

**Venerable Luigia Rosina Rondi (Sr. Floralba)
(Italy/Congo) 1924-1995, Martyr of Charity**

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

Nursing Training at Spedali Civili in Brescia, Italy, ~1948

Tropical Medicine Course in Antwerp, Belgium, 1952

Cared for the sick and poor at Kikwit Civil Hospital for 25 years

Cared for leprosy patients at the Mosango Hospital Center, 1983

Returned to Kikwit General Hospital, 1993

1st Sister to die of the Ebola virus unknowingly contracted at the Kikwit General Hospital, Kwilu, Democratic Republic of Congo.



Ven. Luigia Rosina Rondi (Sr. Floralba) (1924-1995) was born on December 10, 1924, in Pedrengo, Bergamo, Italy. At the age of 14, when her mother died giving birth, Luigia took charge of the family, taking care of her father and seven siblings.

In 1944, at the age of 20, she initially entered the Institute of the Sisters of Charity, in Bergamo (aka Maria Bambini). The next year, she met the Sisters of the Poor, Palazzolo Institute (Poverelle Sisters), a religious order founded in 1869 in Bergamo, Italy and composed mostly of experienced nurses. On April 10, 1946, she entered their novitiate. Two years later, on October 3, 1948, she made her temporary vow as a Poverelle Sister taking the name Sister Floralba.

She attended professional nurses training at the Spedali Civili in Brescia, Italy and was then assigned to work in a hospital. After attending a tropical medicine course in Antwerp, Belgium, on April 15, 1952, she departed for the Belgian Congo with four other sisters to begin the order's first mission there. Their first mission was established in Kikwit, caring for the sick and poor. It was in Kikwit that Sister Floralba made her perpetual vows as a religious sister on November 11, 1954. She served in Kikwit at the Kikwit Civil Hospital for 25 years. During these years, she faced with faith many difficulties which included an attack of the Soviet backed Simba rebels in 1964. In 1977, she was sent to Kisangani, on the outskirts of Kinshasa, the Congo capital, to work in the poor and populous neighborhood. In 1983, she was transferred to the Mosango Hospital Center located between Kinshasa and Kikwit where she cared for leprosy patients.⁴

Over a 43 year period, Sister Floralba cared for the poor and sick in the Congo and also often held the office of Superior. Her hope was in our Lord and she relied heavily on Divine Providence, not losing her peace and serenity during periods of great difficulty: civil war, hospital management difficulties, shortages of food, doctors and medicines. The Vatican Congregation for the Causes of saints describes her as follows:

Her life of faith and hope, as well as her dedication to her brothers and sisters, was nourished by the love for God, which transpired in every gesture and in every behavior. She wanted others to love God too: following him faithfully, if they were priests or religious, regularizing their marriage, if they were cohabiting, trying to assure the seriously ill the anointing of the sick or confession, accompanying the path of conversion of those who had need. For this reason, she often offered sacrifice and continuous prayers with a spirit of sacrifice that affected everyone.

The love she has for the Lord represented for her the constant urge to love her brother and give all of herself for them. She paid particular attention to the poorest and the most sick, to whom she dedicated the most intense care. At the same time, she took care of everyone without making any discrimination based on culture or religious. Her love and availability were also the reason for her death: she took care of the first patients affected by the Ebola virus with her usual dedication and generosity and in turn contracted the infection.⁵

In 1993, two years prior to the Ebola epidemic, Sister Floralba returned to Kikwit to work as a nurse in the Kikwit General Hospital. Her plans were to eventually return to Mosango to work with leprosy patients. On April 15, 1995, as the Ebola epidemic was beginning, she developed symptoms: profuse diarrhea, vomiting, high fever and severe agitation with delirium. She thought she was coming down with typhoid. As symptoms worsened, she was hospitalized at the Mosango General Hospital. She received the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick around 3pm on April 22nd. Her condition worsened and she developed petechiae, bruises and bleeding at injection sites on hospital day 4, April 23rd. Hemorrhages increased on hospitalization day 5 and her fever remained high. She became comatose and died on April 25, 1995, at 9:45 a.m.

No special nursing precautions had been taken either during the hospitalization or after her death. Her body was transferred to Kikwit for burial.² Her funeral was held on April 27, 1995, in Kikwit with a large number of people attending. They remember her as “mama mbuta” (or “elderly mother”), a name which carried with it great esteem and veneration. She was buried in front of the Kikwit Cathedral.



Sister Floralba Rondi, Congo

Sister Floralba was the first of the six Poverelle Sisters to die from Ebola, though as yet, they did not know the cause. Sister Clarangela was the next to become ill. She had taken care of Sister Floralba during the night of April 23rd and according, to the CDC report, became ill with fever, headache and myalgia on April 30th.

*I know in Whom I have placed
my hope*

**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.¹



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

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 virtue³ 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.

Reference:

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3) Hagiography Circle: Martyrs of Charity. Accessed 28 April 2022.

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6) Aleteia. Accessed 28 April 2022. <https://aleteia.org/2021/03/23/6-heroic-nuns-who-fought-the-ebola-pandemic-and-are-on-their-way-to-sainthood/>

Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka