



visiting
the places
where

saint

GIANNA
BERETTA MOLLA
lived





“We are happy to honour Gianna in the city where she was born and in the places of her apostolate and of her married life and motherhood from 1942 until her death.

She was in Magenta when she enrolled on the faculty of medicine and in this very Basilica she was married to Pietro Molla on 24th September 1955. Near here in Mesero she started her surgery in 1950, while in Ponte Nuovo of Magenta she lived as a happy bride and mother...”

(Cardinal Archbishop Carlo Maria Martini, Basilica of St. Martin in Magenta, 15th Aprile 1994)



Gianna with Pierluigi and Mariolina in Ponte Nuovo, Magenta, 1958



Gianna Beretta Molla was born in Magenta (near Milan) on October 4, 1922. Her parents, Alberto and Maria De Micheli, had thirteen children, Gianna was the tenth. As a child she was open to faith and Christian values. Her parents taught her that life was a wonderful gift from God. The example of her parents led her to rely on God and to become fully aware of the need and effectiveness of prayer. She was five when she received her First Communion. It was an important moment in Gianna's life. From that moment onward, she frequently took Holy Communion which was for her a support and source of light throughout her childhood and youth.

Those years were not easy for Gianna. She changed schools, had health problems, her family moved several times, and her parents died. All this did not shock or upset Gianna very much, her sensitivity and good qualities grew thanks to the support she received from her deep spiritual life.

She was a good student both at high school and university. She lived her faith with generosity among the young women who were part of the "Azione Cattolica" (Catholic Action). Gianna also put her faith in action amidst the old and needy through the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In 1949 Gianna received a degree in medicine at the University of Pavia. The following year she opened a "doctor's office" in Mesero and continued her studies with a specialization in pediatric medicine at the University of Milan in 1952.

For Gianna, being a doctor was not just a profession but a vocation. She got more and more involved in Catholic Action. In those years she expressed her great love for life and God's creation through music and painting, skiing and mountain climbing.

Gianna prayed and asked for prayers from others to help her to discern her life's vocation, what God had intended for her. At first, she thought she could be a lay

missionary in Brazil to help her brother, Father Alberto, a doctor and Capuchin missionary in Grajaù, Brazil. Later on, Gianna felt that God had chosen marriage for her and she followed this choice with her innate enthusiasm. Her wish was "to form a truly Christian family".

On September 24, 1955 Gianna and Pietro Molla were married in St Martin's Basilica in Magenta. Gianna was delighted to be a wife. In November 1956, her first son Pierluigi was born. Mariolina was born in December 1957 and Laura in July 1959. Gianna was a happy mother. Gianna knew how to balance her duties as mother, wife, doctor in Mesero and in Ponte Nuovo (near Magenta) with her great "joie de vivre".

In September 1961 Gianna had been pregnant for two months when she started facing pain and suffering. She was diagnosed with a large fibroma - a benign tumor, in the uterus. Gianna knew that pregnancy would entail great risks to her life. However she asked the surgeon to operate to remove fibroma in such a way as to save the life of the baby she was carrying. She never stopped praying and trusting in God's Providence. The baby's life was saved. Gianna thanked God and spent the following seven months attending to her duties of mother and doctor with great commitment and strength.

When the days of the childbirth were near, always trusting God's Providence, Gianna was ready to give her life to save the baby's life, and she said to her husband Pietro: "If you have to choose, there should be no doubt: choose - I demand it - the life of the baby. Save him."

On April 21, 1962 Gianna Emanuela was born by caesarian section at the hospital in Monza.

Immediately after the operation, Gianna's general condition started to worsen. She had a very high fever and terrible abdominal pains caused by septic peritonitis. Despite all human efforts, her conditions worsened. On April 28, 1962, at dawn, she was taken back to the family home in Ponte Nuovo where she died at 8 a.m. She was 39 years old. She was buried in the cemetery of Mesero. She soon became known for the sanctity of her life and her final gesture of great love.

