



E N G L I S H

HILDEGARD BURJAN  
**A CONFLICTED LIFE**  
B I O G R A P H Y

 HILDEGARD  
BURJAN

MIT SPANNUNGEN LEBEN  
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## PREFACE

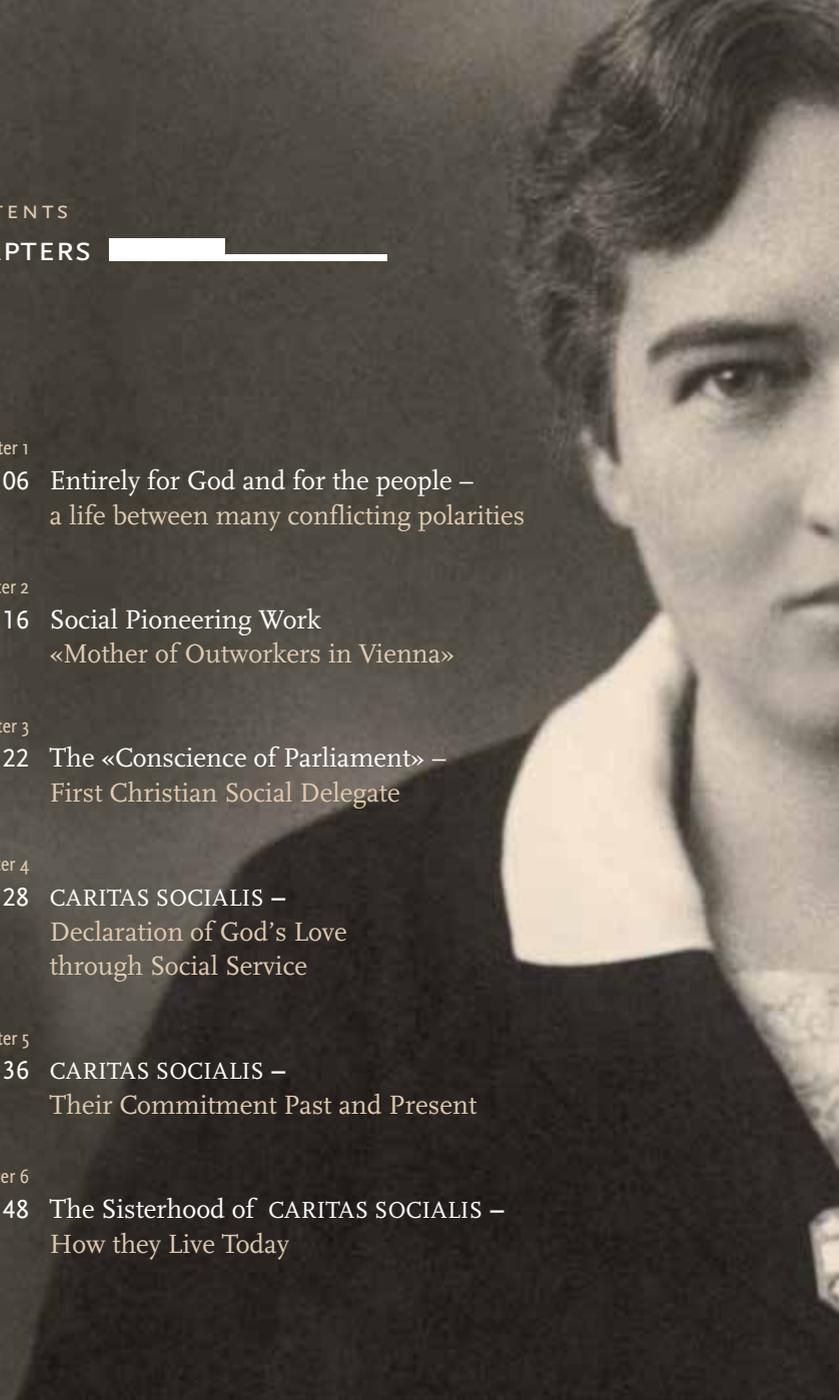
## HILDEGARD BURJAN – A CONFLICTED LIFE

This booklet is dedicated to Hildegard Burjan, her social work and her benevolence. In her role as the first Christian Social delegate of the First Republic of Austria and as the founder of a religious sisterhood, she broke new ground in social politics, which has paved the way to the social policies of today. CARITAS SOCIALIS (CS) is committed to her cause, namely to demonstrate God's love through service of to others. Through this commitment her work continues. In Hildegard Burjan's life one first notices a multitude of contrasts and her need to connect these polarities. She stood between many conflicts: politics versus Church; marriage/family versus the founding of a community, and her duty to her position in society versus her commitment to her humble belief and the purposeful, courageous dedication to her work as a woman of the Church. She never evaded those conflicts but endured them and learned to live with them. It is this which creates people's interest in her today as well as making her a role model. This is expressed in her beatification.

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«LORD, IF YOU EXIST – SHOW YOURSELF TO ME.»

H I L D E G A R D B U R J A N

Of the men and women who later went on to achieve significant goals, not all of them were immediately aware of their calling. Often they needed to meet new people or to be exposed to new philosophical and spiritual influences or even to suffer misfortunes before they recognised which way to go in life. Hildegard Burjan, the founder of CARITAS SOCIALIS, planned on an academic career before she eventually realised God's plan for her, which was her life's calling. On 30 January 1883 a second daughter was born to Abraham and Berta Freund in Görlitz an der Neisse, which was a part of Prussian Silesia. The girl Hildegard grew up in a middle-class family of Jewish descent but she was not bound to any denomination. In 1895 the family moved from Görlitz to Berlin and, in 1899, to Switzerland for professional reasons.

Hildegard developed an idealistic personality. Like many young people, towards the end of the 19th century she was looking for goals, for ideals, for something great. In 1903 she completed her school-leaving exams in Basel and began studying German Philology at the University of Zurich. In addition, she attended lectures on Philosophy as she was on a personal quest for truth and the meaning of life. It was through the philosopher Robert Saitschik and the peace researcher Friedrich Foerster that she was first confronted with Christian ideas.

Hildegard gradually realised that unless God is at the centre of all you do, you can never be a complete human being. At which point she found herself at a turning point in her life and felt that she had to make a decision as to which way to go, but as she still had inner obstacles to overcome she could not yet completely declare her faith.

While she was at university she met the Hungarian-Jew, Alexander Burjan, a student of technology. They married on 2 May 1907 and moved to Berlin when Hildegard was about to finish her studies.

On 9 October 1908 Hildegard was taken to the St Hedwig's Catholic Hospital in Berlin with renal colic. Throughout the course of the year her conditioned worsened and she had to have several operations. Before Easter of 1909 she was close to death. The doctors had given up hope for her recovery and gave her morphine to help soothe her pain. On the morning of Easter Sunday the unbelievable happened, her condition started to improve and finally after 7 months she was discharged from hospital. However, she was to suffer the serious effects of this illness for the rest of her life.

« A true character is of greater value to the world than the most erudite academic. ...In the end progress is based on more and more people who grow into personalities and have an impact on the masses.»

*(Hildegard Burjan, Diary)*

This experience totally changed her life. Where she once had doubts, Hildegard now had the strength to profess her faith in God. Hildegard was overwhelmed by how God had guided her. She was also touched by the commitment and the sensitivity of the sisters of the Borromaer who had cared for her. She intuitively understood what her intellect had not been able to grasp. On 11 August 1909 she was baptised.

Hildegard began to ask herself – what did God want from her? The only thing she knew for sure was that she wanted to dedicate her new lease on life to God and humanity. That year she and her husband moved to Vienna where he was offered a managerial position. Hildegard soon joined Catholic groups in Vienna, in particular those who focussed on Pope Leo XIII's first social encyclical, *Rerum novarum* (1891). For the time being Hildegard had to restrain her social commitment as she was pregnant. Due

to her weakened health the pregnancy could have been life threatening. The doctors advised her to have an abortion but she firmly refused. On 27 August 1910, her daughter Lisa was born. The birth however was a difficult one which almost cost her her life; she consequently had to spend another long period in hospital. In the years to come Hildegard consistently developed a «social concept» and the idea of establishing a sisterhood. Her varied and time-consuming charity work and, later on political work, put her into conflict with her family life as she tried to fulfill her role in both areas of her life completely. Only due to her organisational abilities did she manage to cope.

«A human being left to fend for himself is not able to accomplish the same thing as these nurses. Foerster and Saitschik were not able to convince me, but I have experienced the influence of grace, so nothing can keep me away.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

The Burjans entertained extensively. Alexander attained the position of director-general of the Aust-

rian Telefonfabriks-Aktiengesellschaft and was co-founder of the RAVAG (Austrian Broadcasting).

«This newly given life must belong totally to God and all mankind.»  
*(Hildegard Burjan)*

Hildegard became known for her varied public activities. The Burjans' house guests included the political and the economic elite. For Hildegard this meant that the two sides of her life were diametrically opposed – on the one hand she was the wife of a general manager and on the other a supporter of the oppressed and underprivileged. The immense demands took their toll on her health. In addition to her other health problems she developed diabetes and high blood pressure. In her short life, Hildegard managed to initiate projects and put forward ideas which not only revolutionised the field of welfare but were ahead of their time. And all this due to her deep faith in God. She deeply believed that it was her calling in life to proclaim God's love through her

work. She faithfully tried to do justice to this calling by listening to the needs of the people and to God's Will.

Close to death, she initiated the construction of a church in Vienna in memory of her late friend, Prelate Dr. Ignaz Seipel.

Hildegard Burjan had the novel idea of building a social centre next to the church which is now in the district of Vienna's «Neu-Fünfhaus». She did not live long enough to see the laying of the cornerstone of the social centre. Hildegard Burjan died on 11 June 1933 at the age of 50.

In Vienna's Central Cemetery (Wiener Zentralfriedhof) on her gravestone is the Latin inscription which she herself chose: IN TE, DOMINE, SPERA-

«...because I feel somehow responsible for many sad things that happen in the world... »

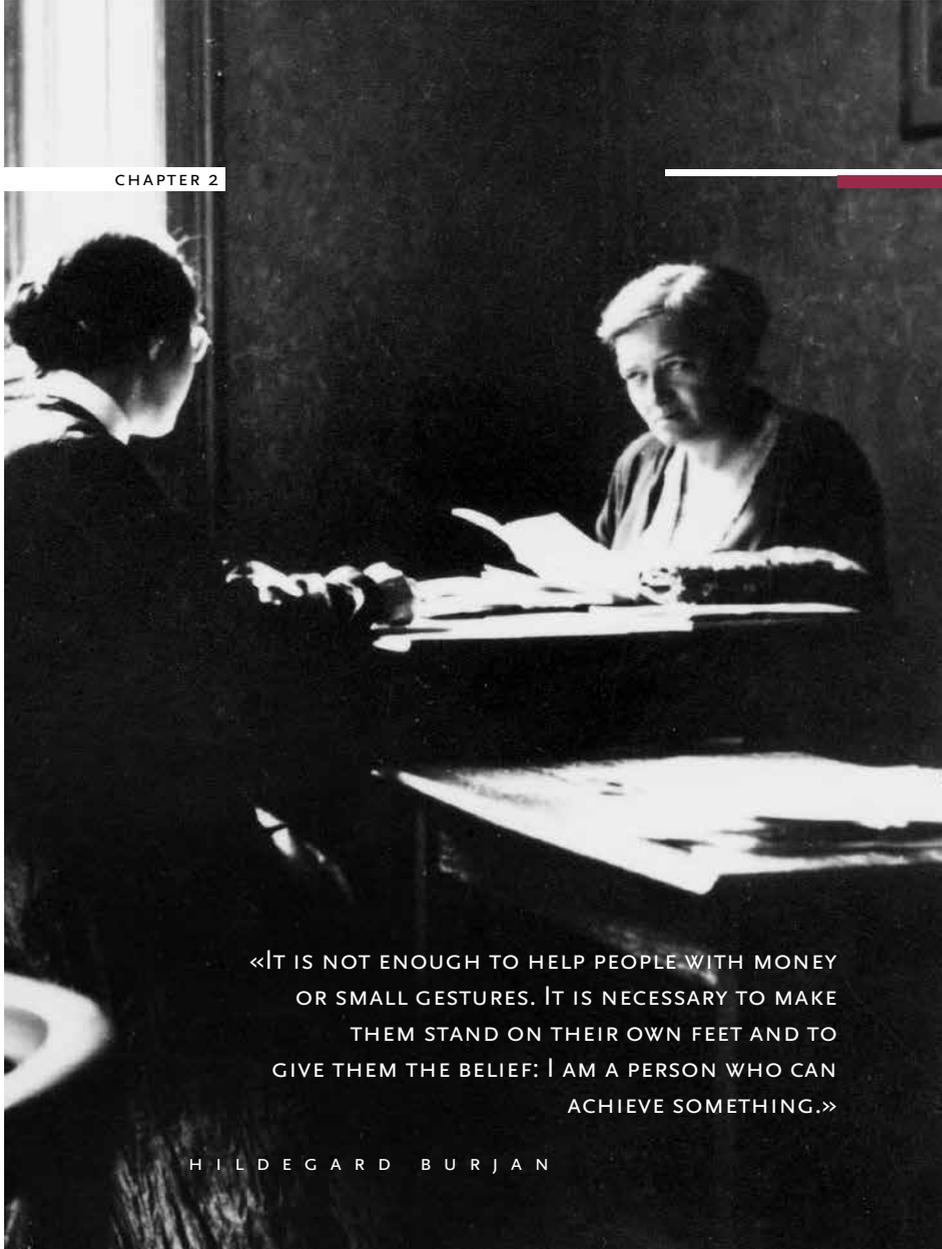
*(Hildegard Burjan)*

VI, NON CONFUNDAR IN AETERNUM. «In you, Lord, have I placed my hope. Eternity won't shatter me».

On 6 June 1963, the process began for Hildegard Burjan's beatification. After the official confirmation of her miracles her remains were exhumed and have been laid to rest in the Hildegard Burjan Chapel in the main building of the Sisterhood of CARITAS SOCIALIS in Vienna.

On 29 January 2012 Hildegard Burjan was beatified in Vienna's St. Stephens Cathedral.

Proffentl. wohlen Sie sich gut, hier ist es un-  
abwäglich heif. Das Ergebnis werde ich von Karlhuber  
aus ableiten, dass wir beide hin kommen u. hier die  
Sachen schreibe ich Frau Varga genau auf, so dass ich  
doch hoffe am Sonntag weg zu kommen, wenn mit  
auch das Weg auch so schwer ist u. ich so fern  
Richte u. alles abwarten möchte. Ich glaube, es  
wird sich aber nichts ereignen, höchstens für 2 Monate  
verzögern u. das muss man in den Kauf nehmen.  
Stehen Sie sich recht für die kommende Arbeit  
- es leert unser viel, aber ich habe doch den  
Eindruck, dass etwas Gutes heraus kommen wird. Die  
Schreibarbeiten müssen sein, das sagen alle Eiler u. Kon-  
stanten. Leben Sie recht wohl, schreiben Sie mir  
espen u. grüßen Sie mir P. Benedikt vielmals.  
Wie geht es ihm? In alter Tätigkeit  
Ihre  
Hildegard Burjan.



«IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO HELP PEOPLE WITH MONEY  
OR SMALL GESTURES. IT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE  
THEM STAND ON THEIR OWN FEET AND TO  
GIVE THEM THE BELIEF: I AM A PERSON WHO CAN  
ACHIEVE SOMETHING.»

HILDEGARD BURJAN

SOCIAL PIONEERING WORK –

«MOTHER OF OUTWORKERS IN VIENNA»

At the turn of the nineteenth century Vienna was a thriving city and the intellectual centre of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, there were also those who did not get their share of the glory. Workers and small business owners were not protected by a social system, and illness and unemployment meant misery. Female outworkers who worked in the textile industry were hit particularly hard. They had to work 15 hours a day to earn 12 crowns a week which was barely enough to live on.

Hildegard Burjan realised that this situation could lead to political unrest. In 1910, when she first arrived in Vienna, she started to deal with social issues

«Let us buy only from diligent merchants and not beat down the price, let us demand an account from the producers about the origins of their products from time to time! More than once it is the wealthy woman who squeezes the merchants to supply goods on unreasonable terms, and this happens at the expense of the poor homeworkers.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

and developed a concept which was based on a new theory. Today it can be referred to as «self help».

Given the prevailing societal views, the way in which she tackled her task was quite unusual. Along with other female volunteer workers she went door to door visiting women, informed them of their rights and developed a list of their demands for improving the situation.

On 13 December 1912, the Women's Society of Christian Outworkers was established in Vienna. For the members of this society Hildegard Burjan

organised larger scale commissions cutting out the middleman and thus improving wages. Furthermore, members who had just given birth had maternity leave and those afflicted by illnesses or bereavement were provided with financial assistance and, in addition to legal protection, there were also further vocational training courses.

On 16 April 1914, Hildegard Burjan gave a talk at the second «Catholic Women's Day in Austria». In her talk, she pointed out the necessity for all outworkers to unite and to eventually have their rights legally acknowledged by the State. In this context, she also drew attention to child labour. At this time it was not unusual for 6 year olds to work 14-hour days and whole branches of industry exploited this «cheap» workforce as the existing laws protecting children were not enforced.

At the end of her talk, an outraged public declared

Hildegard Burjan, «Mother of the Outworkers of Vienna».

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 forced Hildegard Burjan to change the priorities of her social-political concepts. However, she continued to care for women in particular. She set up rooms for seamstresses and created centralised offices where outworkers could get work. She

«Even during the war we believe that we have to raise the matter of just payment for female workers.

During the war a new light has been thrown on the old demand < equal pay for equal work >.»

*(Hildegard Burjan, Presentation, German-Christian Womens Rally 1917)*

Hildegard Burjan was not only a talented organiser but she also managed to motivate volunteers mostly from the higher social classes. She was an adept fundraiser, which helped her finance her nu-

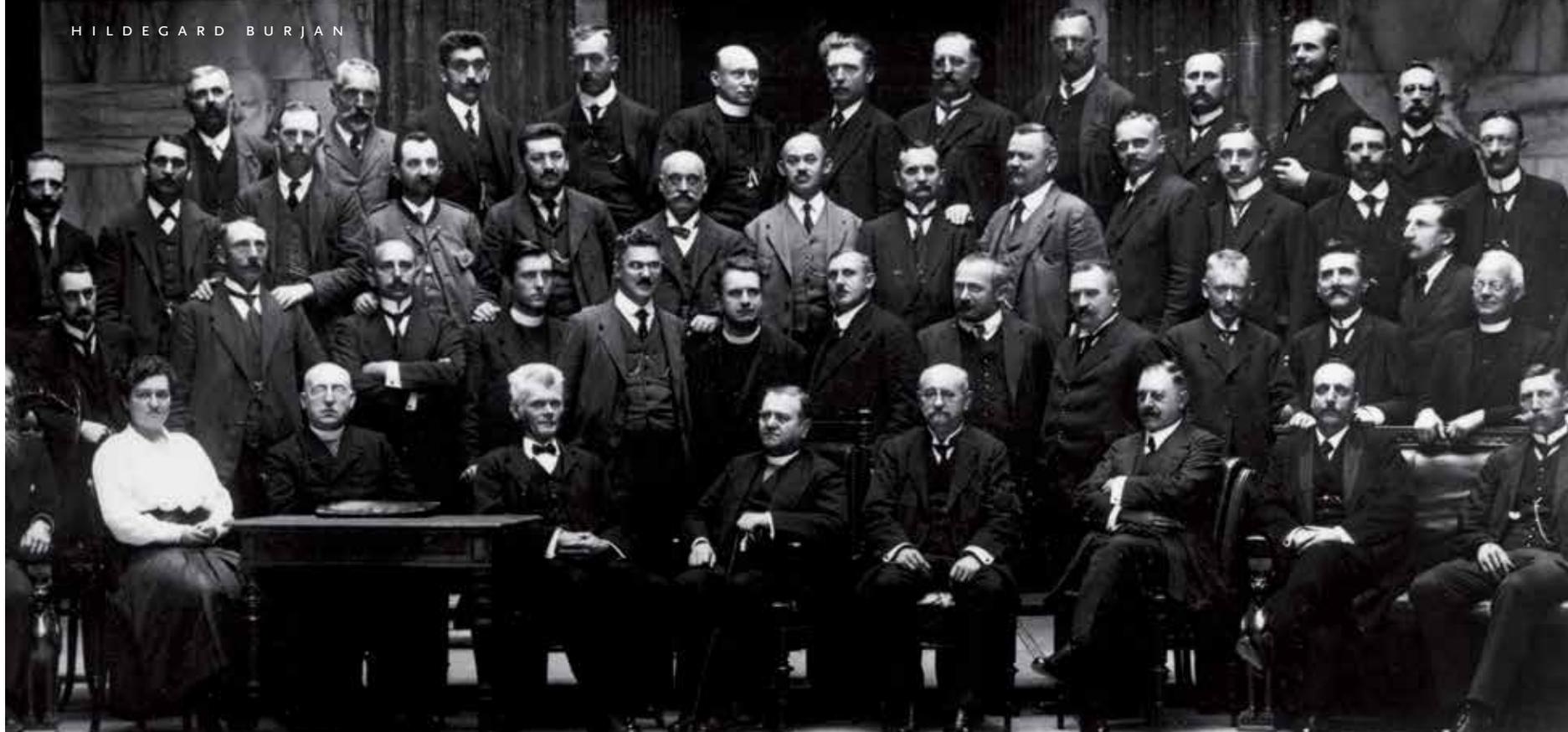
merous activities. At beginning of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hildegard Burjan was already thinking about the position of women in the new State. In a talk given to Christian workers in 1917, she pointed out that the war had changed the situation of women as, while the men had been at war, they had had to take care of themselves. She argued that women had taken on the jobs from which they had formerly been excluded and that they now wanted to hold on to. According to Hildegard Burjan, they were not to fall prey to policies of the labour market which were fashioned to the needs of men. Her main goal was to establish equal pay for equal work.

Due to her social commitment and her courageous fight for women's rights, the male leaders of the Christian Socialist Party had started to notice her.

THE «CONSCIENCE OF PARLIAMENT» –  
FIRST CHRISTIAN SOCIAL DELEGATE

«RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS ARE NOT SUFFICIENT NOWADAYS...  
WE HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING WITHIN OUR POWER IF  
WE DON'T WANT TO SIT BACK AND WATCH THE WORLD BEING  
RULED AND DESTROYED OVER OUR HEADS ... INTEREST IN POLITICS  
IS A PART OF PRACTISING CHRISTIANITY».

HILDEGARD BURJAN



The Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Friedrich Gustav Piffel, called Hildegard Burjan «The Conscience of Parliament» and the head of the Christian Socialist Party, the priest Dr. Ignaz Seipel, said about her that he had never met a man with more political talent, more tact and sensitivity than this woman.

On 24 November 1918, Hildegard Burjan chaired the first political assembly of Christian women. She had a gut feeling that the political commitment of women was now desperately needed.

Cardinal Friedrich Gustav Piffel called Hildegard Burjan «the conscience of the Parliament» According to the new electoral laws of 21 October 1918, women now had the right to vote and were eligible to run for political office. They could now attend to their rights in the workforce and education sector themselves.

«The distress of women that stands above all differences between political parties or convictions will bring women together to work for their common interest. We women will not squander our strength in bitter and fruitless fights between parties, but will dedicate ourselves to the practical work that fosters the community.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

On 3 December 1918, Hildegard Burjan got a seat on the district council and became the vice-chair to the chairman of the Christian Socialist Party, Leopold Kunschak, who was known as the leader of the working class. Due to her political competence she was nominated to run in the first elections of the new republic for the Constituent National Assembly. It was the hope that she would personally appeal to women. However, because of her failing health and her family obligations she was not sure whether she should accept the offer. What convinced her to finally accept was her passionate social commitment to the fight for women's rights and for the right of those on the fringes of society. As a Christian she felt obliged to take on her political role as she saw this as the chance to improve the standard of living of the underprivileged. God had

given her the skills to work with, so she saw it as her task to use them.

On 12 March 1919, Hildegard spoke in parliament for the first time. She was the only woman amongst the delegates of the Christian Socialist Party. The Social Democrats had seven female delegates.

During her two years in parliament, Hildegard Burjan proposed many initiatives: she filed a petition for the extension of the legal rights of expectant and nursing mothers and called for nurses to be employed by the state health insurance companies to aid women who had recently given birth at home. She supported further professional training for women, a budget increase for the education of young girls and demanded the equality of men and women in the public service. It was thanks to one of her greatest achievements that an ideological gap between political parties was bridged leading to a consensus

that passed a law providing a legal basis for the working conditions and wages of domestic help.

Due to permanent tensions within the red/black coalition, a re-election was called for in 1920. Hildegard Burjan informed her party's executive committee that she would not run but retire from politics.

She gave the following reasons for her decision to retire: her failing health, family obligations, the fact that her obligations to her political party forced her to make decisions that contradicted her Christian beliefs. What she did not mention was that she was subject to anti-Semitism from within her own party and repeated allusions were made as to her personality and her origins. During this period anti-Semitic slogans increasingly determined the political debate.

«The more someone is convinced of and steeped in his conviction, the more he will calmly tolerate different opinions, the more he will seek what reconciles and unites; the more he will ignore what divides in working together.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

CARITAS SOCIALIS  
DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE  
THROUGH SOCIAL SERVICE

«WE ARE AIMING FOR  
SOMETHING NEW WHICH  
DOES NOT YET EXIST,  
FOR SOMETHING THAT  
IS APPLICABLE TO THE  
AFFLICTIONS OF OUR TIMES;  
NOT TO SURRENDER TO  
A LIFE OF SECLUSION BUT TO  
BE VIGILANT AND READY  
TO ACT IN TIMES OF NEED».

HILDEGARD BURJAN



«Caritas Christi urget nos» – Christ's love urges us. Hildegard Burjan chose these words from the epistle of St. Paul as her motto. Nothing could summarise the goal of her religious community more aptly. Full of Christ's love and in his image women should devote their lives to those who have forsaken his love out of grief. Hildegard Burjan discussed her intent with people close to her – among others with Prelate Ignaz Seipel. In the years to come he would become the spiritual leader and advisor of the new sisterhood – CARITAS SOCIALIS.

Hildegard Burjan wanted a new sisterhood whose members devoted themselves to serve humanity. Their role was to take their place in a world of adversity and not only focus on material matters but primarily matters of the mind and spirit. Their main goal was to demonstrate God's love through social service and to do so the members of the sisterhood had to adapt its normally secluded life to that of a communal one.

In the year 1919 the sisterhood of CARITAS SOCIALIS was established. On admission, the sisters vowed a life of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their vows were declared in the presence of Hildegard Burjan, (who as a wife and mother was their first Mother Superior), in the form of a special prayer which she herself had written. Soon many women joined this new sisterhood and their work was particularly needed in fields of youth care and other high risk groups. They took over the care of previously con-

Am Lichte zu dir, o göttlicher Heiland und im Ver-  
trauen auf deinen Gnadenbarmherzigen Begnade ich lasse die Über-  
sichtung, die mich zum Beruf einer Schwester der Caritas  
brüchig führen will.

Ich verspreche mit Eifer u. innerer Bereitschaft  
die für mich gesetzten Bestimmungen im Sinne der Se-  
lternans zu erfüllen u. alle meine Pflichten pfeudig auf  
mich zu nehmen.

Durch das Licht deines Heiligen Geistes erhelle  
will ich meine Schwächen u. Fehler zu erkennen suchen  
vom Feuer deines heilvollsten Heiligen durchglüht, ver-  
spreche ich, entschlossen um feigere Tugenden u. Heil-  
streben der Natur, zu kämpfen u. nicht eher zu  
ruhen, bis mein Heil von aller Selbstsucht frei  
wird.

