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"The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?"

Dearest Sisters,

This is just the first verse of Psalm 26 (27), which Sr. Cristina had memorised and made her own and used to repeat often. She prayed in the words of this Psalm: "One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple" (Ps 26: 4). The good and merciful God fulfilled her desire on 20th January 2014, at 12:30 p.m. granting her wish to contemplate His face and taste His sweetness.

Sr. Maria Cristina Avanço was born on 14th October 1962, at Alvorada do Sul, in the State of Paraná. She was the second of five children of Aldemar Avanço and Anizia Rosetto Avanço. From her family of Italian origin, to which she was deeply attached, she inherited love for work and a great religious spirit, because of which, right from her adolescence she was intensely engaged in the Parish community of the Itauna zone, where she lived till the age of 18, helping the priests in catechesis and the liturgy.

At the age of 15, she went through a difficult time due to a health problem – cancer of the thyroid. However, thanks to the prayers of her family, of the Parish community and of the PIME Fathers who were in charge of her Parish under the patronage of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, she got the proper treatment and was healed. Referring to this period she said: "I was afraid of losing my voice and I began to feel deep within me that God wanted something more from me, He had a mission for me and for my voice" (cf. *The story of my vocation* in www.irmasdesantaana.org.br).

Among the other Congregations which she knew, she received the visit of the Sisters of Saint Ann in her Parish on 23rd August 1981 and the Lord revealed to her that His plan for her was there. At the end of the year, she participated in some vocational encounters in Londrina and with the support of her family, the Parish community and the Priests, Cesar Bano and Antonio Quaggiotto, on 1st February 1982 she began her journey of formation with the Sisters of St. Ann. She made her First Profession on 25th January 1985 and her Final Vows on 2nd February 1991.

Equipped with human and spiritual gifts that made her capable of transmitting values by working with the Formees, she was sent to the International Juniorate in Rome where she pursued her Bachelor's degree in Theology from 1985 to 1988. From 1989-1992 she carried out her mission in Barretos, first as a teacher and collaborator in the formation of the Postulants, then as their Formator.

From November 1992 to June 1994, she was again in Rome for her Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology. Returning to Brazil, she was sent to the Community of Curitiba as Junior Mistress, and remained there till 1998, when she was appointed Delegate Superior of the Delegation "Mother Enrichetta" - Brazil. And when the Delegation was erected into a Province in 2001, Sr. Cristina was appointed Provincial Superior, an office she held until 2007. She was then transferred to Curitiba, where she was appointed Superior of the Community and Mistress of Formation of the

Postulants and Novices. In 2011, in a spirit of obedience, she once again accepted the responsibility of Provincial Superior and carried it out till the present moment. Besides, she also lent her efficacious service as Secretary of the Conference of Religious of Brazil (CRB) - Curitiba Region.

Sr. Cristina always distinguished herself, as mentioned above, for her intellectual abilities, but also for her strong sense of belonging to our Religious Family, for her pursuit of coherence and for a strong experience of consecration, through the practice of a deep life of prayer, which enabled her, in recent years, to be invited to give retreats to various groups of young people in formation in other Congregations, a commitment which she accepted, recognizing it as an opportunity for herself to grow. Wherever she went, she always made a lot of friends, managing to take interest in the situation of each one.

Because of the cancer she suffered during her adolescence, she underwent medical examinations regularly, but about a year ago she began to have a persistent cough. She made many attempts to cure it, trying to find out the cause. At the same time, she also started to lose weight in an inexplicable manner. Though she went to various doctors and did many tests, the cause was not understood and no remedy was found to calm the cough. Only last November, as a result of a CT scan and a biopsy, it was discovered that the cancer had again appeared, with its central point in the lungs. On 16th December she underwent the first cycle of chemotherapy, to which she responded well.

All of us, Sisters of the Province of Brazil prayed intensely, together with many other Sisters from all parts of the Congregation. Many friends and Laity of the LASA group were close to us and they came every evening to our Chapel in the Provincialate to pray the Rosary and implore the grace of healing for Sr. Cristina through the intercession of our Founders. Because of this communion of prayer and offering, we all believed that this disease would not overpower her "...whom shall I fear?" However, a bone scan later revealed that Sr. Cristina was full of metastases and the doctors did not hide the seriousness of her case.

