of The Refuge was made possible through contributions received from friends of the Precious Blood Missionaries in Austria and Germany.
- (38) Information given in April, 1999, by Sister Alma Sleddens, ASC, who worked many years at Guadalupe Hospital in Belem.
- (39) The House of Divine Providence was initiated while Erich Krautler was bishop. It was completed after his nephew, Erwin Krautler, succeeded him in 1981.
- (40) Serafina's special attraction to the goodness of God was like that of the foundress of the Adorers, Maria De Mattias, who so frequently spoke or wrote about "the good God", and stated clearly to her spiritual director that, among all God's attributes, it was God's goodness to which she felt most drawn.
- (41) Information based on interview with Sisters Rosa Telles and Dorotea Nery in Manaus, January, 1996.
- (42) This fact was retold by women who worked with Sister Serafina. Among them was Sister Aurea Serique, who worked for almost 20 years in Altamira and along the Transamazonian Road, and who took Sister Serafina's place in the administration of the House of Divine Providence after her illness and death.
- (43) The following statistics for the House of Divine Providence from

1984 to 1995 indicate some of "God's work" for which Serafina praised God:

Pregnant women taken care of there.....	6846
Babies born dead or who died soon after birth.....	118
Babies born alive and well.....	5680

(44) In 1985, one of Serafina's North American novitiate companions, Sister Tarcisia Roths, then the Wichita Provincial Superior, used the occasion of a meeting in Manaus of all the Congregation's Provincial Superiors to travel to Altamira to visit Sister Serafina. On that occasion she sensed Sister Serafina's desire once again to see her formation companions of long ago. Sister Tarcisia was able to arrange for Sister Serafina's return visit to the United States, where she was delighted to see every one and enter wholeheartedly into their mutual celebrations. Her companions marveled at how well she remembered the English language. (Interviews, 1999, with Sister Tarcisia Roths and Sister Rita Robl)

(45) Information given by Sister Aurea Serique, ASC.

(46) Dr. Clara Brandao was a friend and collaborator of Sister Serafina in Altamira. She was profoundly touched by Serafina's example of dedication to the poor. Today Dr. Brandao works at the national level in the Pastoral Care of Children.

(47) St. Gaspar House in Belem is a house of the Precious Blood Missionaries, which serves as a center for missionaries coming and going to outlying missions, and for obtaining and sending out needed supplies. For awhile Sr. Georgiana Heimerman was procurator there. Later on Sister Bernita Marie Leiker served there as procurator for many years. The information on Sister Serafina's stay there was given by Sister Bernita Marie in interviews in April and May, 1999.

Appendices



Appendix A.

CHRONOLOGY OF SISTER SERAFINA'S LIFE

- January 31, 1913 Born at village of Urucurituba, Amazonas, Brazil
- 1924 Sent by her father to Manaus to the boarding school of St.Dorothy
Made First Holy Communion there
First felt the call of God to become a religious Sister
- 1934 Finished Teachers Course at Institute of Education in Manaus. Became involved in parish activities and outreach to the poor
- 1936 Began work as a teacher in various public schools
Gradually became involved in parish work with the Redemptorists and took a course as practical nurse in order to help the sick poor
- January 11, 1945 Was greatly saddened by the death of her mother
- October, 1946 Met Adorers of the Blood of Christ (Sisters Julitta and Evelyn Gorges) for the first time and accepted their invitation to join the Adorers and go to Wichita, Kansas with them to begin her formation there
- 1946-1948 Made postulancy and novitiate in Wichita
In spring of 1947 received a treasured letter of support from her father
- July 1, 1948 Made her first vows as an Adorer in Wichita
- November, 1948 Together with the provincial and two new ASC North American Missionaries traveled back to her homeland in Brazil
- 1949 At Coari began her teaching ministry as an Adorer
- July 1, 1953 Made her perpetual profession as an Adorer at Manaus