In deiner Schule zu neuem Leben umgewan-  
delt, will ich deinem Ruf, o barmherzigster  
Heiland, folgen und in deiner Nachfolge mein  
Leben mit ungeschränkter Hingabe, mit nie  
verkender Treue, mit offerverlangender Liebe  
für leidenden Menschheit weihen. Heilige,  
mein Gott, meinen Vorsatz u. hilf mir mit  
deiner Gnade ihn stets zu erfüllen.

victed prostitutes and underprivileged children.  
Once again Hildegard Burjan tried to take those on  
the fringes of society and help them to integrate. In  
1924 CARITAS SOCIALIS opened a shelter for unmar-  
ried mothers and their children, which was quite  
revolutionary in the face of the current  
societal views, as the common belief  
was that this only «encouraged immo-  
ral behaviour».

«True collaboration between  
public welfare institutions, -  
which of course transcend the  
position of any political party,  
- and private welfare institu-  
tions will be most beneficial  
for our poor people.»

(Hildegard Burjan)

Soon the sisterhood made a name for  
themselves. The local welfare services  
turned to Hildegard Burjan and the  
sisterhood for aid in difficult cases. In  
that time, Hildegard Burjan revived  
the concept of shelters for the homeless at train  
stations and additionally she set up a service that  
provided accommodation for homeless women,  
which due to the poverty and unemployment of  
post-war Austria was desperately needed. Her per-

suasiveness led the State authorities to repeatedly declare themselves ready to financially support her projects.

In 1926 CARITAS SOCIALIS went abroad for the first time. Even beyond the border, the organisation gained a reputation for their courage and unconventional work. They were needed in Berlin, Munich and especially in former Czechoslovakia. There Hildegard Burjan could put into motion what was being opposed in Austria, namely CS's work in home care.

When Hildegard Burjan died in 1933, CARITAS SOCIALIS was already well known as a sisterhood beyond the borders of the diocese and State. «I have placed CARITAS SOCIALIS in the hands of God and God will show them the way» were her final words. In 1936, three years after her death, CARITAS SOCIALIS became a community of diocesan rights and in 1960 Pope

Paul VI turned it into a community of papal rights. Hildegard Burjan prudently took care that her life's work would be continued and the sisters of CARITAS SOCIALIS have worked hard to do so.

Far ahead of the ideas of her time Hildegard Burjan allowed an «external» form of CS membership. After the Vatican Council II this idea has been picked up by the «secular institution» of CS as one of many forms of realising CARITAS SOCIALIS today.

CARITAS SOCIALIS

## THEIR COMMITMENT PAST AND PRESENT



«DOING SOCIAL WORK MEANS PREVENTING  
GAPS THAT MAY OPEN UP IN SOCIETY AND  
TO BRIDGE THESE GAPS WITH CHRISTIAN LOVE  
AND A COMPASSIONATE HEART.»

HILDEGARD BURJAN



Sister Verena Buben (left) working with non-Arian Catholics.

Center for Social Family Work, Centro de Apoio à Família in Guarapuava, Brazil



Between the World Wars I and II, the socio-political climate in Austria worsened and eventually came to a head in 1938 with the take-over of Austria by the Third Reich; and Austria, as it was once known, ceased to exist. CARITAS SOCIALIS could no longer work on such a broad scale and could only work from within the Church. During the war CA-

«Social work means prevention and is an attempt to bridge the gaps within society with Christian love and a compassionate heart.»

(Hildegard Burjan)

RITAS SOCIALIS sisters worked in mobile army hospitals and became a contact for refugees, those in hiding and those who worked in the Resistance movement. For example, Sr. Verena Buben risked her life working for the relief station in Vienna for non-Aryan Catholics («Erzbischöfliche Hilfsstelle für nichtarische Katholiken in Wien»), which was set up by Cardinal Theodor Innitzer in 1940. After the war care for refugees and home-comers became the main focus of CARITAS SOCIALIS. However, posts in Germany and former Czechoslovakia

had to be abandoned for political reasons. From 1948 onwards, CARITAS SOCIALIS again expanded beyond the Austrian borders to South Tyrol, Bavaria, Rome, Brazil and Bethlehem. They worked for 17 years in Children's Villages in Bethlehem; In Bolzano/South Tyrol the sisters run a home for young girls. In Munich they were in charge of the Catholic Mission at the main railway station for over 60 years. In Paraná/Brazil, CARITAS SOCIALIS works – mainly with native sisters – amongst the poorest section of the population. On their initiative and with their help families who lived in slums built their own family-houses and received a vocational training. In the diocese of Guarapuava the CARITAS SOCIALIS sisters dedicated themselves to the pastoral care for children, a programme against malnutrition and for the well-being and education of the whole

«CS needs people who have seen the great and complicated adversity of modernity, which only can be grasped by people who are at the centre of life, who are emotionally and extrinsically free... »

(Hildegard Burjan)

family. By doing so they set socio-political incentives and introduced favourable changes. They set up «Centro de Apoio à Família», a centre for social work amongst families, and put their emphasis on initiatives against violence in families. They offer social counselling, alphabetization, continuing education and leisure-time activities for children and youngsters. In Curitiba their activities comprise pastoral care and work in small Christian communities; they initiated social projects such as waste separation and recycling.

In Austria the sisters of CARITAS SOCIALIS have been running a centre for spiritual retreats and holidays in Maissau in northern Lower Austria and together with the vicarial chaplains for young people of the Archdiocese of Vienna they work for the spiritual youth centre Oberleis in the Weinviertel.

