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25 Years of the Present General Curia House (1976-2001)

by Giuseppe Guerra, C.M.
Visitor of Naples

Twenty-five years ago, on 29 October 1976, Fr. James W. Richardson, C.M., Superior General, gave the news, via a Circular Letter to all the Visitors, of the movement of the *General Curia* from the *Collegio Leoniano* (Rome) to the new *Casa Generalizia* at Via di Bravetta, 159.¹

The *General Curia* had transferred from Paris to Rome (using part of the *Collegio Leoniano*) 13 years earlier, on 5 August 1963, in response to a decision made by the XXXII General Assembly (30 June – 14 July 1955).²

Beginning in 1958, a long search began for the acquisition of land or a building in Rome, first for the purpose of a new organization for the international House of Studies,³ and then also in view of a new home for the *General Curia*.

Finally, the community purchased land on the Via di Bravetta on 26 May 1960 (almost 6 hectares).⁴ Fr. G. Tamagnone, the Treasurer General, has given a synthetic presentation of all this in his article: “Vicende del terreno di Via di Bravetta a Roma e dell’erigenda casa” [The events surrounding the land on Via di Bravetta in Rome and the building of the House].⁵

Difficulties were not lacking once the land was purchased. In the first two years of the 1960s, some plans for construction were presented, so as to make use of the tax breaks available at that time; and these plans had the approval of the City Council. Regrettably, before these plans could be fulfilled, a new general regulatory plan (NPRG) became law on 18 July 1962, and so the land was deemed at a low capacity for new construction.

The appeal of this decision made on 12 April 1963, and those repeated until the end of 1967, were all rejected.

¹With the construction of new housing on property that our Community sold, a new road entering the house was created, and, in August 1991, the address of the house became *Via dei Capasso, 30*.

²The General Assembly of 1947, however, concerning the postulatam regarding the transferring of the *Curia Generalizia* from Paris to Rome, had left the decision to the judgment of the Superior General.

³From 1956, the International House of Studies occupied a part of the *Collegio Leoniano* in Rome; it had its own government with its own Superior until 1974.

⁴The purchase consisted of three distinct parts. While the authorization of the President of the Republic arrived in time for two of the parts, for the third part, a mechanism came into play that, because the approval did not come in time, the property was put in the name of P. Burmm (Superior of the International House of Studies). The matter was cleared up on 22 February 1995, with the “gift” of this land to the Congregation by P. Burmm.

⁵In *Vincentiana*, 1974, 270-279.

In the [General] Council meeting of 4 October 1964, the discussion again arose whether to remain at the *Leoniano*, to purchase one of the buildings among the many proposed, or to begin a construction program from scratch on the land that had been purchased. The discussion continued for the next few years. Only in the Council meeting of 22 April 1970 was the decision made to build on the land at Via di Bravetta, 185 (the number was later changed to 159). Fr. General, in fact, had gotten a favorable vote from the majority during the General Assembly of 1969.⁶

Given all this, the project presented on 11 January 1971 was rejected, because it could not be done in the zoning area E/1 in which it had been requested. Even though it was modified, and relocated in zoning area M/2, the project ran into difficulties, so much so that the Council began to ask itself if it would not be better to look for other solutions. Finally, however, the project relocated in zone M/2 was approved on 11 March 1974. The work, by the construction firm Giampaoli s.p.a. of Rome, under the direction of the architect Busiri Vici, began on 6 May 1974 and concluded two and a half years later.

During the ceremony of the blessing of the cornerstone (14 September 1974⁷), all of the Fathers of the General Assembly (16 August – 23 September 1974) were present. Fr. Tamagnone explained in a note distributed to everyone every useful piece of news ... *everything sober and functional* ... and the Superior General, J. Richardson, explained the purpose of the new construction: *this is not the house of the Curia, but the house of the Congregation of the Mission*.⁸ The same affirmation was made in the Circular Letter to the Visitors on 29 October 1974: *the General Curia is the house of all the members of the Congregation of the Mission*.⁹

In the words of Fr. Tamagnone and of the Superior General we find synthesized both the sobriety in which the new construction was inspired, and its openness to the service of the whole Congregation.

Later steps

As we have seen, the project never lacked for difficulties. Other than the cost (1,025,640,134 lira¹⁰), and a more difficult accessibility, given its distance from the center of the city, the principal purpose of an autonomous and independent house was achieved in return.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷*Benedictio lapidis primarii domus generalitiae* (14.IX.1974) in *Vincentiana* (1974) pp. 477- 479.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹In *Vincentiana* 1977, p. 12-13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

It is evident that, in the following years, the two things brought out by the Superior General and the Treasurer General, the sobriety of the house and its openness to the whole Congregation, made necessary a difficult compromise; thus, in the last ten years, ways have been sought that would enlarge the house, while retaining in substance its initial criteria.

In the meantime, all the land in front of the house was sold, since it was deemed not useful for further expansion. The General Council had already given its authorization on 19 November 1969. The land was sold to the company Troiani & Grilli, which constructed five apartment buildings there. The part of the land sold that is the soccer field rented to “Tevere Roma,” was, as required by law, ceded to the City Council by that sports concern.

A different way of organizing the space, especially in regards to the Secretariat on the second floor, went into effect in 1990. After that, some more improvements were made: a new entry gate, automating the door by the use of electric cells, construction of a security wall, covering the external garage, recementing of the outside walls, installation of a new phone system, and the refitting of some rooms.

After 1996, this remodeling continued, with the use of a large space over the terrace, the rewiring of the electrical system to bring it up to code, the remodeling of the refectory, and a new alarm system. None of this mentions the ordinary maintenance of the building, nor the normal repainting of rooms. An extraordinary decoration in the front entrance hall was done in 2000 by Br. Mark Elder, CM, painter and professor of art at De Paul University.

The Community of the Curia

In the first four years, the community of the Curia was directed, as it had been in Paris and in Rome, by the Superior General. In 1980, however, the new Superior General, Fr. R. McCullen, CM, wished a distinct superior for the house. The office was given to Fr. W. Sheldon, CM, whose term last for three trienniums until 1989. Thus, from 1980, the house of the Curia has had a superior different from the Superior General. His duties, as well as those of the House Council, and its relationship to the General Council, were set out in the **Local Project** of 1985. This Project, with a few modifications, was rewritten in 1992, and again in 1999.

The relations of the house with the Daughters of Charity have always been marked by the greatest collaboration. A group of sisters took care of the logistic services from 1976 until 1993 and then some sisters have worked in the Secretariat. On 21 February 1995, the land bordering the Via di Nocetta, 20,438 sq. meters in area, was donated to the General Curia by the Daughters of Charity.

As the **Local Project** states, the purpose of the General Curia House is the service of the entire Congregation, and the carrying out of the duties that the Constitutions and Statutes assign to the Superior General, to the Assistants General, and to the other members of the General Curia.

The Curia House seeks to create a community of prayer, of brotherly relationships, of works, and of goods, to promote the personal and communal growth of all the confreres in their Vincentian vocation.

(ROBERT STONE, C.M., translator)