Gianna was proclaimed Blessed by Pope John Paul II on April 24, 1994. She was canonized on May 16, 2004. Her feast day is on April 28, the day of her death.



Gianna, Pietro, Pierluigi,
Mariolina and Laura,
Courmayeur, summer 1960



The Beretta family have lived in Magenta since 1662. **In the furrow of a profound family tradition** that gave the city some doctors and many priests (other ancestors were notaries and accountants), **Gianna was born, grew up, got married and died in Magenta** (1922-1955-1962). Now the house is a result of a partial refurbishing, after the death of Gianna, of the dated family building.

In the cemetery of Magenta there are two Beretta chapels.

In the first the parents of her father are buried: the accountant Enrico Beretta (1829-1906) and his wife Amalia Perabò (1839-1885) with some of their children. Among them district doctor Enrico and father Giuseppe

who was Provost in Milan.

Also buried there is father Pompeo Beretta (1822-1879), Enrico's brother and coadjutor in Magenta. The other ancestors, buried in the ancient Parish of Saint Martin or in the attached cemetery which doesn't exist anymore (it was in the now Kennedy square), went lost.

In the second chapel, founded in 2008, buried here are Gianna's parents, Alberto Beretta (1881-1942) and Maria De Micheli (1887-1942) with their children Amalia, Francesco, Ferdinando, Father Alberto, Zita, Piera, Davide, Rosa, Guglielmina and Anna Maria. As stated by Sister Virginia Beretta, their dad, Alberto, expressed his wish that his family should remain united even in death.



Gianna with Sister Virginia and Zita, her sisters, Laura, her sister-in-law, and her nephews and nieces in the Beretta's house in Magenta.



The house of Saint Biagio, that is the Institute of the Canossian Daughters of Charity, was founded in 1884. It was **the second home of Gianna** who from 1942 came here every day together with her sisters Zita and Virginia. Sister Virginia, who was a doctor, later became a Canossian Sister.

Here, Gianna used to meet the teenagers and the groups of Catholic Action.

“To be a testimony means to make the truth visible in your person and offer yourself as an attractive example”.

This is how Gianna taught and lived.



Here is Gianna in 1952 on the stage of the Canossian Hall after a play with the girls of the Catholic Action.

A group of young pilgrims in the inner courtyard of the Canossian House as it is today.





1. The Virgin Mary (Mother of sorrows) of the internal Chapel of the Saint Biagio Church (canvas by Angelo Inganni, 1849): Mary doesn't look at Jesus, dead in her arms, but at God in the sure hope that help for her Son will come from the Lord. **It is a complete trust in the Divine Providence** which characterizes Gianna even more during her last maternity. In this chapel father Giuseppe Beretta, brother of Gianna, celebrated the Holy Mass of Gianna and Pietro's engagement on 11th April 1955.



2. The door to the tabernacle; the "pious" pelican, representing Jesus, from the Eucharistic Hymn of Saint Thomas D'Aquino. The pelican which is wounded in the chest to nurture the little ones reminds us the "Drop of blood" on the good that we do, which Gianna speaks about in her writings.

3. In the small Church of Saint Biagio, in the Canossian Sisters House, it is possible to visit the **PHOTO EXHIBITION: "Saint Gianna Beretta Molla. A life for life"**, 16 panels which illustrate Gianna's life, with the texts in six different languages: Italian, English, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese.





This was Gianna's Parish church. It was consecrated on 24th October 1903 by the blessed Cardinal Archbishop Andrea Carlo Ferrari. In 1947 it was erected in Basilica by Pope Pio XII because it was mother church and for its beauty. It is dedicated to Saint Martin, Bishop of Charity and of ecclesial life: **chari-**

ty and ecclesial life, above all in her parish of Magenta, were Gianna's own characteristics.

Inside we remember the place that was occupied by Gianna during prayers: it was in the row of the pews in front of the second confessional on the left looking from the High Altar.



