

**Venerable Alessandra Ghilardi (Sr. Clarangela)  
(Italy/Congo) 1931-1995, Martyr of Charity**

*Members of the Sisters of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute, composed  
mostly of experienced nurses, and founded in 1869 in Bergamo, Italy.*

*Professional Nursing School, Rome, Italy, 1957*

*Tropical Medicine Course in Antwerp, Belgium, ~1957*

*Diploma in Obstetrics – Nurse Midwife*

*Cared for the sick & poor in Kikwit, Tumikia and Mosango, 1959-1995*

*Contracted Ebola after assisting in a surgery for a seriously ill patient*

*Her blood sample had been sent to the United States Center for Disease*

*Control and provided the definitive diagnosis 2 days after her death*



**Alessandra Ghilardi (Sr. Clarangela) (1931-1995)** was born on April 21, 1931, in Trescore Balneario, Bergamo, Italy to Michele Ghilardi and Angiolina Oldrati. She was the youngest of four children. Her father worked as a sharecropper. Following elementary school, she was taught the trade of sewing by the local seamstress, Ercolina. She initially worked in a button factory and later moved, with her brother Mario, to Milan, to work in the rest home of the Sisters of Poverelle on via Aldini.

She was attracted to the vocation of the sisters to serve the poorest, including the sick and abandoned elderly. Thus, on September 8, 1952, Alessandra Ghilardi entered the Congregation of the Poverelle Sisters. Notably, it was the birthday of the Blessed Mother on which Alessandra took the religious habit and name Sister Clarangela. In 1952, the order had sent five religious sisters to a mission in the Belgian Congo.

One day, the Mother General asked for volunteers. Sister Clarangela exclaimed, "If I am asked for obedience, I will go." On March 31, 1955, Sister Clarangela made her Temporary Profession as a Religious Sister in the Mother House church in Bergamo. In the autumn of 1955, she was sent to Rome to attend a boarding school for professional nurses obtaining a diploma in 1957. After she graduated Sister Clarangela, then, was sent to Antwerp, Belgium for a course on tropical disease. She also earned a diploma in obstetrics. She would serve in the Belgian Congo as a nurse midwife.

In 1959 she was assigned to the mission in the Belgian Congo. For the first eleven years, she worked in Kikwit. Here she made her perpetual vows on March 26, 1961. In 1970, she was assigned to Tumikia where she continued to care for pregnant women and the sick poor. From 1983 to 1993 she served at the Mosango Hospital Center. She was described as exuding joy. She could be heard singing softly or whistling as she worked on the maternity ward. She was given a moped to assist her in her work travels and, therefore nicknamed, "the Sister of the scooter."

Sister Clarangela returned to Kikwit in 1993 and dedicated herself to many small services including working in the hospital. She continued to have a dedicated prayer life, participated in monthly retreats and annual Spiritual Exercises, having a Trappist monk as her spiritual director. The fruit of one of these retreats she shared with the Mother General in a letter of September 1994 and is written at the conclusion of this summary.

In Easter 1995, the Kikwit health care workers had participated in surgery on a seriously ill patient who died within two weeks. Fellow Poverelle Sister, Sister Floralba Rondi died on April 25, 1995. After taking care of Sister Floralba Rondi, Sister Clarangela fell ill on April 26,

1995, with similar symptoms. Professor Muyembe Tamfum, an expert virologist noticed the red spots on her body and send a blood sample to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, USA on May 5<sup>th</sup>.

Sister Clarangela said to her sisters, “*Let me go to my Lord.*” At another time she prayed, “*I recommend Zaire to you, Lord. I recommend this country to You.*” On May 6, 1995, at 1:35 a.m. Sister Clarangela died in Kikwit, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire). Two days later the definitive diagnosis arrived from the CDC in the United States of America. Both Sister Clarangela and Sister Floralba and several other doctors and nurses had died of the Ebola, a very contagious hemorrhagic fever virus. Four other Poverelle sisters succumbed to the Ebola epidemic of 1995: Sister Danielangela Sorti, Sister Dinarosa Belleri, Sister Annelvira Ossoli, Sister Vitarosa Zorza. Their relics were enshrined in front of the cathedral of Kikwit.

*Lord, open me entirely to your Fatherly Love,  
place me next to my brothers free, welcoming, happy,  
poor among the poorest like a drop of water  
lost in the immense ocean of your love.*

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**Martyrs of Charity - Nurse Victims of the Ebola Epidemic,  
Democratic Republic of the Congo/Zaire (Italy) - 1995**

*Died of the Ebola virus contracted while caring for victims of the hemorrhagic fever  
in Kikwit, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*Members of the Sisters of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute, composed  
mostly of experienced nurses, and founded in 1869 in Bergamo, Italy.*

In 1995, a very aggressive virus that causes a terrible hemorrhagic fever, Ebola, ravaged Zaire, taking the lives of six nurses, missionary sisters from the Congregation of Sister of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute between April 25 and May 28, 1995. The religious sisters contracted the disease in the hospital wards and operating room while providing nursing care to those infected by the virus. The terrible Ebola virus killed them, along with thousands of people in Africa. In Kikwit, it affected 220 people and 176 died. The Bishop of Bergamo, Msgr. Francesco Beschi, described these nurses as “martyrs of charity,” stating, “There is no greater love than giving one’s life like Jesus.” They gave their lives to serve the sick and poor in the turbulent country known as the Belgian Congo (1908-1960), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1960-1971), Zaire (1971-1997) and again DRC (1997 to the present).



In May 1995, after caring for victims of Ebola, as they began to succumb to the deadly effects of the virus, the Sisters faxed the Mother General in Bergamo, Italy:

We understand your trepidation, but we are totally in God's hands. No evacuation can be done. It is very hard for you and for us to accept this separation from the sisters. Painful events have overwhelmed us but the life of the Congregation must continue: the situation is quite dramatic, especially inside. But it is necessary to remain calm. In Kinshasa there are no outbreaks and all the roads towards the interior are blocked.<sup>1</sup>

The United States of American Center for Disease Control and Prevention recorded the outbreak in a 1998 Emerging Infectious Disease letter.<sup>2</sup>

At the request of the Congregation, on April 28, 2013, Bishop Edouard Mununu, Bishop of Kikwit, initiated the Cause for Canonization of the six religious Sisters by opening the diocesan inquiry to ascertain their heroic virtues. Eight years later, Sister Floralba, Sister Clarangela, and Sister Dinarosa were declared venerable on February 20, 2021. And the next month, on March 17, 2021, Sister Danielangela, Sister Annelvira, and Sister Vitarosa were also declared venerable, all with the decree of heroic virtue<sup>3</sup> promulgated by Pope Francis.

The remains of the six nurses, missionary, religious sisters, at the express request of the Bishop of Kikwit Monsignor Edouard Mununu, rest in front of the Cathedral of Kikwit.

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