

*Mother Hildegarde Campodonico*



Born to Italian parents in Boston, Massachusetts, on October 1, 1879, Mother Hildegarde Campodonico knew how to blend a love for her native land and the land of her heritage. She embraced religious life with youthful enthusiasm, entering the novitiate of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Boston in 1904. Outstanding for her prudence and keen intuition, she was first chosen as Novice Directress and subsequently as superior and principal in the first schools founded by the Missionary Zelatrices in Missouri and Pennsylvania. She was Provincial Superior in the United States when, in 1937, she participated in the General Chapter and was elected Superior General. Mother Hildegarde governed the Congregation for twelve years. She immediately became familiar with the entire membership of the Congregation by visiting all of the houses within the first three years of her term. She opened new missions in every province and established houses in Belgium and Argentina. With dauntless trust in the Lord she overcame countless difficulties during the Second World War. During this time all communication with the Sisters was cut off and she was constantly concerned for their well-being.

On October 17, 1941, she obtained the approbation of the Constitutions. In 1946, she established the Province of Central-southern Italy with the Provincialate at the Sacred Heart Institute in Avezzano. One of Mother Hildegarde's greatest consolations was being able to recover and identify the body of Mother Clelia and to have her interred in the Generalate Chapel. Eager to make Mother Clelia better known to a new generation of Sisters, she published *A Collection of Letters of the Venerable Mother Clelia Merloni, Foundress of the Missionary Zelatrices of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* in 1948. In the same year the Missionary Zelatrices established for the first time a mission at Forli, the birthplace of Mother Clelia. At the end of her life, Mother Hildegarde endured a serious illness and offered her sufferings for the spreading of His Kingdom in the world and for the sanctification of her daughters. She died in Rome on September 4, 1949.