

**Venerable Noeme Cinque (Sr. Serafina)
(Brazil) 1913-1988**

*Religious Sister, 1st Brazilian Adorer of the Blood of Christ.
Worked as a teacher and nurse often taking sick men and women
and pregnant women off the street, providing health care and
giving them a place to stay establishing first "The Refuge."
Founded the Divine Providence Home for pregnant women and infants
fondly called "The House of Sister Serafina."
Tirelessly begged for beds, sheets, furnishings, food and money
to care for the poor sick and/or pregnant in her care.
Known as, "The Angel of the Transamazonian Road."*



Noeme Cinque was born on January 31, 1913, to Vincent and Sarah Cinque in Boca das Gracas, Urucurituba, Amazonas, Brazil. This was a village on the Amazon River. She was the second of thirteen children (Mario, Noeme, Aura, Renato, Miguel, Sylvio, Jose, Humberto, Attilo, Marieta, Nair, Alfredo and Yolanda). Her parents were of Italian heritage. Her father owned a cacao plantation, a store for buying and selling cloth and was a tapper of rubber trees.

Noeme made such great progress in her studies that, at the age of eleven, her father entrusted her to the Dorothean sisters in Manaus to teach and educate her. The Dorothean Sisters prepared Noeme for her First Holy Communion, at which time she felt called to become a religious sister. She 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.

At the age of 16, Noeme told her parents about her desire to become a religious sister. Her parents strongly disagreed. Her father purchased a home in Manaus and sent his wife and Noeme and oldest sons to live there and continue their education at the state school, the Institute of Education of Amazonas, where Noeme completed her studies.

Noeme involved herself in the local parish of St. Sebastian administered by an Italian Capuchin priest. He hired her as a catechist. Noeme worked hard as a catechist of children, youth and adults in her parish in Manaus. She took the allowance that her father sent every month and gave it to the sick and the poor whom she encountered.

In 1934, after completing her teacher training courses at the Institute of Education, Noeme was sent to the interior of the state to teach and fulfill the obligatory requirements of new teachers. Noeme worked in the small town of Tabocal, in a school housed in the home of one of the families. She taught Portuguese, mathematics and catechism, preparing the children for baptism. She also taught adult religious education and provided marriage counseling.

In 1936, Noeme returned home to Urucurituba where she taught and prepared people for the sacraments awaiting the priest's periodic visit to the town. Under her leadership, an abandoned chapel, that was used as an animal shelter, was transformed back to a lovely chapel.

There she taught the children catechism, and the older people came there to pray the rosary and to receive religious instructions.

The Secretary of Education transferred her to teach in several different schools to include: Benjamin Constant and Saldanha Marinho schools. She was recognized for her zeal as a teacher and catechist.

During World War II (1938-1945), people of German and Italian and Japanese descent were considered enemy foreigners and were shunned by many people. Fellow 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 difficult time, Noeme's mother Sarah Cinque died on January 11, 1945. Despite these difficulties, Noeme was very active in the Church. She enrolled in the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary organized at the cathedral of Manaus. She also joined the Apostolate of Prayer and became one of its leaders. She became a member of Catholic Action. She also took time to join members to visit inmates in a large prison in Manaus.

At the request of Archbishop Dom Joas da Matta Andrade e Amoral, Noeme assisted a new Redemptorist priest, to learn Portuguese, establish a new parish, Our Lady of Aparecida, and establish a branch of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary there. Her enthusiasm attracted many young people to join.

In order to help the sick poor people, she took a course to become a practical nurse registered in the Health Department of Amazonas. She visited the sick and the elderly in their homes.

In 1946, Noeme, made the decision to enter the Congregation of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, an American congregation from Wichita, Kansas, who had just begun working in the mission field of Brazil. On November 7, 1946, accompanied by Sisters Evelyn and Julitta, she travel to Wichita, Kansas, where, at the provincial motherhouse in early December, she would begin her postulancy. Almost immediately, she was given a postulant veil and joined fourteen other postulants. She sewed the long white gowns and made the cords for all fourteen postulants' investiture ceremony as they entered the next phase, the novitiate.

Noeme began her novitiate on July 1, 1947, and was given the religious name, Serafina. On July 1, 1948, Sister Serafina professed her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and became the first Brazilian Adorer of the Blood of Christ. Four months later in November 1948, Sister Serafina began her journey back to Brazil, landing in Belem on November 18, 1948. They continued on to Manaus the next day. In Manaus, on government donated land, the sisters built a convent and novitiate. On February 21, 1949, they received the candidates. Sister Serafina now was fulfilling the role of an older sister amongst the young Brazilian candidates.

On March 4, 1949, Sister Julitta assigned Sister Serafina as the Director of the High School at Coari. She departed for Coari the next day. On July 1, 1953, the feast of the Precious Blood of Jesus, Sister Serafina pronounced her perpetual vows. The next year Sister Serafina was sent to Codajas, where she served for three years as local superior and director of Our Lady of Grace School. While assigned there, in June 1955, she was called to Manaus to be with her father during his last illness. She was at his bedside when he died on July 2, 1955. In 1957, she transferred to Altamira as the superior of the Adorers there and director of the Institute of Maria De Mattias. There she began the Pedagogical Institute of Altamira in 1958 to train good teachers.



Sister Serafina, newly professed in 1948

Sister Serafina, - 1948

In 1959 she moved to Santarem to be directress of a new high school dedicated to St. Raymond Nonnatus which had been opened two years earlier. This year she was also selected to be a delegate to the General Chapter of the Congregation of Adorers and in July traveled to Italy, the country of her ancestors. After two years, she was transferred back to Coari as a teacher in the pedagogical course started six years earlier. She took seriously the importance of providing a sound education for local teachers. In 1963, she was assigned at the Teacher Training School in the town of Manacapuru on the banks of the Amazon River.

By 1965, Congregation of the Adorers of the Precious Blood had 135 professed Adorers serving in twenty communities scattered up and down the Amazon and its tributaries. That year, at the General Chapter of 1965, they decided to form the Vice-Province of Manaus into a Province which caused great joy amongst the Adorers.

Sadness engulfed the community following the Second Vatican Council which concluded in late 1965. For many Sisters in Brazil and elsewhere, the poorly understood changes mandated by the Council raised doubt and questioning of the value of their religious vocation. Many young Adorers in Brazil chose to withdraw from the Congregation. This unexpected exodus deeply troubled Sister Serafina. She, herself, was puzzled by some of the changes that were introduced in the province of Manaus. She expressed these concerns in a letter dated May 18, 1971, to members of the General Chapter meeting in Rome that year.

In 1966, Sister Serafina was assigned to the community at Nova Olinda do Norte, in the Borba Prelacy of Amazonas. The North American Franciscan priests of the Third Order invited the Adorers to this area. Already, in 1965, the Sisters had opened a parochial school and health clinic. Sister Serafina taught in the school which became Nazareth High School and also worked in the clinic.

Many sick people died because of the shortage of doctors in the interior. Sister Serafina arranged to transfer to Manaus those who needed immediate assistance and were too serious to be handled at the clinic. The journeyed to the hospital for treatment for these critically ill patients was via a very arduous boat ride. A former Adorer gave the following statement about Sister Serafina:

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 circumstance 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 house 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 the 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 new ways 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 this difficult Post-Conciliar period was likewise evident. She counseled younger community members to listen to the priests and to pray much for them.^{3 p56-57}

One particular instance that demonstrated Sister Serafina's astute nursing care was recognizing a fellow religious Sister, Sister Genoveva's, very critical condition and then being instrumental in getting her to the hospital in Manaus for the treatment she desperately needed for typhus. She had both the nursing skills and the gentle caring love with which she reached out to the poor. When asked which ministry she preferred among: education, nursing, social work, domestic service and vocational work, Sister Serafina chose nursing and added, "In this work I feel fulfilled and I am happy."

Working continuously without a real and prolonged vacation, Sister Serafina contracted tuberculosis and remained in the provincial house all of 1969. During this time she also saw the demise of the petroleum industry in this poor amazon area. Vacant buildings were transformed into schools for children within walking distance. Others went into ruin, a reminder of what could have been. In 1970, still in poor health, she was sent to Marituba where she served as the secretary for the seminary of the Redemptorists and took up residence with the Sisters there. Soon Sister Serafina regained her health and once again began working with the poor in the Xingu River region.

In 1972, Sister Serafina was sent to Altamira on the Xingu River to work in the parish health care center to serve the needs of the sick and the poor. She was also to help train teachers by working with other Adorers in their Pedagogical Institute in Altamira. She was recognized by many as caring for the poor pregnant women who had traveled from the interior for a safe delivery but were dismissed from the hospital because it was not yet time to deliver. The journey to the hospital was exhausting and many were now in a larger city, very pregnant and with no money. Since the hospital would not shelter them, Sister Serafina found them on the streets, exposed, alone and hungry. She initially housed several in her clinic which quickly exceeded capacity. She worked with parishes and government officials to house the pregnant women. Some complained that the pregnant women were too young and should have used contraception. Others criticized her saying that she was "giving fish to these people instead of teaching them to fish." Sister Serafina ignored these accusations, cared for them and many then became assistants in her work.

In 1972, soon after Dom Erwin Krautler was made bishop, he had his Vicar General, Father Frederico Tschol, oversee the construction of a shelter for Sister Serafina's sick which was fondly called, "The Refuge." It had a dining room and dormitory and could accommodate twelve people. With extra blankets, the shelter could house 50 people. According to their condition, Sister Serafina would either take care of them at The Refuge or coordinate their admission at the hospital for treatment. At times she would manage to send critical patients to Belem for admission.

One day when she was at prayer in the community chapel of the Institute of Maria De Mattias, she heard a voice from outside the window call, "Sister Serafina, help me! I'm dying!" She looked and saw a poor man clothed in rags, trembling and unable to walk. He had been discharged from the hospital after a month and told to leave because he would never get well. His family lived 150 kilometers away. Sister Serafina took him to The Refuge and gently and expertly bandaged his leg and prepared a meal for him. She borrowed a hammock and sheets from the priests and made the poor man as comfortable as she could.

In 1973, Sister Serafina celebrated her silver jubilee as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ. She was celebrated in the newspapers as "The Angel of the Transamazonian Road." The building of the Transamazonian Road had impoverished many of the locals who had traveled from their homes in the interior to find work on the road which was not available. Sister Serafina's work was compared to that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and they referred to her as "Mother Teresa of

Altamira.” Sister Serafina was intent on doing God’s will as an Adorer of the Blood of Christ and reaching out to meet the needs of her “dear neighbor.”

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. Bishop Erich Krautler became her advocate in this endeavor and on a visit to Europe made her needs known and raised a considerable sum from friends in the parish of Biberach in southern Germany and also from the Governor of Voralberg in Austria. Interestingly, one Austrian magazine reported, “Our women no longer want more children. So let us help those who still have the courage to have them!”

The House of Divine Providence, as it was called, was built on Antonio Vieriea Street, 214 Bairro Brasilia, with construction begun in 1979 and completed in 1984. The building was spacious with a chapel, rooms for the pregnant women and an area to house the Adorers who staffed it. On the front of the building was a large mosaic of Our Lady of the Most Precious Blood. Also out front to welcome the women was a statue of Our Lady with the infant Jesus. The House of Divine Providence opened on May 13, 1984.

Sister Serafina’s work was not done. She tirelessly begged for beds, sheets, furnishings and money. In one encounter, a man told them they should make those “witches” work instead of allowing them to “make” children. Another store keeper told Sister Serafina and a mother who had recently delivered and was helping raise funds, “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.

Despite this, many, many people were very generous and at times she would return from her begging trips with a Diocesan truck loaded with sacks of rice, beans, corn, peppers and coffee. The House of Divine Providence was called by many of the local citizens, “The House of Sister Serafina.”