- 1954 Was missioned to teach in Codajaz
- July 2, 1955 Assisted her father at his death
- 1957 Was missioned to Altamira as director of Maria De Mattias Institute
- 1959 Was missioned to Santarem as director of a new high school. Went to Rome as a delegate to the General Chapter of the Congregation of the Adorers
- 1961 Was again missioned to Coari
- 1966 Was sent to Nova Olinda where she worked both in the high school and in the clinic
- 1969-1970 Was ill with tuberculosis and recuperated at the Adorers' community in Marituba at the Redemptorist seminary
- 1972 Was missioned a second time to Altamira with a part-time teaching ministry at the Adorers' pedagogical institute, and a part-time healthcare ministry among the poor Gradually became involved in a special ministry for pregnant women, as well as for the many sick and injured from the interior settlements along the Transamazonian Road. Rejoiced in the construction of The Refuge for the sick poor, and the beginnings of construction of the House of Providence
- May 13, 1984 Saw the fulfillment of her dream in the official opening of the House of Providence
- April, 1986 Together with her novitiate companions celebrated in Wichita the 40th anniversary of their joining the Adorers
- 1987 Suffered the onset of serious illness and was transferred to Belem first to Guadalupe Hospital and then to St. Gaspar House as she received treatment for cancer. Then was transferred to the new ASC Nazareth Infirmary in Manaus
- October 21, 1988 Died at the public hospital Getulio Vargas in Manaus

Appendix B.

THE LEGACY OF SISTER SERAFINA

1. The House of Divine Providence and The Refuge

Even before the construction of the House of Divine Providence it was Sister Serafina's desire that, in addition to the necessary pre-natal and post-natal care the women were given, they also receive some solid catechetical instruction and basic formation for living a dignified and useful life.

That work begun by Sister Serafina has been continued by the Adorers of Manaus province with great dedication and love. In 1995, through the tireless efforts of Sister Zelia Velentim, administrator of the House of Divine Providence since 1991, and with the help of her community and the collaboration of thirteen helpers paid by "The Social Works of the Xingu Prelacy", the following program of classes for both the staff and the pregnant women has continued at Divine Providence.

- Manual labor, such as various handicrafts of tapestry, embroidery, painting, crocheting and sewing;
- Orientation in home medicine;
- Religious instruction
- The need for pre-natal care, post-natal care, parenting skills;
- Natural family planning and the prevention of sicknesses;
- Learning to read, according to the method of Paulo Freire

Classes are given by Sister Zelia; or Sonia Goncalves de Lima, a nurse aide who works with a social assistant; or by a sewing teacher, Neusa Ramos. Two other Adorers who are engaged in other pastoral ministry in the parishes also try to find time to assist with the classes for the women and to spend time listening to them and encouraging them.

The women who are in better physical and psychological condition, and who may already have had some previous instruction, learn a great deal and profit by this education for the rest of their lives. They also learn how to help one another and are encouraged to serve as leaders in the small settlements where they live.

During the time that they are at Divine Providence, the women assist in house cleaning and in meal preparation, and as they do so, they are learning how to work together for the good of all.

One afternoon each week four interns in medicine come from Belem to Altamira to offer their services. Two of these medics examine the pregnant women and the newborns at the House of Divine Providence, while the other two go to The Refuge to treat the sick. If the women show signs of irregularity in their pregnancy, they are given an ultrasound examination, a service given to them without cost by the hospitals and clinics in Altamira, thanks to the arrangement made by Nurse Sonia. The newborns are vaccinated after a week.

Because of the great numbers that continue to need medical attention and because of the high cost of treatment, some hospitals refuse to admit those who come seeking admittance, or keep them for the shortest possible time. More and more continue then to come to the House of Providence or to The Refuge. The following statistics indicate the steady increase of patients who have been cared for at The Refuge:

1988 : 66	1989 : 178	1990 : 246	1991 : 276
1992 : 370	1993 : 403	1994 : 505	1995 : 656

Most common among the prevalent diseases are malaria, intestinal worms, skin diseases, chronic anemia, hepatitis, and tuberculosis. Injuries resulting from accidents of various kinds are frequent. Through the efforts of Father Frederico, medicines and other medical supplies received from donors in Austria are made available to those in need.

