Early on a Sunday morning, 5 July 1562, the members of the Compagnia di S. Maria Maddalena gather in their church to contract the business of the orphanage of S. Onofrio. Recently adopted statutes require that they keep every Sunday morning free for such a gathering, though whether in fact they will meet as a corporale after the Mass and sermon on any particular Sunday is up to the rector. A patrician who may or may not be a member of the confraternity, the Maddalena confratelli chose him to be head of the orphanage for a six-month term. Early in the week, the rector will signal the guardiano, who will in turn go through the city to the home of every member of the confraternity telling them that the rector wants them to show up. With a few dozen homes to visit, the guardiano may enlist some of the older boys to help. He is not to hang around for a tip, but he may reserve for himself those members known for their discrete generosity. If the member is not at home, he may have to leave a message or return. In a few years, he will be able to simply fill the date in on some printed forms and leave them at the members’ houses like mail.

In the later summer of 1562, the rector is Cavaliere Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari, a patrician who had served as rector only a few years before, and under
whose watch the new statutes had been drafted and approved. His return so
quicken could be a sign of deep interest in the home, or of a desire to keep his
finger on the pulse of this institution at a critical time of dearth in the city, or
even of some frustration that the new statutes don’t seem to have taken hold yet.
Boys are still being let in without formal approval, the previous guardiano has
been sacked, and no one seems to understand the rotation of offices or their
duties. The home is at a turning point. The generation of men whose charita-
ble zeal had launched S. Onofrio is dying off. Some of them had joined the com-
pany decades before when it began as a youth confraternity, and simply hadn’t
quit or retired. Now they were dying, and Bottrigari was among those civic lead-
ers who were trying to ensure that S. Onofrio would make the transition from a
group’s labor of love to a city’s stable institution.¹ The statutes had been a step
in this direction. Drawing on the example of Bologna’s longer-running orphan-
age of S. Bartolomeo di Reno, they aimed to bring order, accountability, and
broader involvement of confraternity members into the home by establishing a
trio of officers with particular duties assisted by eight “conservators,” all elected
from the membership and all rotating every six months.

Thirty members of S. Maria Maddalena show up that day, a good number but
just barely a quorum according to the demanding statutes. After Mass in the con-
fraternal oratory, they convene as the corporale to hear reports from the rector;
the massaro (overseer), who supervises the home, staff, and boys; and the priore,
who looks after the confraternity’s devotional life and also oversees the public
church next to the S. Onofrio home, where funerals are held and alms collected.
The thirty confratelli vote on motions by dropping black and white beans in a
container. They readmit Bastiano di Agostino, an orphan who had fled but now
wanted to return to be with the other boys. They commission an inventory of
goods in the home, and set in motion the process that will allow them to appoint
Giovanno da Giovanno Liardi as guardiano at their next meeting at the end of
August. And that will be it until December. By statute, the corporale is where
everything happens: members review and appoint officials and staff, they decide
which of their number will take a turn as visitor, they hear the visitor’s reports
on boys and the home, they examine accounts, review the dealings of officers
who have reached the end of their terms, debate the lack of alms, strategize when
times get difficult, vote on boys coming in and interview boys going out. In
theory, the corporale is deeply involved in every stage of S. Onofrio’s life, but in
practice some rectors call it together infrequently because meeting weekly with
just the priore and massaro is far more convenient and efficient than calling the
entire fractious *corporale* together; Bottrigari only calls it three times in his half-year term. Moreover, even when called, some members decide not to appear—the same manuscript statutes that set a quorum of thirty members over age 25 have an undated note penned in the margin reducing it to twenty members over age 18.

Meanwhile in Florence, Francesco Rosati meets weekly with four companions at the S. Niccolò conservatory. All are bureaucrats appointed by Duke Cosimo I when he ordered S. Niccolò be opened to shelter homeless girls in the dearth of the mid-1550s. The duke’s charge went to Florence’s prison magistracy (the Otto di Guardia e Balia) and landed with Rosati both because of his experience running the Stinche prison, and because he was a member of the Company of S. Maria Vergine, the confraternity that ran Florence’s other conservatory. But the two conservatories are quite different. S. Maria Vergine, like Bologna’s S. Maria Maddalena, delegates duties to a core of officers who serve limited terms and periodically report back to the confraternity. At S. Niccolò there is no reporting, no rotation, no relief, and, for that matter, no religion as such: Rosati and his four companions discuss business together without breaking for religious services, and they have no community of confraternal brothers to advise, audit, or otherwise share the load. They set policies within the ducal mandate, appoint staff to implement these policies, visit periodically to check on both staff and girls, and worry incessantly over expenses that frequently threaten to outstrip a meager income generated from alms and the girls’ work. Their other collective action is complaint: a steady stream of interventions to Cosimo I claiming that they are exhausted and that the current situation simply can’t continue.

Previous chapters have focused on life inside the homes. While the boys, girls, and their resident guardians created much of their lives together, many of the decisions that they worked with or around were taken outside their homes’ walls. Individuals, or more often groups of men and women, met regularly to plan, budget, or fundraise; to let children in or usher them out; to hire staff, expand the premises, or even consider whether it was time to close the doors altogether. In the most direct way, these people acted *in loco parentis* to the orphaned and abandoned children in their care. What motivated them? Some, like the early *confratelli* of S. Maria Maddalena were driven by an intense sense of religious mission and poured their lives and resources into the homes. Others, like Bologna’s Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari or Florence’s Francesco Rosati, took on the
administrative work as yet another charge in long careers of government or political service. Almost all found the work overwhelming.

A related question is, how did they organize this care? And more to the point, why did they organize it as they did? Whether driven by divine mission or ducal decree, administrators worked within a political and religious environment that defined the shape of their work as much as any famine or plague. Bologna and Florence had distinct traditions of charitable relief that governed how the homes were run in each city. Moreover, these two cities took two very different political paths in the course of the sixteenth century. Bologna lost the de facto independence that it had enjoyed through much of the fifteenth century and reverted decisively to subordinate status within the papal state. Florence moved in the opposite direction as the Medici dukes turned it into the capital of a new territorial state which they hoped could act on the European, and not just the Italian, stage.

These political realities were in turn shaped by changes in the Catholic Church and in religious life generally. The Church’s spiritual and organizational life was intensifying under movements of reform that combined competing and sometimes contradictory elements. Laypeople and clerics alike agreed that Christians of all stations needed to develop their spiritual lives and express this more fervent interior state through charitable works that would support and redeem the poor and needy. Charity would have to be better organized if it was to be focused and effective. But who should organize it? The fiery Florentine friar Savonarola (1452–98) thought that regular clergy had the motivation, time, and experience required, and Ignatius Loyola (1491–56) established the Society of Jesus to exercise the same conviction. Neither wished to cut the laity out of the picture; far from it, both had a healthy respect for lay activity and managed to attract many animated and dedicated followers. Yet both also saw the laity as distinctly subordinate disciples who implemented and paid for the plans that a cleric had devised. Not all of their lay followers agreed with this assessment. Other reformers like Bologna’s archbishop Gabrielle Paleotti (1522–97) thought that the secular clergy should be the animators, led by a resident bishop whose palace drawing rooms would be active centers of command—or at least persuasion. Civic magistrates like Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari and Cosimo I, on the other hand, thought they had the requisite combination of spiritual awareness, administrative skill, and legal power to organize charity, particularly since clergy had allowed many hospitals to fall into ruins. Many looked to the experiments being tried in cities and towns like Catholic Ypres, Lutheran Wittenburg, and divided
Lyon for general inspiration and specific policies. Individual lay men and women outside the political class, and various groups of laypeople gathered in guilds or confraternities, practiced direct action in establishing new charities and consolidating existing ones.

Networks of charitable homes for orphaned and abandoned children developed in both cities—and indeed in cities across Italy and Europe—through the interworking of these often competing agendas. Magistrates fought with bishops, bishops fought with religious orders, Savonarola’s disciples fought among themselves, and laypeople fought with all of the above. But they also worked together, and in the end it was that cooperation as much as the periodic tensions that governed how homes opened and sheltered children. The demands of church, state, and charity frequently dovetailed in the orphanages and conservatories, and in each case local traditions helped shape the dialogue among the competing and cooperating figures involved. And here again, nothing was fixed: administration was a constantly evolving experiment in which statutes were written one year and improvised on the next as homes lurched to meet financial crises and political necessities. The mix of factors generated paradoxes: in Florence many people advocated centralizing charity under lay and civic control, yet their hopes ran counter to Medici efforts to negotiate authority between pressures from patricians, Savonarolans, and local communities, and so were consistently stymied. Bologna had no similar pressure group, yet gained a high degree of de facto centralization of poor relief under lay and civic control because this fit the needs of a governing class that was still negotiating the city’s subordination to the papal state.

This chapter first sketches how those local charitable traditions and political realities shaped the running of the homes in Bologna and Florence. It then turns to gender, and asks whether women administered homes any differently than men did, and whether these differences could survive the efforts in both cities to develop more unified networks.

Confraternities and Local Charitable Traditions

All the conservatories and orphanages of Florence and Bologna were started or eventually taken over by confraternities, voluntary brotherhoods of men (and sometimes women) who aimed to imitate some of the disciplined worship, collective life, and charity of the mendicant friars while remaining lay. Did this fact have any particular significance? On a purely practical level, confraternities pro-
vided a traditional institutional format for lay charitable administration. They had organized and distributed charity in both cities for centuries, whether this meant giving bread to the starving, opening infirmaries for the sick and dying, comforting prisoners and those condemned to die, or gathering and burying the dead. When spiritual and charitable revivals moved across Europe from the high middle ages, they typically left in their wake confraternities whose members pledged to treat each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Their theology built on the notion of kinship as expressed in Matthew 25, where Christ teaches that an act of charity offered or refused a poor person is an act of charity offered or refused to him. If you aimed to count Christ a brother, you inherited obligations to the sick and destitute whom he considered to be his family.

A happy band of charitable equals is easy to romanticize. In practice, most confraternity members were as class-conscious, self-serving, factious, bored, calculating, or indifferent as any other collection of Renaissance Italians, particularly once the brotherhood was a generation or two removed from the devotional movement, charismatic preacher, or plague that had first stirred its founders into action. After a few decades, when the founders had died, the second and third generations of confratelli looked desperately for ways of convincing—or forcing—existing members to serve in office, and finding new members to pay dues. Some increased terms of office from six months to a year, and others did precisely the opposite; all toughened up their statutes with dire threats of what would happen to members who refused their turn. Yet who could actually dare expel a member who might occasionally give alms, or relent and actually serve a term as a visitor or depositario? S. Bartolomeo di Reno charged one of its officials with keeping the members caldi—we could almost say “stoked up”—but in fact most groups resorted to dreary and desperate nagging.

This could pose some challenges to running the infirmaries or hostels that many confraternal founders had opened to succor Christ’s poor kin. Hardening of the spiritual arteries might be countered briefly by devotional reform movements, but cities quickly grew too dependent on the new charitable institutions to entrust their survival to sporadic religious revivals. In most places the politically dominant or the merely ambitious moved into the confraternities in sufficient numbers to ensure that their work carried on. With such a close identification of civic and lay religious elements, confraternities in many cities became quasi-governmental welfare agencies through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Tax revenues turned into bread or medicine when funneled through confraternities, and with volunteers performing the time-consuming work of
assessing need and distributing charity, civic governments were spared considerable administrative costs. In the early fifteenth century, many governments consolidated numbers of small ospedali into larger unified ospedali maggiori by encouraging mergers among their governing confraternities. A similar process took hold in the mid-sixteenth century as new shelters emerged for orphans, syphilitics, battered women, and Jews converting to Christianity. In short, confraternities dominated the early modern stage on the continuum from the ecclesiastical charities of the middle ages to the state welfare bureaucracies of the industrial period, with all the paradoxes that this entailed: they were both lay and religious, both private and civic, both autonomous and regulated.

But however “useful” they were, practical considerations alone cannot explain the broad reliance on confraternities, particularly for a time not ruled by bottom lines, quality management strategies, or the nostrums of modern business administration. Caring for needy children was a religious duty. The active participation of confraternal overseers in screening orphaned and abandoned boys and girls underscores the fact that the confraternities who sponsored these homes saw themselves as far more than simply fundraisers or managerial advisors. Lay brothers and sisters took an active, direct, and time-consuming interest in the day-to-day management of conservatories and orphanages. Overseers recruited, supervised, and disciplined the staff of teachers, cleaners, porters, guardians, and priests. Financial officers balanced the income from alms, rents, and children’s work with expenses. Two or more visitors circulated regularly around the halls and workrooms within the homes, and around shops in the city where children might be serving apprenticeships or fulfilling domestic service contracts. Entering children had to be scrutinized. Exiting children needed someplace or somebody to receive them, whether it be a shop, a home, a convent, or a husband. All of this work was in the hands of the executive members who had their own families, properties, shops, or occupations to care for. They no doubt breathed a sigh of relief at the end of their terms.

The many confratelli and consorelle who ran the homes for orphaned and abandoned children drew on different confraternal models. Gender brought some of the greatest differences in approach, as we will see later. Beyond that, there were at least two models of confraternal administration, which we can distinguish as the collegiate and the congregational. Briefly, collegiate administration was favored by large confraternities that undertook many different activities, and that found it easier to allot these to different subgroups or companies that might be designated a collegio, or compagnia, or scuola. This was the model that Gian
Galeazzo Bottrigari worked with at Bologna’s S. Onofrio orphanage. Congregational administration was leaner and more focused, with all (or almost all) members of a much smaller confraternity or congregation taking a hand at running the group’s charitable home. This was how Florence’s Francesco Rosati and his colleagues ran S. Niccolò.

In the collegiate model, the confraternity might number hundreds of members. Besides regularly gathering to sing songs, hear sermons, march in procession, or bury their dead, they might establish a hospital for the sick, a shelter for pilgrims, or a service to bring food to prisoners. Bolognese laypeople had formed four such groups in the early fourteenth century, roughly corresponding to the city’s four quarters. Hundreds of members gathered at least monthly to sing the vernacular praise songs called *laudi*—hence the groups’ colloquial name, *laudesi*—and to support the charitable work of the large pilgrims’ hostels that each ran for the benefit of travelers passing through Bologna on their way to and from Rome. Joining one of these *laudesi* confraternities gave members access to charitable and spiritual resources ranging from disability insurance and dowry funds to burial and requiem services. All members could expect to be drawn into the public charitable work at some point as overseers or in-house volunteers, but this began to change by the fifteenth century. Each of its organized charitable activities—and over time a large confraternity came to sponsor several—came to be entrusted to a separate, subordinate group. Each of these separate groups had its own limited autonomy: it selected members from among the broader confraternity; it elected its own officers; it had its own statutes, accounts, financial officials, and possibly its own priest; and it reported periodically to the larger brotherhood on its activities. Members of the broader confraternity could join one, some, or none of the smaller groups, depending on their interest or suitability for the work. This is the model we find in Bologna’s S. Marta (under the sponsorship of the Compagnia dei Poveri Vergognosi), S. Maria del Baraccano, S. Bartolomeo di Reno, S. Maria Maddalena (sponsor of S. Onofrio), and S. Giacomo.

Confraternities organized on the congregational model were far smaller, often numbering only a few dozen members or less in contrast to the scores or hundreds of members typical of collegiate-organized groups. Members fixed an upper limit on their size, and only added a new member when one of their brothers had died. They tended to be stricter about who could be nominated, and far more careful about reviewing and voting on those proposed. The congregational group was usually far more restricted its charitable work, most often focusing its
energies on one activity only. It frequently had far less in the way of a collective devotional life or much in the way of charitable obligations between members. It looked more like a board of directors than a devotional group. This is the model we find in Florence’s Bigallo, S. Maria Vergine, S. Niccolò, S. Caterina, and Pietà, and in Bologna’s S. Croce and S. Giuseppe. The congregational model was a far cry from the traditional, medieval confraternity, and some might argue that it should not be considered with the other lay brotherhoods discussed here. Yet that would be drawing the analysis too narrowly. Across early modern Italy, the conjuncture of ennobling and Catholic reform introduced new forms under the confraternal rubric, and in the eyes of many reformers the congregations represented a reformed model of the traditional confraternity. It certainly fit the needs of evolving bureaucratic governments, and toward the end of the sixteenth century this was the model that newer groups adopted and that older groups reformed themselves by.

Before looking at why the two cities divided so neatly on this point, it may be helpful to describe how the two forms worked. The differences, while real, had less to do with immediate care for the boys and girls, and more to do with local traditions and political realities.

All confratermities appointed a small group of executive officers to take on the day-to-day work of administration in conjunction with the paid staff. Florentine congregational administrations were almost all very “flat,” and their statutes spent little effort distinguishing one office from another. As we will see below, Florence’s flagship Ospedale degli Abbandonati was directed by a hybrid of historical confraternity and modern bureaucracy—a hybrid so deliberately crafted that it stands out as one of the best examples of this early modern merging of the two. Its twelve captains operated on the level of policy, like a board of directors, while paid officials took on the real work of balancing books and arranging new homes for the boys. This was initially how Francesco Rosati and his four colleagues looked after S. Niccolò. A similar model held with S. Caterina at the end of the century, where a small group of six self-perpetuating signori met every Thursday (later monthly) to hear the reports of one of their brothers serving his one-year term as proposito, and also from a couple of hired administrators. The provveditore handled expenses—making sure that there was food in the home and that the various staff members did their jobs—while the camarlingo handled income—making sure that the alms box receipts were tallied, that legacies were tracked and their rents paid, and that girls’ wages were collected annually in July.
It is possible that these two officials were members, but the statutes do not stipulate this, and the first ones were not. The Abbandonati, S. Caterina, and S. Niccolò in its early years were fundamentally state homes, even if the pretext of confraternal organization put this relation at arm’s-length. Their captains and signori had little direct involvement in the lives of their wards, though statutes required them to visit periodically. At their regular meetings they focused on reviewing the actions of paid staff. They were also expected to review and approve admissions, though this happened inconsistently. Things were somewhat different at Florence’s S. Maria Vergine and Pietà homes, and also at S. Niccolò after Rosati and his colleagues finally convinced Cosimo I to change the administration. We will look more closely at the Pietà when considering how women ran homes. Cosimo solved S. Niccolò’s problems in 1564 by merging it with a confraternity, as he had done with the Ospedale degli Abbandonati and the Compagnia del Bigallo. In this instance, however, the confraternity did not have a 300-year pedigree and deep pockets. S. Niccolò’s new “parent” was the company of S. Maria Vergine, established by the Medici a decade and half earlier to run the eponymous conservatory. And there was a circularity here, because one of its founding members was Rosati himself. Sixty years later the two would merge their books, and eventually their quarters, but at this point they remained two separate institutions under one confraternity.

The thirty members of S. Maria Vergine shared seven offices that involved real work—it is not at all surprising that they had to meet weekly in order to get it all done. The offices were much like those of S. Caterina noted above: under the chairmanship of the padre proposto, a provveditore looked after expenses and a camerlingo recorded income from alms and the girls’ work. S. Maria Vergine added a scrivano to keep the records and then, like all confraternities, added four consiglieri (counselors) to keep the others honest. All officers served for a year, so in the normal course of things, a member of the confraternity could count on being part of the administrative team at least one out of every four or five years. While there was a rough effort to match recruitment with deaths and resignations, the group enrolled cautiously and was consistently a few members shy of its limit of thirty. When taking over S. Niccolò in 1564, it initially resisted expanding the responsibilities of the existing officers, and instead added a group called the Five of S. Niccolò. This quintet supervised staff much as Rosati and his colleagues had. Finding twelve officers annually from thirty volunteers meant everyone was now on the hook every two or three years, and this proved unsus-
tainable. S. Maria Vergine first addressed the situation by raising its size to forty members \((1584)\), and then decided to redefine the Five of S. Niccolò as meaning the four consiglieri, together with the proposted \((1598)\); this meant that members were once again serving every four or five years, a level that everyone found easier to sustain. It also made S. Niccolò’s eventual absorption into S. Maria Vergine that much easier to achieve.

Cutting expectations to meet diminishing volunteer energy available—this was the administrative calculus applied in Bologna as well. Yet here the adjustments were more dramatic because the original administrations had been far larger, reflecting equal measures of charitable optimism, bureaucratic zeal, and mutual suspicion. With four distinct administrative layers, the two orphanages of S. Bartolomeo and S. Onofrio were roughly similar, largely because the latter borrowed the former’s statutes. A rector held supreme authority, but in a somewhat ceremonial fashion. The statutes spoke of him as guarding the peace and adjudicating disputes, sign enough that some of these homes tottered on a deeply divided confraternal foundation. He might not even be a member of the confraternity, but should come from among the “più nobili et gentiluomini et antichi cittadini di boni famigli” (high nobles, gentlemen, and established citizens of worthy families)—in short, a referee and figurehead representing the urban elite who, in practice, was frequently drawn from the city’s most influential families, like S. Onofrio’s Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari. Below him in dignity were the two officials in charge of charitable and cultic activities. The massaro made sure there was food in the kitchen, a roof overhead, and staff in place; his work brought him into the home every day as the official most immediately responsible for every aspect of day-to-day operations, and he could have a couple of assistants to help him carry it out. The priore ensured that the confraternal church was furnished, that flagellant confratelli had their capes and marched in processions, that the priest was hired and the sacraments honored. He was the spiritual cheerleader who, as S. Bartolomeo wished, kept the confratelli “hot” \((caldi)\).

On the third layer below these two were a larger group of conservatori and sindici, eight or twelve members on life or limited terms. They were the institutional memory of the place, whose oversight and audits made sure that rectors, massari, and priori didn’t scheme together to defraud the home. No property could be bought or sold without their approval. A complicated electoral process rooted in medieval guild and communal traditions brought the top three officials into office. The oldest confratelli prepared a long list of suitable candidates
from within the company who were age 30 and over and who had been members for over three years, and then brought this list to the membership, which represented the fourth and broadest layer of administration when it gathered periodically as the corporale. Each name was voted on, but only half—those with the most votes—got into the bags from which officers were drawn every six or twelve months. Their heavier responsibilities meant that these officials met every one or two weeks to conduct orphanage business. It also meant that some of those extracted turned down the job.

Bologna’s conservatories had similar administrative tiers and oversight. All employed a small core group of nine or twelve men, called deputati (S. Maria del Baracano) or procuratori (S. Marta). These were drawn from the sponsoring confraternity, served life terms, cycled repeatedly through a set of administrative offices, and were subjected to the oversight of conservators and sindics. The two key offices, lasting six or twelve months, were those of priore (daily administration) and depositario (finance); beyond that, each member of the core group would serve a two- or three-month term annually as a visitor. Most included a distinct Congregation of Gentlewomen, whose operation and relation to the male administrators will be considered more closely below. And all included various groups of overseers: S. Maria del Baracano’s twelve deputies had four superintendents scrutinizing them from above, and six supernumaries awaiting below; these latter filled in if one or more deputies couldn’t make it to a meeting, but could only participate in discussions and not in votes.

Only the conservatory of S. Croce had a rector serving the kind of ceremonial and political functions seen in Bologna’s orphanages, but then it started with the most elaborate administration and ended up with one of the leanest. It wanted so badly to fit into the city’s charitable, political, and religious networks that in 1609 it allotted executive seats for members of every major social group: a rector representing the senators; a sopraintendente representing the cathedral canons; a prior representing the Franciscan tertiaries who held titular authority over the ospedale quarters; a camerlengo representing the city’s merchants who footed the bill and employed the girls; twelve life conservators and eight annual conservators drawn from the ranks of gentlemen, citizens, merchants, and tertiaries; and a parallel congregation of twelve gentlewomen to deal directly with the girls. They were following a model common across Italy that had emerged locally four or five decades earlier as the city was defining its citizenship categories more closely, and was using these to shape the administrations of large financial-charitable institutions like the Monte di Pietà and the Monte del Ma-
trimonio. Yet finding two to three dozen people willing to serve a home that sometimes gathered barely that many girls was more than a little quixotic; while many were called, few wanted to be chosen. In its first statute revision four decades later, S. Croce reverted to a lean, congregational administration of five: rector, prior, camerlengo, and two visitors.

Florence’s lean administrations seemed focused on getting the job done efficiently, while Bologna’s many-tiered “thick” ones seemed oriented to making sure that everyone got a shot at holding office and a chance to look over everyone else’s shoulder. This contrast of neat and narrow congregational bureaucracies with broad and sometimes fractious collegiate cooperatives reflected both the evolution of the two cities’ confraternal and charitable traditions through the fifteenth century and the shifting political culture of the sixteenth century. Florence’s charitable traditions were shaped by the fact that most of its hospitals were in some way proprietary. The families or guilds that had established and maintained them jealously guarded their rights and property by concentrating power in small, appointed boards that operated with a high degree of secrecy and little or no public accountability. The governors and rector of S. Maria Nuova, Florence’s largest ospedale, were descendants of Folco Portinari through the male line, while a small ospedale like S. Caterina dei Talani on Via S. Gallo was firmly in the grip of the Talani family, in spite of their demonstrable corruption.

Bologna’s hospitals, by contrast, had almost all grown out of the large laudesi confraternities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and even when patricians began infiltrating and co-opting them in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the tradition of a broad membership electing an executive board remained strong. The only Bolognese institutions to adopt the congregational model were founded by individuals late in the sixteenth century. Moreover, a closer examination shows that both traditions evolved in close connection to the new political realities of the two cities.

Bologna and Collegiate Governance

The collegiate model had first emerged in Bologna in the fifteenth century. Paradoxically, it was not aimed first at practicing institutional charity, but at avoiding it. When some members of the large confraternities that ran the city’s pilgrims’ hostels and infirmaries were caught up in the observant devotional movements promoted by traveling preachers like Bernardino da Siena, and wanted to practice the rigorous devotional exercises that these movements en-
tailed, they found that the time and effort of running their charities simply wouldn’t allow it. Moreover, some of their brothers and sisters were nonplussed by the notion of shifting from a somewhat relaxed set of spiritual exercises toward one that demanded weekly gatherings for the Divine Office, monthly confession to the priest, and regular periods of fasting. Most challenging of all, these strict new exercises included gathering a few times a year to strip to a special robe and whip one’s self until the blood flowed. In the 1430s, these worship wars brought some Bolognese confraternities to the brink of splitting up until one, the Compagnia di S. Maria della Morte, came up with the idea of separating into two linked groups that would share quarters, resources, and name but divide responsibilities: thus was born the collegiate model. Those who wanted to wash their hands of the chores of running the ospedale and instead follow a strict life of prayer, sacraments, and flagellation took the name compagnia dell’oratorio or compagnia Stretta. Those who preferred washing sheets, greeting pilgrims, fixing beds, and occasional worship services took the name compagnia dell’ospedale or compagnia Larga. Both were equally members of the Compagnia di S. Maria della Morte. The terms oratorio and ospedale designated function, but Stretta and Larga were the terms that made it into the city’s confraternal vernacular, perhaps because they referred as much to the size and exclusivity of the group as to the relative amplitude of their spiritual exercises. Larga membership could be in the hundreds, while the Stretta seldom numbered more than a dozen or two. All members of the Stretta were automatically members of the Larga, and could gather with these spiritual kin to vote in the confraternity’s overall governing board of officers, to worship in its church, and to march in the confraternity’s processions. Members of the Larga, however, could not join their Stretta brothers unless invited, and all they knew of the Stretta’s activities was what the latter group’s representative on the confraternity-wide governing board of officers chose to tell them.9

Despite—or perhaps because of—the disequilibrium between the two parties, the collegiate model became a widely practiced and characteristic element of Bolognese confraternal life. Its flexibility made it adaptable to most any circumstance. Within a couple of decades, the four major charitable confraternities of S. Maria del Baraccano, S. Maria della Vita, S. Francesco, and S. Maria dei Guarini divided in this way, and in the sixteenth century many more followed their example. Allowing distinct subgroups to function with a degree of autonomy within a larger corporate body matched the status that Bologna aimed to create for itself as a city within the papal state or that colleges possessed
within a university. Under this system, different styles of worship and charity could be accommodated within a single confraternity. Members whose devotional preferences ran in new directions need not quit, and confraternities could avoid schisms that would divide the properties that had been built up over decades or centuries, and that funded the dowries, sickness benefits, or funerary provisions that all members drew on. Moreover, through this device, a single confraternity could take on a variety of only loosely related charitable activities that would have strained the resources and attention of a more traditional group.

Here again, S. Maria della Morte led the way through the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by establishing separate groups for those members who aided prisoners (compagnia dei poveri prigionieri) and for those who spiritually assisted criminals condemned to execution (scuola dei confortatori). Its patrician members used the model quite deliberately in order to turn the brotherhood into Bologna’s most powerful confraternity, with representatives heading out from its rebuilt quarters on Piazza Maggiore to their responsibilities in the prisons, on the scaffolds, by the hospital bedsides, at the shrine of the city’s most important religious icon, and collecting rents from houses and farms throughout Bolognese territory. Because so many people had direct experience of this administrative convention, it was easily adapted in the 1520s to create Congregations of Gentlewomen that would directly supervise girls in the conservatories, and then again in the 1540s and 1550s to form distinct devotional consororities within existing confraternities.

For all its flexibility, the collegiate system could cause as many problems as it answered. Larga-Stretta relations were seldom placid, and hostile disputes frequently broke out over confraternal identity and control of property. These troubled Bologna’s shelters for children because in almost every case, their governing confraternities were driven to create a subgroup out of financial necessity rather than devotional fervor. In a reversal of the usual historical pattern, S. Bartolomeo di Reno, S. Maria Maddalena, and S. Giacomo deliberately created Larga cells after opening their orphanages precisely in order to accommodate those higher-born Bolognese who had the capacities and connections for administration but who were less interested in flagellating with artisans. The administrative fiction of massaro and priore acting as equals under the overall authority of the rector fit in here because, apart from their formal offices, the massaro represented the Larga and the priore the Stretta. Neither could be seen to dominate, and the rector had to have peacemaking as one of his chief goals because of the
frequent tension between the two groups. Yet even this was a convenient fiction because rectors and *massari* might rub shoulders in civic councils, patrician palaces, and social events where the *priore* and his Stretta brothers could never appear. In each case the high-born charitable administrators of the newly created Larga companies soon made moves to control the whole confraternity and appropriate its revenues, inevitably straining the connections between the confraternity and its officers. The S. Maria Maddalena brothers accepted this as a necessity in 1560, and the S. Giacomo brothers embraced it as an opportunity in 1604; S. Bartolomeo’s Stretta was considerably less accommodating.

Many S. Bartolomeo di Reno *confratelli* had resisted having anything to do with orphans when they were first approached by civic officials in the 1530s. They fought it in confraternal councils and local law courts for decades before submitting to what was really nothing less than an internal coup. Meetings held to discuss the situation turned into angry debates between older members who wanted to kick the orphans out as soon as possible and younger members who favored cooperating with communal authorities and turning the home into an orphanage. The latter group won the argument but, for all intents and purposes, lost the confraternity. Cooperation with communal officials entailed an expensive building program for a new dormitory that stretched their resources that they were obligated to sell some of their endowment properties. In 1534 they negotiated the sale of a small house close to the *ospedale* with Cavaliere Lodovico Fellicini, who promised half the 800 lire price in building stone and half in cash; twenty years later, the confraternity brought Fellicini to court for having failed to pay either the price or the interest. New and wealthier *confratelli* were required, but no Bolognese matching this description wanted to join this small group of flagellant artisans meeting in an industrial district. The brothers obliged by establishing a separate nonflagellant group within their confraternity, designated the Larga according to the local custom.

A 1590 history by one of the winners, Alessandro Stiatici, described the change in terms of social class: the lay brothers, realizing that they were of low condition and little ability, sought the administrative expertise and financial resources of citizens who had greater *qualità*. In view of the long-running dispute simmering under the surface, this was a convenient justification of events. With brothers skilled in the arts of politics and patronage, the Larga soon dominated the confraternity and the orphanage, while the artisans segregated in the Stretta were on the verge of extinction by the early 1550s. They had sold their rental properties to provide space and funds for the dormitory, thereby losing a major
source of income. By 1554 they would have been bankrupt had not a legacy claimed by the Larga been settled in the Stretta’s favor. These deep disputes were the context for the statutes drafted in 1550 with their convoluted electoral process that aimed to balance the old and new orders. The three oldest members (those initially opposed to the home) prepared nominations for executive positions that the whole corporale voted on, and the rector—a short-term officer drawn from a patrician family outside the brotherhood—was cast as the confraternity peacemaker with the power to throw out troublemakers.

But whom would he throw out? The rector was hardly disengaged from the civic politics of charity that animated the confratelli’s internecine disputes. In the 1550s, the senate was aiming to firm up its grip on local governance. It established eight subcommittees of assunti charged with overseeing distinct areas of civic administration, justice, infrastructure, economy, and social life. This gave senators a much more effective means of controlling and extending the local government bureaucracy, particularly since the mandates of particular assunterie expanded to what might at first sight seem to be unrelated parts of the city’s social life. This was the critical decade in the emergence of Bologna’s network of civic welfare, culminating in the opening of its beggars’ hostel, the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, in 1563, and the senate assigned the Assunteria del Pavaglione to oversee the new institution. The Pavaglione was the major annual fair where merchants traded the cocoons that provided the raw material for Bologna’s rapidly expanding silk industry. While it may seem an odd choice of bureaucratic committee to oversee a charitable shelter for the poor, the senators clearly realized that cheap semiskilled workers would be needed to help the silk industry expand, and saw the labor potential in an enclosure for poor women and children. So as it took shape from the 1520s to the 1560s, Bologna’s charitable network deliberately wove together political influence, economic needs, and forced labor.

Other European cities expropriated charitable institutions and put them under the control of a magistracy. Bologna’s approach was more indirect and deliberately rooted in its republican polity. Patricians gradually moved into the Larga companies of charitable institutions, spearheading or securing shifts in their charitable activity, and frequently stimulating disputes in the process. This is when we see the first examples of the practice that S. Croce adopted in 1609, when it designated seats on its executive to distinct social groups like doctors, merchants, artisans, and clerics. Within these broadly representative executives, the rector was to be both a figurehead and a referee standing above the fray.
Senators fit this role and soon predominated as the rectors overseeing the major homes. In return for the work expected of them, they often received the power to place girls or boys in the homes during their term. Balances were built into the system: to prevent consolidation of power and to preserve the relative openness of the homes, senatorial rectors served only a six- or twelve-month term. At the same time, some senators moved from one home to another or even served in two at once. When the brothers asked Francesco Sampieri to take on the duty in 1591 (a year after taking up a seat in the senate), he declined on the grounds that he was already serving as rector of both the Ospedale dei Mendicanti and the Opera dei Poveri Vergognosi, which ran a number of charities, including the S. Marta conservatory. Sampieri was a busy man, having earlier (1578) been a member of the congregation that ran Bologna’s Monte di Pietà, agreeing a year later to take on the S. Bartolomeo rectorship (1592), and then eventually moving over to serve twice as rector of S. Maria Maddalena (1597, 1602), where some of his relatives were also active. Similarly, Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari moved from the rectorship of S. Maria Maddalena to serve two terms as the chief officer (principe) of S. Maria della Morte (1564, 1568) before joining the senate (1570–1600), the Monte di Pietà (1584), and the Morte’s prison charity, the Poveri Prigionieri (1597).

We can see two related phenomena here. On one hand, a few senators like Sampieri appear and reappear in one home after another, taking on more of these time-absorbing duties than political expediency alone could justify. On the other hand, a few families took leading roles in particular institutions, becoming virtual patrons of them. We saw earlier that the Bentivoglio family frequently sent gifts of food, wood, and oil 100 meters down the street to S. Onofrio, and that the pater familias Ercole Bentivoglio sat frequently on S. Onofrio’s governing councils or served as its rector.

The shuffling of senatorial rectors from one home to another brought some consistency and semiofficial policy to the network of homes that was emerging in Bologna. But it ensured that when push came to shove between a devout artisanal Stretta and charitable patrician Larga, most rectors would side with the latter. Stretta were caldi for all the wrong reasons. This reality puts recurring complaints about members declining to attend meetings or serve as officers into a different context. Artisanal members who were disenfranchised had little motivation to attend. Reducing the numbers and duties of officials could be read as a necessity imposed by the numbers of confratelli who had gone freddi (cold), but could also reflect the status quo that was developing as rectors like Gian Ga-
leazzo Bottrigari declined to call the corporale and simply met regularly with his massaro, priore, and staff. Turning the blame back on the membership was a convenient, self-justifying rhetorical stance, but as scholars of voluntary organizations have argued in other contexts, apathy is often the result rather than the cause of disengagement and disenfranchisement.¹⁹

S. Maria Maddalena had left open the possibility of weekly meetings of its corporale, but from 1562 through 1603, the mean was slightly more than six annually. Two rectors managed to get through their six-month terms without ever calling a meeting of the corporale, only one ever managed monthly meetings, and over the forty years there had only been sixteen times when two meetings were held in a single month. While S. Bartolomeo’s draft 1550 statutes called for regular meetings of the corporale and the executive congregation, there are no records extant for either of these groups until 1588. Both started new minute books that year and prefaced the blank pages with a commitment to reform and renewal. The Bartolomeo Stretta wrote new statutes the same year, suggesting a deliberate and broad effort to turn a new leaf from the informal management of the previous decades (for which the financial records remain) to something more organized. Yet reforming zeal inevitably flags. The new minute books are initially rich with detail on the boys passing through the homes, but within a year or two revert to a more telegraphic mode.²⁰

A bureaucratic congregational model was gradually replacing the participatory collegiate one in Bologna. It became the new convention for groups established or reformed from the early seventeenth century, like S. Croce and S. Giuseppe. Maintaining and controlling a broad membership was not easy. The disputes raging in S. Bartolomeo were not just about charity or property, but about class or, as company historian Alessandro Stiatici had put it in the code of the day, qualità. S. Bartolomeo and S. Maria Maddalena were caught in between the two models. While moving to a less participatory congregational administration, they required a large base of dues-paying members to handle expenses. Only six new members went through S. Bartolomeo’s process of nomination and review from 1588 to 1593, the period when conditions in the city steadily worsened and the corporale debated sending most boys out onto the street. But membership was always very fluid. At the end of August 1593, 46 of 47 members present at the corporale voted to accept 98 new members, a dramatic act that both confirmed the idea of a broad membership undergirding the collegiate system, and yet indicated that this system could only be maintained by desperate expedients.²¹ The move was no doubt made in desperation, but it accelerated the
process of ennobling that had long been underway. Yet we should not make too much out of comparisons between two lists that are at best snapshots of a moment. A meeting in September of the same year attracted 26 members, of whom 11 were on the June matriculation of 48 members, 3 were of the August influx of 98, and 12 were on neither. Members fluctuated so much in their attendance and commitment that the matriculation taken at any particular meeting is no index of total membership.

S. Maria Maddalena had an even harder time. Its 1560 statutes had intoned, “better the number of the few and the good than the confusion of the many,” but within decades it was seeking as much of that confusion as it could get. About forty to fifty confratelli supported it through the 1560s and 1570s, perhaps two dozen of these being Stretta, although of course fewer than that number would come regularly to meetings. On 25 March 1580, fifty-four of these members voted to accept a group of forty-four recruits. It was the feast of the Annunciation, and joining the Maddalena and bringing the new members’ gifts of alms and cake was the kind of charitable act toward children that was popular on that feast day. Two months later, the confratelli took in a second group of eighteen. This offered some immediate relief both in terms of new candidates for office—and both groups included some men who moved almost immediately into positions of influence—and new sources of revenue. Did it erode the sense of confraternal community? In October 1595, eighty recruits joined in a single meeting, and five years later, a further forty-eight; yet the number of members who came to vote in this latter group was only twenty-eight, or scarcely more than 20 percent of the many who had recently joined. Indeed, here as at S. Bartolomeo, mass influxes usually resulted in little more than a dozen more members attending meetings regularly, if that. What, then, were the advantages of membership?

There were certainly immediate benefits for the institution beyond gaining people who could pay dues or take a turn in office. With broad-based memberships, orphanages like S. Onofrio, S. Bartolomeo, and S. Maria del Baraccano gained access to their members’ broader networks of support, and used them to fight the battles of the moment. While the senate seldom granted much in the way of direct alms, a savvy member could negotiate exemptions from taxes, usually those levied on building supplies. In February 1567, eleven members of S. Maria Maddalena circulated to eleven guilds to lobby for alms, and a year later eight more did the same. At the same time, an appeal for help to newly appointed Cardinal Bishop Gabrielle Paleotti backfired badly; he responded that if the
The orphanage was in such bad straits, it ought to merge with S. Bartolomeo di Reno. The brothers immediately sent eight members to intervene with Paleotti and wean him from his inconvenient notion. The delegation included recent rectors like Senator Ercole Bentivoglio together with Marc Antonio Malvezzi and Antonio di Grassi, both of senatorial families. Their lobbying succeeded in killing the suggestion. Soon after, another member was sent as an ambassador to Rome to see if there might be help forthcoming from that quarter. Cultivating connections to Rome could prove profitable in other ways. When a conventual Franciscan friar, Arcangelo Scargi, was convicted of apostasy in 1581, all his property was forfeited to the papacy. Gregory XIII turned around and, on the Day of the Annunciation, donated one of Scargi’s houses to “the putti di S. Maria Madalena.”

In Bologna’s more decentralized government, power was shared and derivative, and everyone from junior politicians to the archbishop looked over their shoulders toward Rome. The senate shared power collectively with the papal legate, but all senators were in real or potential competition with each other, a competition that extended down into the ranks of families where the question of who would take on the senatorial dignity was a real one. This uneasy balance of interests characterized many Renaissance and early modern republics, and one way to counter uncertainty was to buy, negotiate, or usurp powers and privileges, and then seek legal means of cementing gains. One of the most notorious examples locally happened in 1434 and 1440, when a group of investors banded together to purchase the public treasury. They comprised the core of the oligarchy that ruled the city in the later fifteenth century, and fought tenaciously when Pope Paul II accused them of bleeding Bologna dry. By the sixteenth century the group had expanded somewhat, but the city’s finances were still controlled largely by a small core of investors. And Bologna was not unusual — this was simply how power operated in small republics, particularly those like Bologna that were republics “by contract” or treaty with a sovereign power that had agreed to guarantee some local customs and rights. It led individuals, families, and groups to focus on preserving local authority in any way they could, and tended to make them insular and obsessed with consolidating local alliances against local enemies. Ambitious politicians married locally, and families perpetuated fixed alliances down the generations. This gave women significant bargaining power, and made them critical to alliance building. In this decentralized and competitive environment, a network of homes — each based in a distinct albeit informal alliance, and each with a membership structure that could
draw in more patronage networks—simply made more political sense than a single home.

Did membership have its benefits? The ambitious professionals, merchants, and politicians who joined the confraternities running these homes had more than the prospect of onerous office or repeated financial appeals ahead of them. On an immediate level, *confratelli* knew that if they died in good standing, their needy children would have priority in entering the home. And even in spite of ennobling and the carefully guarded distinctions of *qualità*, membership brought aggregation of sorts to the upper ranges of society. An ambitious, careful, and willing guild master who made it onto a governing body could reasonably expect that at some point he too would have the chance to enter a patrician’s palace in order to discuss the fate of an orphan or the problems in a *guardiano*’s accounts. The charitable confraternity was one of the few forums for members of different social classes to come together in common cause and with some degree of shared purpose. More directly, it also gave guild members and textile brokers immediate and privileged access to a young and cheap labor supply.

More intangibly, joining a group like S. Maria Maddalena or S. Maria del Baraccano brought significant spiritual benefits. Coming to Christmas Mass in the oratory brought a plenary indulgence, with more plenary and temporal indulgences on other feast days and on days when there were meetings or processions. From the late 1570s, the Maddalena confraternity devoted considerable energy to obtaining the kind of spiritual benefits that could attract members. Beyond the abstract benefits of public charitable service, members joined in a rich festive life that ensured them an honorable place in processions on major civic and religious feast days. If they chose, they could apply to join the Stretta and take part in its weekly Mass at the confraternal chapel and in more rigorous penitential exercises. Aggregations to the Franciscan and Augustinian orders and to Rome’s S. Spirito in Sassia raised the spiritual calculus exponentially.

This continued pursuit of indulgences and spiritual goods, together with other signs of an expanding devotional and cultic life, should keep us from interpreting the gradual shift to bureaucratic congregational modes of governance as an example of secularization, or from separating governors’ motives into tidy categories marked “spiritual” and “temporal.” The religious context was indispensable—indeed, it is unlikely that Renaissance and early modern people could even think of institutional care for children outside of it. Continual expansions in cultic life suggest that it was far more than just an afterthought or “mere ritual.” It was at the core of the homes’ identity and of their governors’ ability
to legitimize their claim to authority over society. This was all the more so as we move by the end of the sixteenth century into the period of baroque piety when spirituality found ever more extravagant expression in processions, shrines, and public acts of charity and devotion. Bologna’s homes provided a cast of children who could be recruited into these public acts, their confraternities provided the lay religious framework, and their patrician members provided the contacts in archiepiscopal and papal circles that could inflate their churches’ spiritual treasures and elevate their images to a far higher status.

So, for instance, at S. Bartolomeo di Reno, the first stage in the home’s reconstruction from a pilgrims’ hostel to a much larger orphanage came not in the dormitories but in the adjacent public church, which became the focal point of the expanded complex. Around 1534, architect Alessandro Fontana shifted the building’s orientation away from the Reno canal, which bordered it on the south, toward Via Imperiale on the east. This simple action effectively turned an open space there into the church’s forecourt, and accentuated its prominence on a street that was then emerging as one of the most fashionable in the city, thanks to palaces of the dal Monte, Fellicini, Fava, and Tanari families. The church’s cultic locus was a Marian image which with some deft promotion during a drought of the 1550s became known as the miracle-working Madonna della Pioggia. The brothers kept the Madonna under wraps in the confraternal oratory for most of the year so as to preserve its spiritual charisma and the importance of their own patronage. On certain feast days confratelli brought it shrouded into the public church, and then dramatically pulled back the curtain. At other times, it accompanied the confratelli in procession.

The body directing S. Bartolomeo’s cultic life was its Stretta company, and this too underwent a metamorphosis in the central decades of the sixteenth century. As the artisanal flagellants who had opposed the orphanage died off, this branch of the confraternity, like the Larga, moved up the social scale and into a different set of devotions. The 1588 Stretta statutes include a matriculation list with a number of prominent families among the names. If many are still guildsmen, all these are now masters, and there are none of the patronymics found on earlier lists. The statutes themselves point to subtle changes by what they include and omit. Piety, too, has moved upscale. The usual emphasis on frequent reception of the sacraments, regular attendance at worship, frequent reciting of private prayer, a restricted and disciplined membership, and a personal life marked by reserve, morality, and self-control is certainly there. But no one carries a whip. Flagellant devotions, or indeed penitential exercises of any sort, are
nowhere to be seen. And while Quattrocento Stretta had shunned the public streets, these statutes include a chapter on the public processions that will take S. Bartolomeo’s _fratelli_ around the city, carrying their image of the Madonna della Pioggia before them and trailing their costumed juvenile wards in their wake. 

These processions were a vital part of the confraternity’s public promotion before various audiences, with none quite so significant as the Compagnia di S. Maria del Baraccano, the elite confraternity that directed the Baraccano conservatory. While the Baraccano and S. Bartolomeo homes were parallel institutions, their confraternities operated in different social spheres, and the latter deferentially referred to the former as “nostri Padri del Baraccano.” Promoting the Madonna del Pioggia was quite clearly meant to provide the Baraccano with a miracle-working image similar to the Baraccano’s own venerable Marian one. It was a special honor for the S. Bartolomeo brothers to be asked by the Baraccano to visit on a day like the Feast of the Annunciation, and for these occasions a few _fratelli_ would be chosen in advance and drilled carefully in deportment. They were told to stand with

reverence, fear, devotion, and modesty, forcing yourself in that place to be a mirror for all the people of goodness and devotion, as is appropriate to men of a spiritual profession; and if any of these elected ones should do or say anything that would be scandalous, or would dishonour the Company, he will be thrown out.

At the head of the 1588 Stretta matriculation list was the name of its oldest member, 89-year-old Alessandro Stiatici. Stiatici was a prominent scholar who taught law at the university and wrote five volumes in Latin on legal and notarial questions. He was also the chief human link between S. Bartolomeo and S. Maria del Baraccano for over sixty years, filling various executive offices at both homes and ending his distinguished writing career with a vernacular history of S. Bartolomeo that pleaded with the Bolognese to remember why these homes were so vital. Writing in the early stages of one famine, Stiatici recalled the chaos of another—orphans wandering homeless and starving through the streets in the 1520s. As Stiatici’s text circulated around the city, the governors of S. Bartolomeo, the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, and other charitable homes darkly hinted that the current famine might force them to open the doors and release their wards to forage in the streets again. The Bolognese rallied, the homes survived, and the doors remained safely shut with the poor inside. Stiatici is an example of the kind of person who found in Bologna’s confraternities and
orphanages a vehicle for expressing both his faith and his political and social ambition. The words of the passage quoted above may or may not be his, but the sentiment—bringing together charity, piety, and deportment for the honor of the group and the edification of the population—surely is. Charity and order were two sides of a single coin. In the convictions and the six decades of service of a Stiatici we find the argument against separating the spiritual from the bureaucratic, or for reducing all charitable service to political opportunism or economic advantage.

**Florence and Congregational Governance**

Congregational governance in mid-sixteenth-century Florence came out of the dovetailing of three elements: local charitable and confraternal traditions, the Savonarolan movement, and Medici state building. Each of these elements had a history with each of the others, and each had been fractured, compromised, and adapted in the revolutionary swings that marked Florentine politics after Lorenzo de’Medici died in 1492. Their interaction together shaped how the city’s conservatories and orphanages would be set up and run. Moreover, the Medici dukes used newly formed or re-formed confraternities to achieve a degree of direct or indirect coordination of Florence’s orphanages and conservatories.

Florentines had a curious love-hate relationship with their confraternities. On one hand, they were proud of them as demonstrations of Florence’s piety and charity. Confraternities were, as elsewhere in Italy, woven into the warp and weft of social life at the overlap of neighborhood and parish, quarter and city. They delivered charity, socialized children, organized neighborhoods, conducted processions, and enacted a worship that was vernacular, participatory, and Catholic. On the other hand, no other state in Italy interfered as much in its confraternities’ operations. Florentine governments of all political stripes re-fashioned confraternal administrations, instituted mergers, appropriated or redirected legacies, and appointed or dismissed officials. From the early fifteenth century, no political turning in Florence was complete without the obligatory closing of the confraternities, all or some, in whole or part, for weeks, months, or years, and always on suspicion of being nests of conspiratorial intrigue. Whole or partial suppressions had closed confraternal doors in 1419, 1444, 1455, 1458, 1471, 1484, 1498, each year from 1502 through 1505, and from 1512 through 1517, 1522, and 1527.

Closures aimed specifically to keep politically active Florentines out of secre-
tive confraternal oratories while they were serving in political office, or when
scrutinies were underway to fill the bags from which those officers’ names were
drawn, but there was also a more general fear of “unlawful association.” Clos-
sures became such a reflex motion that it is difficult to say whether it was
simple paranoia, familiar tradition, or a realistic assessment of threat. Certainly
the Medici and the Savonarolans (popularly called piagnoni, which could mean
“wailers,” “weepers,” or “snivellers,” depending on one’s attitude) had each, in
their turn, used the confraternities to advance their programs and undermine
their enemies, and so the serial suppressions were motivated in part by the desire
to withhold from the enemy the tools that had proven so helpful to one’s own
cause. The Medici were particularly fearful of the confraternities as fifth-column
piagnone cells, and so draconian closures were among their last acts before los-
ing power to the last republican regime in March 1527 and among their first
upon recovering power from that regime in 1530. This latter closure lasted until
1533. True to familial form, one of Cosimo I’s first measures upon riding into
the city in February 1537 to claim the ducal crown from his assassinated cousin
was a closing of the confraternities.14

Did he have reason? Savonarola’s message of a disciplined, charitable, spiri-
tually vibrant, and politically attuned Christianity had resonated well with those
who chose to gather in confraternal oratories, as did his growing critique of lax
and corrupt clerics. He and his followers believed that the clergy ought to stick
to their sacramental and pastoral functions, and leave charitable work to the
laity, who in turn ought to organize it as broadly and systematically as possible—
through confraternities and with civic help if necessary—in order to ensure that
the “poor of Christ” were sheltered, fed, clothed, and healed. As a result, many
confratelli had rallied around Savonarola’s standard in the 1490s, while many
Savonarolans flocked to the confraternities in turn, seeing in them the lay reli-
gious arm of the Christian republic that he was building. Institutional charity
was a cornerstone of that republic, and the piagnoni moved particularly to some
of the key charitable confraternities that had started to flag in recent years, most
notably (and ironically) the Buonomini di S. Martino, the group for the “shame-
faced poor” that Cosimo de Medici had helped found in 1442 and which the
Medici had heavily patronized. Among others they revivified were S. Michele
Archangelo, which came to be known as the Compagnia di Carità because of its
new focus on helping the poor, and SS. Filippo e Jacopo, which ran the Ospedale
del Ceppo. Members cut out elaborate ritual activities in favor of simplified
worship, and taxed themselves heavily in order to increase their confraternities’ impact.\textsuperscript{35}

They also taxed their neighbors heavily, though in different ways. Savonarola’s fanciulli, those bands of holy teenagers who patrolled for sodomites, card-players, blasphemers, and prostitutes, and who processed for Christ and his Florentine republic, also took confraternal form. The coordination of their activities pointed to another Savonarolan inheritance that reflected both his Dominican background and the impulses of almost all Catholic Reformers who saw the lay brotherhoods as incubators of reform. If they were to be the coordinated vehicles of deliberate reform, confraternities themselves needed to be reformed out of their local, self-directed, and sometimes superstitious customs and habits, and made into groups whose thoughts and actions were more centrally directed and uniformly organized—in short, something more congregational. When clerics preached lay reform, the first casualty was lay autonomy. Savonarola reshaped Florentine confraternities so as to make them more effective vehicles for his movement, though he did not lack for willing—even eager—confraternal partners.\textsuperscript{36}

The depth of Savonarola’s legacy became clear only after his death. Persecution forced his followers underground, but the confraternities and charities were a refuge where they could continue their pursuit of the Holy Republic through lay preaching, spiritual exercises, help to the poor and sick, and even prophecy. Most of all, this network allowed them to connect with, patronize, and encourage each other such that when the political winds shifted, as they did in 1527, the piagnone movement was ready to take power. Lorenzo Polizzotto argues that the suddenness of the piagnone revival in 1527, with well-articulated plans for political and charitable action, can only be explained by a healthy piagnone underground existing in the confraternities and ospedali through the apparently placid 1520s, when it seemed that the movement had been all but killed by Medici kindness. The underground network operated at all social levels. When the sack of Rome made Clement VII a prisoner in his own fortress, Medici authority in Florence collapsed and the piagnoni were ready to assume power. Their sudden emergence from a long internal exile was, to their own minds, a fulfillment of Savonarolan prophecy. This conviction moved them beyond contradiction or compromise and into disaster. Millenarian apocalypticism prepared the piagnoni for everything but success, and the steady refusal of its clerics and leaders to fight the papal-imperial siege that settled around Florence by
1529 with anything other than prayer, charity, and hope steadily bled all but a hard core of true believers out of the movement. As a result, the republic of 1527–30 was at once the piagnone movement’s greatest triumph and its greatest setback.

In demonstrating both the quixotic and self-destructive nature of devotional absolutism, and the extent of clerical resistance to lay efforts at compromise, the republic effected a change in piagnone moderates. These gradually abandoned revolution and moved to build their Holy Republic on a smaller scale, by immediate action, with a lay focus, and without directly challenging the Medici dukes—the dukes could, in fact, be allies in the cause. The Medici would exact a high price though. Popes Leo and Clement had pursued a moderate policy of winning over enemies through compromise, but the vigor of the piagnone underground had discredited this approach. After the family’s restoration, Duke Alessandro executed twenty-five prominent republican leaders and imprisoned or exiled another two hundred. When a prophetic cell of piagnoni became recklessly public in their prophecies, the duke imprisoned and executed its leaders and closed the confraternities for one of the longest periods yet.\(^{37}\)

Cosimo I’s closing of the confraternities in 1537 fit this repressive policy, but even by then was perhaps an overreaction, since only a disorganized, and widely scattered remnant was ready to pick up the political fight they had left off at the beginning of the decade. If this closure continued one Florentine tradition of gagging the brotherhoods in times of political flux, Cosimo’s suppression of the Compagnia di S. Maria del Bigallo five years later, and the transfer of its assets, name, and responsibility over to the magistracy meant to oversee hospitals and relieve the poor, was an act in an allied local tradition of shaping confraternal charity through political dictate. Communal, republican, and despotic governments had done this continually from the thirteenth century, notably with major public confraternities that distributed charity like Orsanmichele, the Compagnia di S. Maria della Misericordia, and the Compagnia di S. Maria del Bigallo itself. They consistently argued that corrupt confraternal officers were siphoning off the alms meant to succor widows and orphans. Orsanmichele had counted almost three thousand members in 1325, but had become for all intents and purposes a branch of government by the end of that century. The Misericordia and the Bigallo had histories of worship and charitable service extending back to 1244, but had been forcibly merged by communal decree in 1425 and then separated again in 1489 and 1525. Expropriating the much-battered Bigallo was, if
anything, a family tradition, since both Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent had been key players in its Quattrocento transformations.

Recurring closures had prevented many Florentine confraternities from retaining active members, and made it inevitable that a small congregational core of officials would look after legacies.\textsuperscript{38} The suppression or expropriation of large confraternal charities had much the same effect. While the Misericordia seems to have emerged from its forced marriage with the Bigallo with an active membership that was ready to pick up the sick and bury the poor, the Bigallo itself seems to have atrophied at the grassroots level. In short, by the mid-sixteenth century Florentines had been prepared by the traditions of their existing guild and family ospedali, by the history of political suppressions and expropriations of confraternities, and by the Savonarolan movement for the kind of top-down congregational governance that characterized the groups that opened shelters for orphaned and abandoned children in the 1540s, 1550s, and 1590s. They were also prepared by both the Savonarolan and Medicean visions for Tuscany to welcome further bureaucratization as the best means of expanding charity beyond what confraternities themselves could offer.

Cosimo I moved gradually toward this goal. As famine gripped the duchy in 1540, he appointed Francesco Cavalcanti and Francesco Inghirami as commissioners and provisioners of the begging poor (“commissari et provveditori de . . . poveri mendicanti”), with a broad mandate “to order, provide, and manage in benefit, accommodation, and subvention of these poor.”\textsuperscript{39} Both Cavalcanti and Inghirami were members of the Misericordia confraternity, and had served terms as the Misericordia’s capo di guardia during the critical period of 1527–28 when that confraternity was Florence’s chief agency battling the plague.\textsuperscript{40} Their immediate mandate was directed to finding and rationing food supplies in the 1540 famine, but as that crisis faded, Cosimo I apparently aimed for a less ad hoc approach to poor relief. It may have been around this time that an undated and anonymous \textit{Regolamento} in the Pratica Segreta was written. The document is filed with others dated 1531–43, and proposes a “spedale de Mendicanti di Firenze” for four types of deserving poor: the crippled, the blind, abandoned orphans, and—more controversially—the unemployed. Florentines would receive shelter, food, and spiritual assistance aimed at helping them reform. Non-Florentines would receive alms before being sent away from the city.\textsuperscript{41} With their confraternal background and provveditorial office, Cavalcanti and Inghirami are likely authors of this \textit{Regolamento}. It indicates that by the early 1540s,
Florentines were joining in Europe-wide discussions about radical overhauls to poor relief. And they weren’t simply talking. In March 1542, Cosimo I took the bold step of putting two hundred lay and clerical ospedali under the supervision of a magistracy of five gentlemen. Both Cavalcanti and Inghirami were among the first five appointments to the magistracy (although Cavalcanti died before he could take up his duties), and the magistracy itself was unusual in that one of its first tasks would be to determine its specific activities within the rather broad mandate that Cosimo I had given.  

These discussions took place under the direction of the new magistracy’s presidente, Angelo Marzi de’Medici, bishop of Assisi and secretary to both Duke Alessandro and Cosimo after him. His colleagues were largely Medici loyalists, and they had great ambitions. Cosimo I had directed them to survey the income and expenses of the two hundred ospedali, and requisition their excess resources to provide for derelitti e mendicanti, that is, abandoned children and beggars. The magistrates drafted a plan that would have left them running a wide-ranging welfare plan whose charitable and disciplinary parts would extend out to all parts of the duchy. They would license and discipline beggars, distribute food aid, open a workhouse, care for poor prisoners, and run shelters in Florence for orphaned and abandoned girls and boys drawn from across Tuscany. Moreover, working together with local ducal police and administrative officials, they would keep a tight rein on local ospedali, which they took to be nests of fraud. Some of the worst, in their minds, were clerical ospedali. Cosimo I seems to have anticipated some conflict, because he secured approval for the plan from Archbishop Andrea Buondelmonti in October 1542 and from Pope Paul III the following year. It was in between these approvals that he stabilized the magistracy’s funding by suppressing the Compagnia di S. Maria del Bigallo and transferring its considerable assets over to the new magistracy. The quid pro quo here was that in taking on the Bigallo confraternity’s assets, the magistracy also took on the Bigallo’s name and testamentary obligations and even adopted the title of “captain” that Bigallo officials had used. Moreover, their numbers were increased from five to the twelve that the Bigallo had had, though none of these existing confraternity captains kept their posts. The Bigallo’s absorption by the poor relief commission in November 1542 was highly rational. It brought together a magistracy that had power but no income, and a confraternity that had a tradition of serving poor pilgrims and orphans, an effective institutional base in the territory, and significant rental properties. The merged body was a natural vehicle for spearheading Cosimo’s restructuring of poor relief.
The merger confirmed the Bigallo confraternity’s evolution into a purely congregational body without a broad membership of lay brothers who could be the eyes, ears, and hands of the operation. It is a critical example of how state welfare bureaucracies emerged out of earlier voluntary and religious charity, and paradigmatic as well since spiritual elements did not entirely disappear. The Bigallo magistracy retained all the cultic and testamentary obligations that the Bigallo confraternity had accumulated over the preceding two hundred years. It retained the limitations on the alienation of property. It retained the network of orphanages and *ospedali* in city and *contado* (country). It retained the prominent public building on Piazza S. Giovanni with the loggia where Florentine children had been abandoned by desperate parents for years. Whatever ambitions its twelve members and their president Bishop Angelo Marzi de’Medici may have harbored for licensing male and female beggars, sheltering male and female orphans, caring for the poor in prisons, and supervising hospitals across the duchy, the scope open to them gradually narrowed until by the end of the next decade it fit the narrower channels developed by the Bigallo over the previous century. In law, the magistracy absorbed the Bigallo; in the public mind—and perhaps in the Medici dukes’ minds—it was the other way around.

Who were the Bigallo captains? The first three dukes appointed 71 captains: Cosimo I, 31; Francesco I, 14; and Ferdinando I, 26. Captains normally served life terms, though the fact that both Francesco and Ferdinando made a rash of appointments upon coming to office suggests that vacancies were determined by more than captains’ mortality alone. When one died, the others each nominated a replacement and then from this long list prepared a slate of three nominees from which the duke made his choice. The president was always a bishop drawn from a diocese in the Florentine dominion (from 1565 this was consistently the bishop of Fiesole), nominated by the archbishop and appointed by the duke in a procedure intended to mitigate the problem of a lay magistracy exercising control over ecclesiastical *ospedali*. Table 5.1 compares in years the actual length of

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duke</th>
<th>1–10</th>
<th>11–20</th>
<th>21+</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosimo I</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesco I</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferdinando I</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
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*Source: ASF, Bigallo ms. 1669/IV, 199r–203v.*
the life terms served by the captains appointed by the three dukes. These ranged in practice from one to thirty-three years; the mean among Cosimo and Ferdinando’s captains was twelve years, while that for Francesco’s was eight.

The captains were not political lightweights. As Table 5.2 shows, the bulk of them were members of the active and established political class of Florence. A steadily rising percentage came from families that had held priorships four times or more through the fifteenth century. Beyond lineage, the prerequisite for political participation in ducal Tuscany was personal membership in the Council of 200, the assembly drawn from those who had passed scrutiny for magistracies. Most captains were members of the 200 before joining the Bigallo. A somewhat smaller, but steadily rising percentage of captains were also members of the forty-eight-member executive senate. Finally, moving from the organs of power to the organs of ritual and prestige, most Bigallo captains were also knights of Santo Stefano, the chivalric-crusading order created by Cosimo I in 1562 to capitalize on the booming market for marks of honor and possibly sweep the Mediterranean of Corsair pirates in the process.

