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Rome, September 14, 2025
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Prot. no. 230/2025
Subject: World Day of the Deaf – September 28, 2025

To: the Rogationists
Cc: the Family of the Rogate

Dear Confreres,

Due to the subject of this circular letter, I would like to extend a special greeting to the new Rogationists who were formerly members of the Little Mission for the Deaf (LMD). As of December 25, 2023, Christmas Day, they became full-fledged members of the Congregation of the Rogationists by order of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) and by their own free choice.

From all of us, a joyful, affectionate and fraternal welcome to them! I would like to take this opportunity to present the merger to the Family of the Rogate. This idea was to do this presentation after the decree of CICLSAL was issued, but I preferred to wait until all the legal aspects had been finalized, including the decree of the Minister of the Interior, and to coincide it with World Day of the Deaf (WDD), a significant event for the LMD.

The stages of the merger

The Pontifical Dicastery took note of the LMD members' desire to merge with the Congregation of the Rogationists, as well as the 13th Rogationist General Chapter's (2022) essentially unanimous decision to accept this merger.

"This Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life having carefully examined the above request and obtained the favorable vote of the Congress on December 2, 2023, by this Decree, in accordance with canon 582 of the Code of Canon Law, establishes the merger of the Institute of the *Little Mission for the Deaf* with that of the *Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus*."

I will briefly summarize the stages of this merger.

On June 19, 2020, the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life appointed Fr. Matteo Sanavio RCJ as the Pontifical Commissioner for the Little Mission for the Deaf. He was asked to guide the Institute through the process of merging with another Institute.

At the time, the LMD had 24 Religious members distributed in four communities: Rome, Butembo (Democratic Republic of Congo), Cebu (Philippines), and Londrina (Brazil). Six of the members were in formation with temporary vows, and 18 were perpetually professed, including 16 priests, one deacon, and one lay brother.

On October 2, 2020, two Congolese Religious brothers in formation, Bro. Matthieu Kasereka Musondolya and Bro. Lwanzo Kasereka Sekeraviti, transferred to the Rogationist Theological Studentate in Rome. In March 2021, two priests from the St. Joseph Quasi-Province, Fr. Raoul Nouno RCJ and Fr. Jules Ciza RCJ, transferred to the Butembo Community as formators to accompany four young Religious in formation: Bro. Chrisostome Katembo, Bro. David Mumbere, Bro. Louange Kahasi, and Bro. Muyisa Kahuko. Fr. Matthieu Kasereka Musondolya was ordained a priest on August 2, 2025.

During the period under the Pontifical Commissioner, four Religious died: Bro. Ermanno Personè, Bro. Carlo di Carlo, Fr. Giustino Rovai and Fr. Giuseppe Gissi. Another Religious, Bro. Dennis Edipolo Libarnes, obtained the reduction to the lay state.

On June 7, 2021, the Secretary of the CICLSAL sent the Commissioner a Guide for Preparing the Merger of one Religious Institute with another.

The LMD Religious, excluding those in the Londrina community, expressed their desire to merge with the Rogationist Congregation. This desire was met with a favorable opinion from the 13th General Chapter of the Rogationists.

On December 25, 2023, the Holy See issued the Decree of Merger of the Little Mission with the Rogationists.

On September 28, 2024, the Interior Minister Piantedosi recognized the civil merger of the two Congregations by decree, which was published in the Official Gazette of the Italian Republic on October 26, 2024.

On September 8, 2024, six Confreres in formation professed the perpetual vows in the Rogationist Congregation in Messina and Butembo (DRC). From September 8 to December 8, 2024, the remaining Confreres from the LMD also professed the vow of Rogate, thus entering the Congregation of the Rogationists of the Heart of Jesus.

Currently, there are 14 Rogationist Confreres from the PMS: eight Priests, four Religious students, and one Coadjutor Brother.

The charismatic gift of the LMD

Through this merger, we welcomed the Religious of the LMD and offered them a share in the charism of the Rogate. In turn, we received their charismatic gift. Therefore, we are called to keep this charism alive in light of the signs of the times. We find inspiration primarily in the Gospel and in the "sacred history" of the Little Mission for the Deaf, as well as in the heritage of its Founder, including his life and writings. Let us briefly recall his life.

The Founder of the LMD, the Venerable Don Giuseppe Gualandi,¹ was born in Bologna on June 9, 1826. He was ordained a priest in 1849, and on July 8 of that year — the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary — he was called to be the apostle of the Deaf.

On that day at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Bologna during the celebration of the First Communion, he saw a girl who was older than the others but looked lost. Her name was Carolina Galoppini. Being deaf, she had to delay her First Communion until some kind-hearted ladies were able to provide her with the minimum religious instruction necessary to receive the Sacramental Jesus.