The patients at both The Refuge or The House of Divine Providence who are able to do so walk to one of the health centers in the city for treatment. Those who cannot walk are transported to the hospital for physical therapy or other needs in the Divine Providence House automobile. The secretary of the House provides money for telephone calls when the poor need them and cannot afford them.

Sonia has explained: "We feel compassion for these poor sufferers. We especially feel pained for the plight of the elderly, for the mothers with older children, and for the sick and weak who travel many miles from the interior of the Transamazonian Road area. We receive all who come to us. It is what Sister Serafina would wish. It is as if she is still here with us, teaching us what to do. For example, yesterday, we received a man who broke his leg some time ago. While he was cutting down a tree, the tree fell on his legs. After doing what it could for him, the hospital dismissed him. We took the man to The Refuge and provided him with a cane, and made arrangements to transfer him to a hospital in Belem."

More than eighty people volunteer their services at one or other of the two houses of charity that were begun through the charity and work of Sister Serafina. Many others assist by providing fruits and vegetables or other foods on a weekly basis, or by helping in fund-raising events that help cover the costs of keeping both of the Houses in operation.

One of the gentlemen, Mr. Francisco Mela, who was a great help to Sister Serafina at the beginnings of the House of Divine Providence, has sculptured a white cement bust of Sister Serafina, which now has an honored place in the building.

2. Collaboration in the Service of the Poor and Oppressed

Sister Serafina's remarkable service for the poor in Altamira was clearly marked by the collaboration of herself and the other Adorers of the Blood of Jesus with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. These men from the Teutonic Province have faced enormous challenges since they began work in the Xingu area in 1930. Ever since Pope Pius XI established the area as an independent Prelacy, its bishops have been Precious Blood Missionaries: Bishop Clement Geiger, Bishop Erich Krautler and Bishop Erwin Krautler.

Just six years after the first Precious Blood men arrived in the Xingu area, a group of Adorers of the Blood of Christ from the German-speaking province came in 1936 as missionaries working in the area of Altamira. They continued faithfully serving God's poor, even as they suffered the isolation of being completely cut off from their home province during World War II.

Adorers of the Blood of Christ from the Wichita, Kansas province arrived in the Amazon area in 1947, joined the next year by Sister Serafina and very soon by many other Brazilian Adorers. In 1953, Brazilian and Wichita Adorers began serving God's people in Altamira, and the exhausted Sisters from the Schaan province in Liechtenstein were able to return home.

The collaboration of the Adorers and the Missionaries continues today in circumstances that in some ways are the same but in other ways are enormously changed.

In the Xingu diocese, besides Altamira, the Sisters serve in Porto do Moz and Gurupa.

Under the leadership of the bishops, the Prelacy of the Xingu has employed legal assistance in defending the indigenous peoples and the settlers in their struggles to maintain their existence because of the construction of hydroelectric power plants, the destruction of the forests to make way for large open spaces for cattle grazing, and especially the construction of the Transamazonian Road with its many negative effects.

Recognizing the need for homes for the poor, the Prelacy has obtained houses with land for many people with the help for several

years of Sister Marieth Machado, ASC, a Social Assistant.

Since 1989 the Adorers have been in the front line of the work of the Prelacy for justice. In many ways they have struggled for the human rights of the poor. Like the Precious Blood Missionaries, they have thereby brought down on themselves the anger and reprisals of those responsible for the abuse of the human rights of the poor.

Bishop Erwin Krautler was taken prisoner briefly when he joined a protest of sugar cane workers who had not been paid for nearly a year. In 1990 he barely escaped an attempted murder in a planned "accident" on the Transamazonian Road, in which Father Salvatore Deiana was killed. (1)

Sister Vanilda Lobato, ASC, director of Maria De Mattias Institute in Altamira, suffered severe injuries and was nearly killed in 1993 when a police car tried to run over her and a young girl in front of the school. This happened after Sister Vanilda insisted on taking in poor students and not favoring the wealthier when the number of places available in the school were limited. The circumstances of this attempt have never been thoroughly investigated, but it is obvious that it was one more indication of the opposition of the wealthy and powerful to those who stand with the poor in their struggles, as did Sister Serafina.