In her book on the life of Sister Serafina, Irma Marilia Menezes relates an example of Sister Serafina’s trust in God which occurred in 1983:

Sister Serafina had an unshakeable trust in God’s goodness and love believing that since God is good and God’s goodness is limitless, God certainly would never abandon those who are the object of God’s love. This gave her unshakeable confidence in Divine Providence. 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 The House of Divine Providence. Sister Rosa withdrew the money from the bank, leaving both the large school and the Adorers’ community without any money left in the bank. The money, Sister Serafina gave to the poor workers with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God. Sister Rosa prayed asking God to take care of the situation and the very next day, Father Dario, whom one of the nuns had been teaching Portuguese, arrived with a donation in the exact amount of what had been withdrawn.^{3 p89-90}

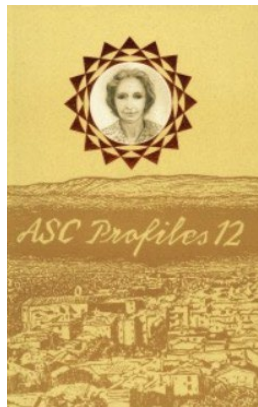
In 1986, Sister Serafina celebrated the fortieth anniversary of her entrance into religious life with a trip to Wichita and reunion with the group with whom she had entered her postulancy. This was a joyous occasion and many celebrations were held. Within two years, however, Sister Serafina would meet that Good God who accompanied her those so many years nursing the poor, sick and abandoned. The sisters observed her becoming weaker and one day she fell on the streets. After she recuperated, a car, that she was able to use briefly, was donated by friends. She was sent to the Hospital of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Belem where tests revealed that she had a form of cancer called lymphoma. She received chemotherapy which caused great physical pain,

terrible itching, a rash all over her body, hair loss and great weakness. Despite this, she assisted Sister Bernitz Marie with household tasks.

Sister Serafina was moved to the provincial house in Manaus to receive care in their newly constructed Nazareth Infirmary wing there. She patiently accepted suffering with meekness and gentleness towards the Sisters and everyone else. She continued in prayer with complete surrender to God's will. 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. She so much wanted to recover and return to Altamira to serve the sick and the pregnant women there. Here, however, 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.

As her condition deteriorated, she was taken to the public Hospital Getulio Vargas in Manaus. She was unable to speak the last three weeks. Sister Serafina died on October 21, 1988, on the Feast Day of St. Gaspar del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Her body was buried in the Cinque family tomb in St. John the Baptist Cemetery in Manaus at the family's request.

Sister Serafina Cinque, ASC was declared venerable with the decree of heroic virtues promulgated on January 27, 2014, by Pope Francis.² Since her death, several people in the city of Altamira and along the Transamazonian Road have reported receiving graces due to the intercession of Sister Serafina. Irma Menezes lists several of these in her text.³ p111-112 Graces received should be reported to the postulator below:



<https://adorers.org/profile-of-serafina-cinque/>

Postulator: Sr. Maria Paniccia, ASC. Irmas Adoradoras do Sangue de Cristo, Av. Constantino Nery, 1667-Sao Geraldo, 69011-970, Manaus - AM, BRAZIL

How good God is.

Adorers of the Blood of Christ are a vowed religious community of Roman Catholic women who were founded in 1834 as a teaching order by the Italian, St. Maria De Mattias, in the small town of Acuto, Italy. Worldwide, they are nearly 1,000 women strong including 240 in the U.S.:

Main Office (U.S. Mission Center) 4233 Sulphur Avenue,
Saint Louis, MO 63109; (314) 35-6294

References:

- 1) "Venerable Noeme Cinque". CatholicSaints.Info. 21 June 2015. Web. 26 April 2022. <<https://catholicsaints.info/venerable-noeme-cinque/>>
- 2) Hagiography Circle: An Online Resource on Contemporary Hagiography. 1988. Noeme Cinque (Serafina). Accessed 25 April 2022. <http://newsaints.faithweb.com/year/1988.htm#Cinque>
- 3) Irma Marilia Menezes. (26 Oct 1999). Serafina Cinque: Angel of Altamira. ASC Profiles 12. Accessed 25 April 2022. <https://adorers.org/profile-of-serafina-cinque/>
- 4) Nadine McMillan. (2020). Saint of the Month, February, Venerable Serafina Cinque. Challenge: Catholic Youth Ministry. <https://challengeyouthministry.com/saint-of-the-month-venerable-serafina-cinque/>. Accessed 25 April 2022. (Photo source).