The work of CARITAS SOCIALIS has changed over

Lunch for women  
in need in Munich



the years as they have worked not only within the framework of their own institution but have collaborated with other ecclesiastical and social institutions. The sisters of CARITAS SOCIALIS have been trained in social and pastoral professions and work for the causes of the sick and those in need of care, as well as with expectant and single mothers, amongst others. Furthermore, they are active in adult education, spiritual guidance, retreats and in local parishes. The sisters of CARITAS SOCIALIS have made substantial contributions to the publicising and development of hospice work in Austria.

In Hildegard Burjan's hometown of Görlitz, on the Austrian Polish border, the sisters of CARITAS SOCIALIS care for the elderly and attend to the spiritual needs of the sick.

«You do not help people with a penny and a waltz, you have to rebound and to convince him: I am somebody and I can achieve something!»

(Hildegard Burjan)



CS-Consultation service

CS home for mothers  
and their children

In Munich, sisters are involved with homeless people; in Hungary they work temporarily as well as in Bulgaria and in the Ukraine for charities. Their charitable work depends on the skills the sisters can bring to these areas.

The annual Christmas fair of CARITAS SOCIALIS, which takes place before the first weekend in Advent is well known. With funds raised through the sales of homemade gifts and sweets, CARITAS SOCIALIS helps single mothers and others in need. Many volunteers and a well-known Women's Club have been funding this fair for decades.

At the CS consultation services in Vienna (which offers support and advice to women and families) trained consultants offer free social, private, legal and economic advice as well as long-term support. In hard times dialogue helps people to overcome loss, separation and grief or to find answers when

they can no longer find meaning in their lives. In addition, they receive clothes and other means of support.

The shelter for mothers and children offers temporary accommodation to single mothers with up to three children. With the support of social workers and social education, these people in need are helped to develop new perspectives. In order to cope with the afflictions of our time and to be able to make their contribution to Church and society, CARITAS SOCIALIS continue to re-evaluate their goals.

In 1987 the sisterhood conducted a study on future target groups for their work. They discovered that a new direction was needed in the areas of care for the elderly, single mothers and unemployed youth. Consequently, they further developed and extended

«Despite the importance of the detailed nitty-gritty work we still need to have an eye for the whole and to find new means and methods for helping. We need to get down to the roots of evil.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

Care and assistance  
in the CS centres



«At the beginning and the end of life man needs special care» their work in mother and child care, consultation for women and families and youth care. Additionally, new ideas for CS social centres for the elderly were developed. Since 1993, companies have been set up to lead these projects and on 1 January 2003 they amalgamated to form the private foundation of CARITAS SOCIALIS.

It is the foundation's goal to safeguard the future of the institutions of CARITAS SOCIALIS and to preserve the spirit of Hildegard Burjan's cause. CS support and guide people at the beginning of their lives and at the end. The CARITAS SOCIALIS centres for social care bring together the specialised services of residential long- and short-term care, day-time centres, the CARITAS SOCIALIS-hospice Rennweg as well as CARITAS SOCIALIS home-assistance services. CARITAS SOCIALIS is known for its specialised treatment for people with multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's

disease. Men and women with terminal cancer are accompanied during their last weeks and days in the CARITAS SOCIALIS hospice Rennweg, which offers counselling, a team of volunteers, a palliative care unit, a mobile team for palliative care and «The red Anchor».

CARITAS SOCIALIS works in accordance with the concept of «maieutic» care or «experience-based care». This model has been developed by the Dutch doctor Cora van der Kooij for geriatric care and the care for of people who suffer from dementia. Led by their experiences and the means of maieutic care, attendants learn to empathise with the environment of their residents, to become aware of their needs and to integrate them into personalised care. Relational care and biographic work are an indispensable part of the maieutic concept of care. Important

«Everyone must be aware of the fact of how much people depend on each other and how every action needs to be done responsibly.»

(Hildegard Burjan)

«God gave us reason to identify the distress of the times, the causes of this distress, the means for remedy. Not by accident He puts us together with the outer circumstances, not by chance He talks to our hearts, not incidentally He leads us to this work.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

attention is paid to the experiences of the collaborators. The interdependency between the worlds of residents and of attendants helps form an affirmative relationship between them. Together residents, their relatives and attendants create a familial environment that enables living and working in an atmosphere of security and contentment.

A true culture of hospice («hospitality») and maieutics are the fundamentals of the work for and with chronically ill people. With the responsibility for those entrusted to them, all collaborators face up to challenging ethical questions.

Professional care, the best possible medical care to handle pain, psycho-social care and spiritual guidance for the residents and their families are the pillars of the concept of palliative care – a

Celebrating life until the end in the CS hospice Rennweg



comprehensive care for people in the last period of their lives as well as for their relatives. Transforming the quality of life of people advanced in years or who are chronically ill, CARITAS SOCIALIS founded numerous exemplary institutions. The most advanced form of care is specialised sharing communities for people suffering from dementia. CARITAS SOCIALIS also run kindergartens and nursery schools, institutions for assistance and counseling and a home for mothers with their children.

In these social centres and care centres of CARITAS SOCIALIS, work full-time and voluntary teams as well as CARITAS SOCIALIS sisters. Their co-operation is based on the mission statement that has been collectively developed. CARITAS SOCIALIS-sisters and attendants together share their responsibilities and try to follow the founding mission statement of Hildegard Burjan «to strike at the root of the misery of this our time».



«THE AWARENESS THAT THEY ARE A  
PART OF A COMMUNITY, STRENGTHENS  
THE INDIVIDUAL.»

H I L D E G A R D B U R J A N

## THE SISTERHOOD OF CARITAS SOCIALIS – HOW THEY LIVE TODAY

«Lord, let me be deeply rooted in you so that I may venture out.»