On October 10, 1995, Brother Humberto Mattle, Precious Blood Missionary, was assassinated because he refused to reveal the whereabouts of Father Frederico Tschol, whom the assassins wanted to kill. At the time of Brother Humberto's murder, Father Frederico was taking care of the poor on the second floor of the parish house. In the same incident, Sister Regina do Nascimento, ASC, and a student of Maria De Mattias Institute barely escaped also being killed.

The story of the work in behalf of justice for the poor continues today in the Xingu Prelacy as does the collaboration of the Society of the Precious Blood and the Congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ. Together with other religious men and women they put their trust in the Blood of Christ, which is the "sign, expression, measure and pledge of divine charity." (2)

(1) For more information and Bishop's own reflections on this attempt, see pp. 88-93 of his *My Life is Like the Amazon*. Those who perpetrated this crime have never been brought to justice.

(2) Phrase taken from the preface of the 1857 Constitution of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ.

3. Ongoing Challenges in the Care of Pregnant Women

As Sister Serafina's work at the House of Divine Providence continues, many questions arise that must be faced now and in the future by those who are truly dedicated to this very special ministry.

What can be done in this and similar regions of developing countries about the high number of births on the part of very young women?

What should be done when natural methods of regulating births fail because of the ignorance of couples, the difficulty of putting them into practice, and the situation of male dominance over women in these regions?

What must be done when maternity is the fruit of misery, where women surrender themselves to the powerful and the wealthy for a piece of food?

What can be done in these regions of unstable family life, of constant migration, where many women do not have a fixed life companion, which makes a family plan even more difficult?

Who is to say who can and who cannot be born in an area as vast as the Amazon Region with a very small population at present, where millions more people--Brazilian and refugees from around the world--could come and live if there were proper governmental structures?

Who would not help a poor woman at the moment of child birth, when in Brazil the sterilization of women is increasing alarmingly, both voluntary and enforced?

Indeed the work of Sister Serafina continues to challenge the Adorers of the Blood of Christ today, if they are indeed concerned about the dignity of women and the plight of the poor!

4. Favors Received through Sister Serafina's Intercession

Since Sister Serafina's death, several persons in the city of Altamira and along the Transamazonian Road have stated that they have received graces through her intervention, a few of which are included here. However, this is done, keeping in mind the declaration of Father Oscar Fuhr: "If we can talk of 'miracles' and of graces received, we need to remember that the greatest miracle of Sister Serafina is the upkeep of the House of Divine Providence and The Refuge. Here usually there

continue to be about a hundred persons who daily receive food, medicines and much more, despite the poverty that is now being experienced."

Several mothers who have come to the House of Divine Providence have stated that, when experiencing a very dangerous and difficult birth, they asked divine help through Sister Serafina's intercession and they were assisted to a successful outcome.

Sister Zelia has told of a man named Joseph who worked in the Transamazonian Road area. He was worried because the lack of rain was causing so much damage to the rice plantation that he and the other farmers were about to lose all the fruits of their hard work. Then he made a promise to Sister Serafina. "If I can save my rice crop, I will give five sacks of rice to Divine Providence House." All marveled at how, with so little rain and with such a small plot of land, Joseph was able to harvest such a large amount of rice. When he took the rice he had promised to "The House of Sister Sarafina" (as he continued to call it), he praised God for "this Sister who is as holy as any of the other saints."

Another grace received through Sister Serafina's intercession was the growing community spirit among the Ecclesial Base Communities in the Transamazonian Road area. This called for overcoming the earlier tendency of some of the lay leaders to be somewhat egotistic. When they received the annual letter from the administration of Divine Providence House asking for collaboration, they began to promote a periodic gathering of agricultural products, which would serve as food for the pregnant women and other sick.