This episode led Don Giuseppe to discover the world of the Deaf, which had been completely unknown to him until then. In it, he saw his calling to devote himself entirely to

¹ Members of the Little Mission for the Deaf were also sometimes called "Gualandian Missionaries".

this ministry. Because all this took place in front of the Marian painting venerated in his parish, he considered it a special grace from Our Lady, who would be present in a special way in his life from that moment on.

As soon as Don Giuseppe felt a strong impulse within himself to help these unfortunate brothers and sisters, he realized he needed to learn about and understand a reality he had been unaware of until then.

He gradually came to understand that deafness is a disability not noticeable to most people, but that it has devastating effects. Deaf individuals are cut off from relationships with others because they communicate mainly through sight. However, even sight must be educated and prepared to allow for real and satisfactory communication.

As a shepherd of souls sent to proclaim the salvation of the Lord, Don Giuseppe was troubled by the fact that the Deaf were excluded from this relationship. They could not hear the Word intended for them. The Deaf were truly the poor of the Church. Through no fault of their own, the Good News did not reach them.

In 1852, Don Giuseppe's brother, Don Cesare, definitively joined him in his mission to help the Deaf. Don Giuseppe, for his part, repeated like a prayer: "Euntes, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae! Omnia creaturae, even the poor Deaf."

Together, they founded the Little Mission for the Deaf, composed of Religious men and women dedicated exclusively to the apostolate of the Deaf.

After Don Cesare's premature death, Don Giuseppe perfected the organization of his work, set its goals, consolidated its beginnings, and established its Rules. These Rules were approved by the Most Eminent Ordinaries of Bologna (1872), Rome (1884), and Florence (1885) - cities in which Don Giuseppe extended his ministry.

He gave his Religious Confreres the motto, "GOD ALONE!" As a program for their apostolate, he instilled in them a spirit of universal charity towards the Deaf. He also gave them a philosophy to guide and justify their commitment to educating young deaf children: Educate in order to evangelize.

Comforted by the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Don Giuseppe died on July 14, 1907, after 56 years of uninterrupted service to the Deaf. His remains are buried in the Basilica of San Petronio in Bologna. On April 24, 2001, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared that the Servant of God had exercised heroic virtues, attributing to him the title of Venerable.

Apostolate with the Deaf in our Congregation

Father Hannibal dedicated himself to the evangelical renewal of the Avignone Quarters to bring the Word of God to the poor and the marginalized. With his gaze fixed on the global horizon, he recognized that the Lord Jesus entrusted the proclamation of salvation to the good laborers of the Kingdom. He believed that the People of God must ask the Lord of the harvest to provide these laborers. Thus, he entrusted the charism of the Rogate to the little ones and the poor, considering them privileged individuals who could implore good laborers through prayer.

In Father Hannibal's mind and heart, the Rogate aims to obtain good laborers for the Kingdom of God and tends to the interests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, which is promoted by evangelization.

We recall that Father Hannibal went to the Avignone Quarters to meet the beggar Zancone. It was in keeping the promise he had made to teach him "the things of God."

He did everything in his power to uplift these marginalized people, educating the children, especially the orphans, and preparing the older children to work. He pulled families out of degradation, but his primary goal was to talk to them about God and introduce them to prayer.

According to his first biographer, Fr. Francesco Vitale, he also took care of a deaf boy in the beginning. "The Father gathered the boys one evening and the girls the next day, not only from the neighborhood, but also from the surrounding area. The adults always attended, too. At the end of the lesson, he would have the children pray for a beautiful, large chapel to be built in those places soon. He said nothing else, but he dreamed of building a beautiful, large chapel because of his love for Our Lord, so that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament could bring life to places where death reigned.

"It was a golden dream that earned him eight years of prayers, groans, and penances. This dream then gave rise to the great feast of July 1, which we commemorate annually in all our Houses. Father Hannibal remembered one deaf child who, unable to express his feelings any other way, joined the others in prayer by saying: "Aaa! Aaa!" as such unfortunate people usually do."²

Gradually, the Congregation's apostolate developed in the footsteps of Father Hannibal. They prayed to implore good laborers, spread this prayer, and committed themselves to works of charity, the education of children and young people (especially the poor and abandoned), evangelization, human promotion, and relief of the poor.

The apostolate with the Deaf has also been carried out in Italy since 1950, practically for more than half of the Congregation's existence. Below is some data on the locations of this apostolate: Assisi (1950–1971), Messina (1952–2025), Chiavari (1959–1961), and Palermo (1960–2016). According to the Congregation's Bulletin, 13,068 deaf individuals were supported during these years, averaging 174.24 per year.