*(Sr. Elia Niklas CS)*

The women who have joined CARITAS SOCIALIS want God's love to be seen and felt by those they help. The question is, what motivates people nowadays to set a goal like that and to join a congregation whose ideals and way of life are not part of modern trends?



Common symbols of the Sisters of CS:  
Ring and necklace

Companions on  
the way of their  
faith and life



Devoting oneself to people in need and in crisis and trying to make fundamental improvements is an enormous challenge. Allowing oneself to be challenged requires being grounded enough to take on the responsibility and being on a continuous personal quest for the meaning of life.

«The construction of a new community is rightly emphasized as the main challenge of our times.»  
*(Hildegard Burjan)*

This is not always easy. The strength one needs to achieve this is gained by prayer and communal living. Daily private prayer, the Eucharist and communal prayer strengthen trust and lead us to an active relationship with Christ, who is the centre of our community. The sisters express their sense of belonging to the community by wearing the same symbolic necklace and ring. Living in a community is a gift and a challenge at the same time. Today many people experience the vulnerability of human relationships as well as separations, so one may wonder if it is at all possible to live in a community in which the rights of

an individual are not curtailed or restricted. CARITAS SOCIALIS is an attempt at communal living and being companions in life and faith, learning from one another, growing together and seeing differences as an opportunity.

Spiritual commitments also change throughout the course of time. The character and the decisiveness of an individual is especially important today. And if a person enters a community it is a challenge for both. Within the sisterhood of CARITAS SOCIALIS individuality is respected and the sisters not expected to fit into a mould. During a trial period the applicant and the community review the applicant's calling. The ideals of the community are reflected in the applicant and in turn the applicant contributes to the community. «If a person joins CARITAS SOCIALIS, then it means that

«Personally called by God we find our place in Caritas Socialis. Caritas Socialis will be realized in each one's own heart. In that case we are on the way to live Caritas truly and not only by name.»  
*(Caritas Socialis - Our Charisma, 15)*

Dedication for lifetime  
in the community of  
the Sisters of Caritas  
Socialis



«In undivided commitment  
I only will seek Your honour,  
I will not recoil from any dif-  
ficulty or trouble, I will not be  
shaken by any disappointment  
and will not be separated from

You by any success.»

*(The devotional prayer of the Sisters of  
CS written by Hildegard Burjan*

God wanted to change them both. »  
On ordination the sisters commit  
themselves to God and the communi-  
ty and take their vows of poverty, celi-  
bacy and obedience.

In a society full of opportunities, it is  
a great challenge to take a vow of po-  
verty. Poverty can mean living a sim-  
ple life, awareness of and feeling for

the poor but taking a vow of poverty means a life  
of solidarity and responsibility and accepting one's  
own limits and that of others as well as committing  
oneself to the just distribution of goods.

Celibacy is a considerable challenge. Many people  
may wonder if a life of abstinence from partner-  
ship and family life can be fulfilling and whether  
fidelity is at all possible in our fast moving times.  
However, celibacy does not mean that one has to

live without relationships. Their conscious com-  
mitment to Christ and to the sisterhood shapes  
and supports their lives. According to the task set  
by Hildegard Burjan, the members of CARITAS SOCI-  
ALIS are there for those in need. Through this rela-  
tionship the sisters help them feel their own sense  
of worthiness. In doing so, the sisters experience  
their female qualities by giving life through love.  
This shows others that God's kingdom is already  
amongst us.

The vow of obedience means listening and being  
attentive, asking ourselves what does God want  
and how does he show his presence to individuals  
today through his word, through the sisterhood, in  
everyday life and through the signs of our time.

Obedience does not mean asserting one's own will  
but looking for God's will and living according to  
it. It means being prepared as an individual to keep  
the whole picture in mind and to focus on what

«CS needs people who are rooted in life, emotionally and extrinsically free, for whom Caritas Socialis becomes truly their aim in life.»

*(Hildegard Burjan)*

something evolving and never complete, ... a community which readily and actively responds to the afflictions of our time.»

God wants to achieve in this world via CARITAS SOCIALIS.

If CARITAS SOCIALIS is able to listen to God's subtle signs in our world, they can continue being what Hildegard Burjan intended: «CARITAS SOCIALIS is



HILDEGARD BURJAN

Lord, You have filled the heart of blessed Hildegard Burjan with the desire to search for You with sincerity.

Give people today the courage to search for You and to build their lives upon You.

You helped her to find her place in Your Church.

Through her example encourage us to live by the baptism that sends us into the world.

Urged on by Your love she inspired others towards social commitment and developed new forms of togetherness in the Church.

Make us alert and attentive for the shockwave of Your Spirit in today's Church and society.

As a woman she followed her vocation and ventured forward into spheres dominated by men.

Strengthen all efforts for the equality of women and men in our society.

Rooted in Your love she was able to pave new pathways of charity and to plead for human dignity and social justice.

We ask You for people with open eyes and an open mind about evolution in our society.

Beholden to You and faithful to her conscience she was able to seek what unifies against all political divisiveness.

We ask You for responsible men and women in politics and economics - socially aware like Hildegard Burjan.

As wife, mother and working woman, socially devoted, Hildegard Burjan confronted the tensions of her life and found her comfort and rest with You and in You.

We ask You for stability and alignment with You. Enable us to truly fulfill our tasks in Church and society, in family and in our work.

We ask You for this on behalf of blessed Hildegard Burjan through Christ our Lord in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

RECOMMENDED READING

THE FOLLOWING BOOKS DEAL WITH  
HILDEGARD BURJAN'S LIFE AND WORK:

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**Hildegard Burjan –  
Frau zwischen Politik und Kirche**  
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CARITAS SOCIALIS

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[www.caritas-socialis.or.at](http://www.caritas-socialis.or.at)