Appendix C.

TESTIMONIALS

1. Testimonial of Bishop Erwin Krautler

"God is good", Sister Serafina, an Adorer of the Blood of Christ, used to say so often. Frequently God reveals his goodness through persons who choose to be messengers or instruments of his love and his mercy. Without a doubt, Sister Serafina was a woman to whom God gave a heart so open and sensitive to others that the people of the Xingu, even today, remember her with love and gratitude.

With compassion, she recognized the difficult situation of women about to give birth to a child on the Transamazonian Road and its side roads and along the rivers and streams of the Xingu Prelacy. Many died during pregnancy because they could not get to Altamira. They had no relatives nor friends in the city who could take them in and provide necessary assistance to the mother and her child who was about to be born. Many children in the interior die after only a few days or weeks of life, far from a doctor or hospital, having no recourse to alleviate any complication or illness. Usually, mothers could only look sadly at the dead body of the baby, their hearts lacerated with tearful pain because of its premature death.

Sister Serafina saw in these women and children the face of God, the Lord who identifies with these abandoned persons, living in a cruel and inhuman reality. She wanted to help in some way to mitigate so much suffering. She wanted to serve the Lord in these poor children of God, excluded from the right to medical assistance and hospital care.

It was thus that the plan to build a house for pregnant women began. It all started in the 1970s, in a simple and poor manner, in a small wooden building. In a short time, however, it was evident that that house with only a few beds and without proper sanitary conditions was far from ideal for this work of love. Sister Serafina did not give up, and she found in Dom Erich Krautler a bishop with

a heart full of compassion for the poor. The Vicar General, Father Frederico Tschol, C.P.P.S., designed a plan for a larger, more comfortable and inviting house. With help received from Austria and Germany, the House of Divine Providence was constructed and was ready to open its doors on May 8, 1984.

Since then, hundreds of women have been assisted. Whoever visits this house can testify to the love and dedication with which these women are treated, following the moving example of Sister Serafina while she lived and administered this work. It is Divine Providence which permits the continuation of this service to the poor. There are always good people who offer to help and contribute with generous money and with food.

Sister Serafina who is now near the throne of God, has become the intercessor for the work to which she dedicated her last years of life on earth. The people of the Xingu today are still not accustomed to the official name of the house and continue calling it, with simplicity and gratitude, The House of Sister Sarafina.

Altamira, August 28, 1995

Dom Erwin Krautler, Bishop of the Xingu

2. Testimonial of Bishop Marskell

"Boca das Garcas" is a small rural community on the banks of the Amazon River, within the municipality of Urucurituba. It belongs to the Risen Christ parish of the Itacoatiara Prelacy.

Sister Serafina Cinque was born in this place. She certainly absorbed in her infancy much of the surrounding community, especially its poverty, work and faith. She must have gone to the chapel with her family on festive days when a priest visited Boca das Garcas to celebrate the life of faith of that population.

I became acquainted with Sister Serafina when she came to Itacoatiara to visit the Sisters of her congregation who taught in Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima School. After spending a few days in the house of her brother Jose, who lived in Urucurituba, Sister Serafina returned to Manaus.

I was happy that she was the first woman from Amazonas who entered the Congregation of the Sister Adorers of the Blood of Christ, who had come from the United States in 1947. These Sisters continue to serve in our Prelacy of Itacoatiara with enthusiasm.

Sister Serafina, this woman from the banks of the river, spent her life serving others in the education of young students...working with abandoned pregnant women in Amazonas and Para...as teacher and nurse, showing her love for Jesus who lived in her heart. In this manner, she testified to the love that God has for his people. She served all with dedication beyond the ordinary.

May the witness of Sister Serafina, who dedicated her entire life to the abandoned, help us, as Church in Amazonia, to move forward into the new Millennium...and always, in the same way.

Scarborough, Canada, February 26, 1998

Jorge Marskell, Bishop of Itacoatiara

Appendix D.

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