1. *Christening gown of Saint Gianna donated by the Beretta family to the Basilica.*



2. *Christening font of the Basilica, where Gianna was baptized on 11th October 1922.*



3. *Saint Crescenzia* Martyr, brought to Magenta in 1817 from Roman catacombes of Romans (San Callisto) represents **the testimony and the Christian coherence** clearly requested and lived by Gianna. *Saint Crescenzia* is remembered by Gianna in her writings.



4. **High Altar:** at the foot of this altar Gianna and Pietro Molla exchanged their wedding vows on 24th September 1955. The tabernacle door (above) represents the glory (that is the manifestation) of God and reminds us the traditional teaching from which Gianna was inspired in her choices as a mother: **“Glory of God is the man who is given the gift of life”** (Saint Ireneo).



5. The altar of **Saint Mary, Queen of Peace and of the Family** (the statue by Grazioso Rusca, sculpted in the early 19th century, was owned by the Beretta's family that from 1687 had the patronage on the altar of Virgin Mary that is they had rights and duties regarding the celebration of Mass on this altar and the maintenance of both the statue and the altar). There is a lovely testimony of Virginia, Gianna's sister, regarding this statue: **“What a lot of praying Gianna and me in front of Our Lady!”**. Here Gianna and Pietro, just after their wedding, entrusted their family to the Virgin Mary to which Gianna donated her wedding bouquet.





The church dates back to the 14th century and gathers within itself the proof of the most antique religious traditions of Magenta. Therefore it was risen to the dignity of "Sanctuary of the blessed Virgin Mary Assunta" with an order of the blessed Cardinal Archbishop Ildefonso Schuster on 13th May 1951. The denomination "Assunta" is the name of this sanctuary; it means **moral perfection** in which humanity is called in raising prayer to God. Gianna always aimed at this perfection. In this church of the "Assunta" Gianna took part in the holy Mass daily and she often gathered in prayer, even with

her young group of the Catholic Action. She always sat in the last pew on the right towards the central aisle, looking from the altar. Gianna asked her future husband to prepare himself spiritually and to receive the marriage sacrament with three days of praying, with holy Mass and Communion: she was in this Sanctuary and he was in Ponte Nuovo Chapel, Magenta. She spoke of love between a man and a woman realized according to God's law defining it also as a desire of perfection that involved the husband: a love destined to last forever in Heaven.



In the Sanctuary of the “Assunta”, Gianna, who practised painting, found inspiration of meditation in some paintings, particularly in the prospects of her vocational choices. For example, the third altar, entering on the right, represents Pope Saint Celeste V, at his own abdication, and Abbot Mauro, when he was called from the contemplation to helping the sick: that is being humble in the vocational choice and **the concern for the sick**, as it was for Gianna. The big painting of the altar is by Agostino Santagostino, third last decade of the 17th century.

In the sixteenth-century icon of the altar of St. John (the photo on the right), the young Saint (John) is depicted in a particularly significant way. The human beauty of the Sacred Family of Nazareth is underlined, in reference to the vocational choice of Gianna for her marriage,

done with enthusiasm and rooted in **Christian family values**. The central canvas is attributed to Zenale (in the early sixteenth century). The side panels were painted by Bergognone, again at the beginning of the sixteenth century.





Saint Anna (canvas by Cerano and apprentices, of the first half of the 17th century), that is the woman made strong by grace, and again "strong" in accepting the mystery of Mary (the human love of Anna which becomes sublime in the project of God on Mary).

The theme of the "strong woman", taken from the holy book of Proverbs (31, 10-31) where "strong" means "perfect", was dear to Gianna. The characteristics of a strong or perfect woman, meditated by Gianna from the texts of Saint Anna's mass, in a far off day had been attributed to her mother Maria De Micheli. Just before her marriage, Gianna declared she was inspired by the model of the "strong" or perfect woman and she wished to follow such

an example, enriched by what she perceived from the Gospel.