This experience developed over the years, as did the contacts made by the Little Missionaries of the Deaf with Rogationists who worked with the Deaf community. These contacts influenced the decision to merge. Currently, the apostolate with the Deaf is carried out in a limited form in Messina but has a significant presence in Butembo, DRC. We hope it will also be established in Cebu, Philippines, as soon as possible. Additionally, the Congregation is committed to establishing a Residential Health Care Facility (RSA) for the Deaf as soon as possible, an endeavor that the LMD had planned years before the merger.

Dear friends, it seems that the Deaf find it difficult to make themselves heard, but we know that if we are called to give priority to the poor in our apostolate, the Deaf are the poorest of the poor because of their difficulty in communicating. If the figures reported are accurate, there are 72,000,000 people in the world who use sign language.

World Day of the Deaf – September 28, 2025

The World Day of the Deaf is celebrated every year on the last Sunday of September. The World Federation of the Deaf began celebrating it in 1958 in memory of the founding of that Federation in Rome in 1951, but it was officially established during the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Paris in 1971.

² VITALE F., *Il Canonico Annibale Maria Di Francia – Nella vita e nelle Opere*, Messina (1939), pag. 72-73.

However, even before that, EFFATA Sunday was celebrated on the initiative of the Little Mission for the Deaf. Effata Sunday is generally celebrated on the same day as World Day of the Deaf, if possible.

It is called Effata Sunday because it commemorates the miracle of Jesus Christ healing the deaf, as recounted in the Gospel of Mark (7:31-37).

Before the liturgical reform, this Gospel passage was read every year in August; now, it is read every three years on the 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time of Year B, which is usually in September.

This year, many deaf Catholics celebrated Effata on Sunday, September 9. The Gualandi missionaries have always placed great importance on this event, organizing gatherings of deaf individuals and offering religious, cultural, and recreational activities.

This year, large numbers of former Gualandi students, as well as members of various groups and associations, are expected to participate in events held at different locations on different dates.

In Giulianova, Bishop Michele Seccia will preside over the Eucharistic celebration at the Madonna dello Splendore Shrine. The Deaf community of Benevento will gather at the Marian shrine in Castelpetroso.

The Deaf community of Bologna will gather at the former Gualandi Institute on Via Nosadella on Sunday, September 23. Former students of the Palazzi Zavarise Institute will gather in Fano on September 16.

Deaf people love to socialize and experience this anniversary intensely due to their particular condition.

In keeping with tradition, the LMD organizes special events every year for students, former students, and others from the Gualandi Institutes.

- The gathering for Effata Day, which commemorates the healing of the deaf as described in the Gospel of Mark.

- The gathering to celebrate the Patron Saint of the deaf, St. Francis de Sales. This celebration was previously held on January 29, but it was moved to January 24 due to the liturgical reform.

- The Easter gathering: During Easter, Gualandi priests visit parishes in cities where National Deaf Association Circles were active to celebrate Mass and administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

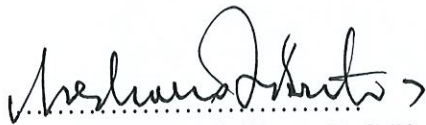
Dear friends, one of Father Hannibal's spiritual characteristics was inventing "spiritual enterprises" for special events and anniversaries to rekindle the devotion of his sons and daughters. I urge you to celebrate World Day of the Deaf by embracing the challenging yet rewarding reality of our brothers and sisters. If we have the opportunity, let us show them the warmth of our friendship. In any case, let us raise this awareness among the faithful during the Eucharistic celebration. If we are engaged in this apostolate with the Deaf Community, it would be good to organize some formative and informative events, if possible.

In Religious Institutes, the charism, mission, and spirituality are codified in a particular Rule of Life through the approval of the Apostolic See. At the same time, the Founder remains the guide and witness in the life and mission of the Religious. Therefore, as we welcome the charismatic gift of the LMD, which is also present in our tradition as an apostolate, we also

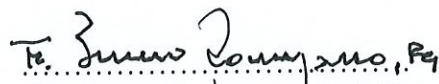
welcome the paternity of the Venerable Giuseppe Gualandi. We promote knowledge of him and his cause for canonization, if it is the Lord's will.

Finally, I invite you to offer our common thanks to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary for enriching our fraternity through the merger of the LMD. May they bless our path towards full communion, guided by the Holy Spirit who bestows charisms on the Church. May St. Hannibal and Venerable Don Giuseppe Gualandi intercede for us.

With these wishes, I greet you all with affection in the Lord.


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(Fr. Fortunato Siciliano, R.C.J.)
Secretary General




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(Fr. Bruno Rampazzo, R.C.J.)
Superior General