If we move beyond the relative anonymity of political memberships and global percentages, we find some Bigallo captains had done exceedingly well by ducal patronage. Among the longest-serving of Cosimo I’s appointments was Giulio di Alessandro del Caccia (served 1559–90), a doctor of law, frequent ambassador (to Ferrara, Milan, Parma, Savoy, the Holy Roman Emperor, Philip II of Spain), and governor of Siena. Among Francesco I’s appointments, Benedetto di Bonoaccorto Ugaccioni (served 1582–90) was a favorite who supervised numerous public works projects in the dominion (in Livorno, Pratolino, Lampeggio) and in the city (working on the Palazzo Pitti, S. Maria del Fiore, and Ponte S. Trinità); he was also the first of his family appointed to the senate. Finally, among Ferdinando I’s captains we find Giovanni di Domenici Bonsi (served 1590–1601), a cleric and doctor of law who negotiated the marriage of Marie de Medici to

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Duke</th>
<th>Appointed</th>
<th>Priorial Families</th>
<th>Council of 200</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Order of S. Stefano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cosimo I</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21 (67.74%)</td>
<td>25 (80.64%)</td>
<td>16 (51.61%)</td>
<td>24 (80.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesco I</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10 (71.42%)</td>
<td>11 (78.57%)</td>
<td>8 (57.14%)</td>
<td>12 (85.71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferdinando I</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23 (88.46%)</td>
<td>24 (92.3%)</td>
<td>22 (84.61%)</td>
<td>25 (96.15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

France's Henri IV, accompanied her to France as her almoner, and became bishop of Buziers and subsequently cardinal of S. Clemento.  

In short, the Bigallo captains were the personally powerful scions of traditionally powerful families. They had experience in Florentine and ducal government, were adept at gaining honors and position, and normally enjoyed long terms of service with the Bigallo. On paper, their influence increased over our period: while Cosimo I and Francesco I appointed new men and old, insiders and outsiders to the Bigallo, Ferdinando I overwhelmingly favored well-established senators and knights of Santo Stefano. As they never tired of pointing out in numerous letters to successive dukes, Cosimo had endowed them with great authority. How, then, to explain their mixed success in realizing the Bigallo's ambitious mandate?  

Cosimo and his sons seem to have developed reservations about the power that the Bigallo captains could garner to themselves if they fulfilled their plan. They also seem to have developed reservations about the plan itself. Significantly, neither Cosimo I nor his sons ever ratified the magistracy's draft statutes, which became a virtual dead letter. Ambitious captains and an ambitious centralizing plan—even one dedicated to consolidating Medici authority—could undermine ducal relations with territorial communities. The vision of coordinated poor relief may have warmed the hearts of charitable reformers across the spectrum from piagnone radicals to Christian humanists, but it was anything but popular with local hospital administrators, who saw their livelihoods threatened. Towns and villages also resisted, because they rightly feared that their local charitable resources, built up over generations and a vital part of local self-sufficiency, would be drained away into the capital. From the time of the first, incomplete census of ospedale resources, local communities resented and resisted the efforts of the Bigallo to review accounts, approve nominations for office, or tax resources. For both these reasons, a centralizing poor relief system in the hands of powerful magistrates could undermine the Medici dukes’ own efforts to secure their personal authority.  

Certainly Cosimo’s most delicate relations were with the Florentine patricians, and particularly with those gathered in the Council of 200 and its executive forty-eight-member senate. They had written the new constitution in 1532, and after the assassination of his distant cousin Alessandro de’ Medici in 1537, they appointed him in some desperation. While generally Medici supporters, they assumed that this inexperienced boy would act as a figurehead like the
Venetian doge. The collapse of the last republic in 1530 had brought many piagnone moderates over to the view that having a Medici on the ducal throne could provide some ballast to the regime so long as this duke left governance to a series of powerful magistracies of the Council. The Bigallo captains saw themselves as one such magistracy, and as their ambitions became clear through their draft statutes and their early actions of 1542 and 1543, it seems to have dawned on Cosimo that they could develop into the kind of body that could challenge his agenda rather than fulfill it. In the narrow area of poor relief, they could establish under their own authority the kind of network that Cosimo himself wished to control, and in the process they could certainly alienate locally influential ospedale patrons whose cooperation was vital to Cosimo’s strategy of dealing directly with territorial leaders. While they were anything but Cosimo’s political enemies, they were to some extent his rivals in a race for political supremacy whose outcome was, in 1542–43, by no means assured.\footnote{53} In the decades that followed, both Cosimo I and his sons consistently ignored the Bigallo captains’ appeals for ratification of their broad authority or for the funds to fulfill their mandate. Their neglect was more deliberate than benign, and ensured that the captains could do little but supervise the Ospedale degli Abbandonati. If their centralizing ambitions did not extend beyond care for orphaned and abandoned boys, what then of the girls who were in a similar state?

The dukes refused the captains’ persistent appeals to be put in charge of orphaned and abandoned girls until 1615. While they did not centralize that care in a single orphanage like the Abbandonati, or set up a parallel magistracy like the Bigallo, they did establish a congregational confraternity to oversee and coordinate care at arm’s length. This was the Compagnia di S. Maria Vergine, whose members, as Rosalia Manno Tolu has shown, took an active role in establishing most of Florence’s conservatories. The name at the head of the confraternity’s first matriculation list is that of Francesco d’Astudiglio, a Spanish priest and doctor from Burgos who had come to the Medici court together with Eleonora of Toledo, who had funneled her alms giving to S. Maria Vergine and who was a witness to the will in which she pledged 200 scudi annually for dowries for the conservatory’s girls. We have already seen that Francesco Rosati of S. Niccolò was also a founding member of S. Maria Vergine. Another charter member was Antonio di Francesco Cattanio, also known as Antonio da Milano, who was the first priest for the girls of S. Maria Vergine and who was instrumental as one of the founders of the Pietà conservatory that opened in 1554. When that conservatory needed an administrator who could oversee expenses and collect the
income generated by the girls’ work, they turned to Andrea di Benedetto Biliotti, who had joined S. Maria Vergine a year before. Among later members of the group, we find both Vittorio dell’Ancisa, the founder of the Carità conservatory, and Girolamo Michelozzi (a senator and cavalier of the Order of Santo Stefano), Friar Giulio Zanchini, and Giovanni Battista de Botti, the three founders of S. Caterina; certainly dell’Ancisa consulted the S. Niccolò statutes when he was framing the rules for the Carità. S. Maria Vergine steadily expanded its coordinating role with Florentine conservatories. Having taken over S. Niccolò’s administration in 1564, it merged the two separate quarters into one building in 1620. Its early control over S. Caterina expanded to the point where five of the first six governors were members, including those who renovated the building and wrote the first statutes. By 1632, an anonymous S. Maria Vergine account noted the fact that it still controlled half of S. Caterina’s six-man governing council. These connections went beyond the administrative level; some of the girls living in the Ceppo had sisters in S. Caterina, and the governors of the two homes allowed for visits on some feast days.54

For all its importance, S. Maria Vergine remains a somewhat shadowy confraternity that operated more as a behind-the-scenes charitable congregation than as a conventional lay religious brotherhood. In its early years it had a relatively high turnover; in its first four years, it had lost eleven members, or over one-third of its original strength, seven through death and four through resignation. The members addressed at least part of this problem by ensuring that more of their new recruits were in their 30s or 40s (with three in their 20s). Eight of the original thirty had some historic family links among the piagnoni, and at least one, the physician Giovanni de Rossi, was himself a member of the piagnone group in 1497. While most members came from prominent families like the Portinari, Frescobaldi, Pandolfini, and Alberghi, there were a few more humble ones identified by patronymics, like the cloth-shearer (cimatore) Lorenzo di Tommaso, or by their occupation, like Lionardo il Sarto (tailor). One charter member, Alessandro di Gherardo Corsini, was a Florentine senator, and in its early years the confraternity usually counted at least one senator in its ranks. By the turn of the next century there were two or three senators, another sign of its expanding importance in the informal network of state charitable aid. Like most brotherhoods, the confraternity chose its own members. Though technically at forty members from 1584, meetings at the turn of the century attracted only twelve to twenty participants.55 Any continuing Medici influence was more indirect than at the Bigallo. Yet the choice to appoint its members to establish the
new S. Caterina home four decades later speaks to the dukes’ continuing regard for and investment in the confraternity. It suggests that however informally the links to the Medici were maintained, they were sufficiently strong that S. Maria Vergine could be considered a voluntary body parallel to the Bigallo, and that it acted primarily as an administrative body overseeing Florence’s conservatories as the Bigallo acted for the orphanage of the Abbandonati. The relative paucity of its religious observances reinforces this impression.

So far as we know, S. Maria Vergine had no oratory or regular religious services. Almost all of its members pledged to give annual sums of money, grain, wine, or oil, and received for their generosity the grateful prayers of the girls in their care, yet S. Maria Vergine did not collect legacies on the promise of requiem Masses said by a confraternal priest in a confraternal oratory. The pastoral visitors sent around the Florentine archdiocese by Archbishop Antonio Altoviti in 1568 and Alessandro de Medici in 1589 made no mention of it, and it does not appear in M. Piccianti’s 1589 census of 143 confraternities found in the city of Florence. While the 1632 anonymous history suggests that its members were proud of their achievements, the Vergine left few records and seems to have simply dissolved at some point in the seventeenth century. By contrast, the Bigallo is mentioned in archdiocesan records as a functioning confraternity performing Masses, even though its captains would have preferred to jettison the liabilities and obligations of confraternal identity and function simply as magistrates.\textsuperscript{56} This brings a final interesting comparison: while members of S. Maria Vergine served in the congregations governing other conservatories, no Bigallo captains served in S. Maria Vergine. There was no overlap between these two groups, and each had its own particular patronal links to the Medici dukes.

**Women’s Governance**

The orphanages and conservatories considered to this point were run by confraternities and/or congregations made up of men. Yet a few homes had parallel congregations of men and women working together, while others were run by groups of women alone, particularly the Casa della Pietà in Florence (est. 1554) and the Conservatorio di S. Giuseppe in Bologna (est. 1606). Did they do anything differently? Definitely—from the way they organized themselves, to the ways they raised funds, to the way they related with the children in their charge. Yet their difference was short-lived. In all instances, the women’s mode of governance was within a few decades (or less) criticized and reformed to bring them
closer to local (male) conventions. When opening shelters for needy girls, women did not use the model of institutional hospitals, but that of the informal communities of widows who fostered children as a way of realizing spiritual goals and achieving financial self-sufficiency. This was strongest in Florence, where the model of the widows’ community dovetailed with Savonarolan politics. Some of Savonarola’s strongest supporters had been among widows who seized on his message about building a charitable republic by devoting their own lives and resources to serving the needy. Three Florentine conservatories rose out of this ethic—the only three that were run by women, as it turns out. Yet all three were undone by Savonarolan politics: one by a suspicious Cosimo I and two by conflicts with Savonarolan male clergy who found the women’s religious vision threatening.