"I often like to meditate on the extract of St. Anna Mass: "Who'll find the strong woman?".

Pietro, could I be the strong woman for you from the Gospel!". (Letter of Gianna, Magenta 9th April 1955)

What Gianna wrote means that She had in mind Our Lady, in particular the Mother of sorrows, "strong", made perfect, at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. It's not by chance, as we have seen, that in the Chapel of the Canossian Institute of Magenta there is truly the Mother of sorrows.



You can note how Cerano depicted the theme of the "strong woman" peculiar to the readings of the mass of St. Anna. She is listening to what the destiny of her daughter Mary will be. The newborn baby seems to be afraid. In fact the Holy Spirit (see the picture above) that is descending on her (as you can see in the painting in the Church) appears to us in a fierce and strong way and not so docile as a dove. St. Anna, the mother of Mary, will educate her to listen to Our Lord's Word with joy and respect.





In the photo we see the **house** which was given to the family of the Director of the Saffa Company (in that time Pietro), **where Gianna was bride and mother** from 1955 to 28th April 1962, the day of her birth in Heaven. Here three of her four children were born. In Ponte Nuovo Gianna was head of

the Consultory of mothers and of the crèche, which were part of the National Organization for Mother and Child Welfare. Moreover she gave voluntary medical assistance in the Nursery and state Primary Schools, later dedicated in her memory, and followed privately different patients from Magenta.



St. Mary, Mother of Good Advice church: *this was the church where Gianna took part in the Mass and in the silent worship in Ponte Nuovo. It was made sacred in 1903 together with the Basilica of St. Martin of which it was a chapel of ease and then an independent church (Rettoria) within the same Parish. The "Mother of good advice" helps the faithful to meditate and make the right decisions after due consideration and with conscience.* Here Gianna wished to baptize her children and devote them to the Virgin Mary. To this Our Lady, Pietro attributed the grace to have met Gianna. In this chapel he did his three-day meditation in preparation to the wedding, proposed by his future bride.



This is the interior of St. Mary of Good Advice Church with the statue of the Virgin Mary of Lourdes. Gianna stated she met Pietro after she had been on a pilgrimage to Lourdes and she asked Our Lady to let her meet the person Our Father had chosen for her.

As you enter to the left, the sculpture "Arms of a mother lifting a newborn baby" was the work of the sculptor Pietro Bolis donated by the widow, Mrs Franca Brolis Petteni, a schoolmate of Gianna in the first years of the high school in Bergamo.



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Five kilometres from Magenta Gianna was family doctor. She practised this job from July 1950 for about twelve years. At the same time Gianna, if necessary, continued to substitute her brother doctor Ferdinando in Magenta and viceversa.

1. The waiting room of **Gianna's surgery** where her equipment is kept.

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2. Cemetery of Mesero: **the Molla family Chapel** (to the left of the cemetery entrance).

Here lays the body of Gianna, together with her daughter Mariolina and family members of Pietro.

3. The old Parish Church of Mesero. After a recent wise refurbishment, it was dedicated to St. Gianna and erected Diocesan Archiepiscopal Sanctuary of the Family on 1st November 2007. Near this ancient church, there is the modern Parish church which has been in function for many years.

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MAGENTA:
places where Saint Gianna
Beretta Molla lived

MESERO **F**



E

NOVARA
PONTE NUOVO



A



C



D



B

LEGENDA

- A** MAGENTA - THE HOUSE WHERE GIANNA WAS BORN
- B** MAGENTA - THE CANOSSIAN SISTERS HOUSE
- C** MAGENTA - BASILICA OF ST. MARTIN
- D** MAGENTA - SANCTUARY OF THE "ASSUNTA"
- E** MAGENTA - PONTE NUOVO CHURCH
- F** MESERO

HOW TO REACH MAGENTA:

The town of Magenta is about 25 km from Milan and 150 km from Turin. You can arrive in Magenta:

BY CAR

Motorway A4 : Turin-Milan
(exit: Marcallo-Mesero)
www.autostrade.it
Motorway Company: tel. no. 39/06/43322121
"CISS viaggiare informati": (information
about traffic and road conditions)
Tel. No. 39/1518 (free phone)
From Milan or Novara: state road 11 (SS11)

BY BUS

Bus service: Autoservizi ATM www.atm-mi.it
Tel. no. 39/800.81.81 (free phone)
Bus service: Autoservizi ATINOM
www.atinom.it - Tel. No. 39/02.97.23.84.1

BY TRAIN:

Milan-Turin railway line
From Milano Centrale railway station
or Garibaldi railway station
or from Porta Nuova railway station in Turin
(stop: Magenta railway station)
www.trenitalia.it - tel. No. 39/800.019.152
(free phone)

BY AIRPLANE:

From Malpensa 2000 airport, Boffalora-Malpensa
fast road/Superstrada Boffalora-Malpensa
or from Linate (Milan) Airport: state road 11 (SS 11)
www.sea-aeroportimilano.it

via CAVALLARI

stazione
FFSS

via BROCCA

via MAZENTA

via 4 GIUGNO

via VOLTA

via FORNAROLI

via PUSTERLA

via ROMA

piazza
KENNEDY

via
BERETTA

via
SAN MARTINO

piazza
LIBERAZIONE

via
SAN BIAGIO

via SANTA CRESCENZIA

via
SANTA CATERINA

via
GARIBALDI

CEMETERY

ABBIATEGRASSO
VIGEVANO

MILANO

Santa Gianna Beretta Molla

i luoghi della sua vita

In questo caso dei nonni paterni nacque,
il 4.10.1922, Santa Gianna Beretta Molla.
Esso lo ospitò nei primissimi anni di vita
e dal 1942, all'epoca degli studi universitari
e mentre elaborava le sue attività
in Azione Cattolica e in Parrocchie.
Qui Gianna accoglieva le ragazze dell'Oratorio,
approfondiva il proprio cammino di fede
e iniziava la professione di medico.
Da qui partì nel 1955, "per formare una famiglia
veramente cristiana", alla volta della casa sponsale
di Ponte Nuovo di Magenta, dove morì nel 1962.

St. Gianna Beretta Molla was born in this house
on 4th October, 1922. She spent her early childhood
here and then returned in 1942,
where she remained until she got married in 1955.
She then moved to the house in Ponte Nuovo di Magenta,
where she died in 1962.



Gianna Beretta Molla
è stata dichiarata Santa
da Papa Giovanni Paolo II
il 16 maggio 2004.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT OPENING TIMES OF CHURCHES AND SERVICE TIMES, PLEASE CONTACT:

"BASILICA DI SAN MARTINO" and "SANTUARIO DELL'ASSUNTA" - Magenta
Tel. no. 02 97298342

"CASA DI SAN BIAGIO" (Canossian Sisters House) - Magenta
Tel. no. 02 97298276

ST. MARY, MOTHER OF GOOD ADVICE CHURCH - Pontenuovo
Tel. no. 02 97297252

SANCTUARY OF THE FAMILY "SANTA GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA" - Mesero
Tel. no. 02 9786035

This is one of the
signs (see the
picture) indicating
the places where
St. Gianna Beretta
Molla lived.





Many thanks to:

The Beretta Molla family, for the kind cooperation in revising the texts

Those who have cooperated in remembering the main historical events regarding Saint Gianna in the places, still existing today, where she lived

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for the translation

By the diligence of "Associazione Amici di St. Gianna Beretta Molla di Magenta" (the Association of the Friends of St. Gianna Beretta Molla of Magenta) Via Don Pompeo Beretta, 2 - 20013 Magenta Tel. No. 349 7795548 - www.amicidisantagianna.org