Yet, she remained firm, and even though fragile, she gave her contribution at our Provincial Chapter held from 27th to 31st December 2013, regretting only that she was not able to give to the Sisters present all the attention that she would have liked to.

She managed to do four cycles of chemotherapy, making a lot of effort to eat even when she did not have appetite and with the support of the Sisters of the Community, tried in every way to stay well. On Thursday, 16th January, having undergone chemotherapy the previous day, she felt better, so much so that she received the visit of our Archbishop, Msgr. Orlando Brandes, and she also called for a meeting of the Provincial Council at 3:30 p.m. She also attended Mass celebrated in our Chapel by the Parish Priest Fr. John Jairo Garcia Chacon and soon after received the Anointing of the Sick.

The next day, she had severe back pain and headache, but said that this was because she had "overdone it" the previous day. The same evening (17th January), because she was having much difficulty in breathing, she was taken to the hospital. There, as each hour passed by, it was perceived that despite the help of oxygen, it was getting increasingly difficult for her to breathe. On the 19th it was necessary to have recourse to treatment through which liquid was extracted from her lungs. This, however, did not give any relief, so much so that on 20th January, after hours of quiet agony, assisted by Sr. Adriana and her elder sister, while expressing her desire to return "home", she peacefully abandoned herself into the arms of the Lord Jesus, the Bridegroom, who gave her the crown of life (2 Tim 4:7-8), because she had fought the good fight and had kept the faith deeply.

For us, Sisters, it was a unique experience of pain, of difficulty in understanding God's plan and at the same time of consolation for the mercy that God showed towards Sr. Cristina, preserving her from further pain and suffering that would have been caused by this disease and for having granted her, at the age of only 51, "to dwell forever in His Sanctuary".

Our Archbishop was with us while we waited for the arrival of the body, at 8 p.m. in the Chapel of the Provincialate. It was a solemn moment, of profound silence and acceptance in faith of the mysterious Will of the Father. We immediately began the Funeral Mass celebrated by the Archbishop and Fr. Marcelo Gomes Santos of the Parish of St. Lawrence the Martyr, who is in charge of the youth ministry. Also with us were Sr. Cristina's mother, brothers and sisters and other relatives, whose serene presence (especially of her mother) was a grace that strengthened our faith. Many other people were also present: friends from various communities, the laity of the LASA group, religious of various Congregations, relatives of our other Sisters. After the celebration, the wake lasted until 5 o'clock in the morning of 21st January, when Fr. José Mauri da Cruz, Parish Priest of the Community of Curitiba, celebrated Holy Mass. At 6 a.m. we accompanied the coffin in a procession of cars up to the Church of the city of Alvorada do Sul, where at 10 a.m. our Archbishop presided over another Funeral Mass, concelebrated by Fr. Marcio Fernando França, Parish Priest of that Parish, Fr Luiz Carlos Senigalia, Fr. Marcelo Gomes Santos and Fr. Jorge Pereira de Melo. The members of Sr. Cristina's family and numerous relatives and friends were present. Mother General too made her presence felt through a significant message that was read as an introduction to the Mass. The body of Sr. Cristina was then accompanied to the cemetery of that city, where, by wish of her family, she was buried in the family tomb.

During these days many friends have been in touch with us, we have received condolences from our Sisters from different parts of the world, men and women religious of many Congregations and priests have expressed in various ways their closeness and unity in sorrow and prayer. We thank our Mother General who had the kind thought of sending our dear Sr. Anna Maria Gamba, who is for us a presence of hope and who is helping us to discern the direction to be followed in the journey of the Province.

May God bless you for everything you have done for us in this moment of Sr. Cristina's passing away. We are determined to go ahead with courage, in the certainty that she will intercede with the Father and that her "Yes" until the end will result in many graces for each one of us, for the Province and for our entire Religious Family.

In the desire to be faithful to God's plan, I fraternally greet you all,

Sr. Fatima Marafon
Provincial Vicar