As we saw in chapter 2, the earliest identifiable conservatory in Florence was the shelter that Lionarda Barducci Ginori opened in 1541. Though colloquially known as the Ospedale delle Povere Fanciulle Abbandonate, it in fact had no formal name or legal identity, and was little more than a community of widows who took in numbers of young girls. Florentines likely began using the name after Cosimo I opened the Ospedale degli Poveri Abbandonati a year later, and it suggests that they saw the two as companion institutions much like Bologna’s S. Maria del Baraccano and S. Bartolomeo di Reno. Ginori rented the Ospedale di S. Niccolò dei Fantoni in Piazza S. Felice from the Compagnia di S. Maria del Bigallo where a possible kinsman, Giovanni Leonardo Barducci, was then a captain. To help in the work she recruited three other widows, Nanina, Antonia, and Piera, and then her own daughters Caterina Tedaldi and Maria. She was certainly not the only widow fostering orphans for a fee, because another of the Bigallo’s tenants in the mid-1540s was Maddalena, widow of Sebastrella, who together with her daughter ran a similar home for boys, possibly on commission from the Bigallo itself, which had been merged into the magistracy that operated the Abbandonati orphanage.57

The Bigallo captain-magistrates offered Ginori alms from time to time, but Ginori also counted on informal alms giving by other women to cover costs. These women constituted a network of help that may also have sponsored girls and that certainly intervened on their behalf. After Ginori’s death in 1549, three of them appealed to Cosimo I for a dowry to help a girl marry. The girl’s three elder sisters had all passed through Ginori’s shelter and gone on to marriage or a convent thanks in part to Cosimo’s aid. Their petition, and others issued after Ginori’s death, suggest that this conservatory was organized loosely, if at all. It
had no clear entry procedures, no formal officers, and in fact no statutes; Ginori herself had decided which girls stayed and which girls left. This was a common enough procedure for a widow’s community, but it left Ginori’s daughters puzzled about how they ought to proceed. They believed that they were running a type of lay convent or community that offered shelter on some informal ducal commission, and so sought to draw the duke in more closely. Soon after their mother’s death, they wrote to Cosimo I asking that they be allowed to take a girl into “servanza” in the “monasterio” of their late mother. Cosimo’s secretary Lelio Torelli compounded the confusion by forwarding their letter to the captains of the Bigallo, possibly because of the common belief that the so-called Abbando- nate and the Bigallo’s Abbandonati home for boys were somehow connected.

The Bigallo magistrates, already the landlords of and frequent donors to the Abbandonate, and very eager to expand their mandate, welcomed the strengthening tie. Torelli forwarded at least seventeen petitions of this sort on to the Bigallo before writing in February 1551, “they can accept this one and no more.”58 Torelli and Cosimo presumably saw that this could mushroom out of control, and leave the state subsidizing dowries for any poor girl in its borders, and they now made moves to shut down Ginori’s home altogether. More than that, they sought to expunge it. The three widows Nanina, Antonia, and Piera who had lived in the home appealed to Cosimo I for a small farm where they could continue living together, “because Your Excellency is resolved to no longer help care for abandoned girls.” They claimed that they had given their youth and their possessions to care of the girls, and that Ginori had promised them the farm after her death so that they could continue living communally. Their request was refused.59

Cosimo did in fact carry on facilitating care for abandoned girls by establishing the Compagnia di S. Maria Vergine within the year. On one level his move marked the extension to conservatory governance of the kind of formal institutionalization and accountability that he had initiated with the centralized Ospe- dale degli Abbandonati and the magistracy that became known as the Bigallo. Yet why was he determined to close down the Abbandonate and eliminate its traces? The most likely answer is that he wanted to sever its connection to the movement of Savonarolan piagnoni. Lionarda Barducci Ginori was of piagnone stock, and had married into a piagnone family. Her daughter Caterina had done the same. The three women who had appealed to Cosimo for a dowry for one of Ginori’s wards had also married into piagnone families, as was the girl on whose
behalf they were writing. The Abbandonate seemed to be another instance of the *piagnone* charitable underground, and though Cosimo’s suppressions since 1537 had taken the sting out of the *piagnone* tail, there was no point in allowing this institution to grow into something bigger, or to allow the *piagnoni* to take credit for charity that Cosimo was bankrolling. By contrast, S. Maria Vergine was loyal, organized on familiar institutional lines, and largely self-financing.

Closing the Abbandonate did not eliminate the group of *piagnone* women determined to find shelter for needy girls, any more than opening S. Maria Vergine took up all the demand for such shelter. If anything, ambitions grew as needs exploded. In three years, the *piagnone* women emerged stronger than ever as the force behind the Casa della Pietà. As we saw in chapter 2, the Pietà opened its doors in December 1554, but the women organizing it had already been working for months to raise pledges. Giving a pledge secured membership in the confraternal Compagnia della Pietà and with it the right to participate in the group’s activities. In five months, the chief instigators of the group, Margherita Borromei and Marietta Gondi, got 149 pledges, most of them for very small amounts from artisans, servants, and patricians, and all but one from women. Among those giving pledges were Lionarda Ginori’s daughters Caterina and Maria Ginori. No doubt more of Ginori’s former supporters were among those now joining the rapidly growing Compagnia della Pietà and pledging to support its home. The pledges were the early foundation of the home’s finance, and most women renewed their support annually over the first few years of its operation—after a year, the Compagnia della Pietà had 270 members, and by 1558 it had 320.

Most of these women pledged up to a florin annually, and while many donations fell below this level, only eighteen of the first year’s cohort exceeded it. Practical and ideological motivations drove this kind of hand-to-mouth financing. In the absence of the large private legacies that had founded most Florentine hospitals, or of the guild or state support that underwrote others, only private pledges could open a new conservatory’s doors. Moreover, Savonarola had taught that dependence on an invested, alms-giving community rather than an invested legacy kept religious charitable institutions honest, engaged, and less vulnerable to corruption, fraud, and theft. That said, funding by annually renewed pledges could work only if a few larger donors stood ready to make up the difference when larger bills came due, as indeed happened within months of the Pietà’s opening. The shelter also needed another form of funding that Sa-
vonarola, and indeed all sixteenth-century poor-relief reformers advocated for financial and moral reasons: low-skilled piecework, usually in textile trades, that the enclosed poor carried out on commission from outside merchants.⁶²

There are no statutes extant for the Compagnia at this stage (and likely none written), but there was a madre priora and a consiglio delle maggiori who helped her make decisions, such as which girls would get into the home. Girls had one interview with Marietta Gondi and four or five other members of the Compagnia (Borromei had died only days before the home opened its doors), who then decided immediately on their admission. This was far simpler than any other conservatory then operating in either Florence or Bologna, and certainly more reminiscent of widows’ communities and Ginori’s Abbandonate.

What we know of the early organization of the home comes in part through a chronicle of the home started decades later by one of its Dominican padri spirituali and carried on by a series of friars and nuns after its transformation into a Dominican convent. The chronicle must be read critically because it deliberately aims to obscure some difficult debates over the Pietà’s administration and purpose, and to project the impression that its later evolution into a convent was not a result of these disputes, but an outworking of God’s original plan for the home.⁶³ Reading it in conjunction with contemporary administrative records gives the acute impression that one is reading about two entirely different homes. In the account books, the work of Borromei, Gondi, and the two or three hundred women is amply evident. In the Dominican chronicle, the Pietà conservatory emerges as the work of pious clerics who recruited the women and directed or corrected their efforts. Between the lines we find latent piagnone connections and the intense struggles that erupted within the piagnone movement between lay women and Dominican friars for control of the Pietà home.

In a prosopographical study of the Pietà matriculation list, Rosalia Manno Tolu has found both a strong presence of traditionally piagnone families, and also signs that some of these were beginning to marry into traditionally Medicean families, bringing about a convergence of the two camps. The Pietà’s piagnone links went to the very top and in many cases had generated considerable personal hardship. Many of the women who had joined the Pietà consorority were the widows, daughters, or sisters of prominent piagnoni. Priora Marietta Gondi had married Federico Gondi, an anti-Medicean who had been exiled for his service to the republic and had died in 1536. They had no children, and Marietta gave all her property to the conservatory when she died in 1580. Ginevra Bartolini’s husband Lionardo barely escaped the city before being condemned to
death in absentia in 1530 for his role in protecting Pieruccio de’Poveri, one of the charismatic leaders who had helped organize *piagnone* poor relief. Maria Strozzi’s husband Lorenzo Ridolfi had opposed the arrival of Duke Alessandro in 1530, and had fought against Cosimo I at the battle of Montemurlo in 1537. Her brother Piero was fighting for the French against Cosimo in the war for Siena that was raging even as the Pietà was being established.

Other women had more mixed political connections. Ginevra Sacchetti Capponi was the daughter of Niccolò Sacchetti, a signatory of the petition defending Savonarola that was sent to the pope in 1497; she was a sister-in-law of Niccolò Capponi, first *gonfaloniere* (standard-bearer) of the last republic. On the other hand, her sister Isabella had married Luigi Guicciardini, a fervent Medicean who gained important offices under the restored duchy. Maddalena Gondi was the widow of Pagnozzo Ridolfi, a once ardent Savonarolan who switched sides in 1530 and went on to take political office under the Medici. Monaldesca Monaldeschi Baglioni, widow of the mercenary Malatesta who had led the last republic’s forces through the siege and had subsequently defied the republican government and negotiated with the imperial forces, was a member. So too were Lucrezia Girolami and Cosa Antinori, the widow and daughter respectively of that republic’s last *gonfaloniere*, Raffaello Girolami. Yet other family links suggest that the informal networks among patrician families allowed for a degree of coordination in charitable institutions. Maria da Diacetto was the wife of Piero di Bartolomeo Capponi, who had joined Malatesta Baglioni in the surrender, but also the sister of Dionigio da Diacetto, one of the captains of the Bigallo from 1561 to 1574. Another sister was the stepmother of Caterina de’Ricci. At this point, the Pietà was still a Bigallo tenant, occupying the Ospedale di S. Maria dell’Umiltà in Borgo Ognissanti.

These were clearly influential women with first- and secondhand experience of governance. They were deeply pious, but confident and canny enough in ecclesiastical matters that they aimed to draw spiritual directors from a variety of sources: lay and clerical, regular and secular, first and third order. Over the first two decades, the Pietà consorority found teachers for its girls from an unnamed confraternity, the Carmelite sisters of S. Maria degli Angeli, and possibly from the Franciscan friars of the S. Salvatore friary that was adjacent to their home in Borgo Ognissanti. They recruited spiritual directors from the Capuchin, Camaldolese, Dominican, and even Jesuit orders. Savonarolan sentiments among Florentine clergy extended far beyond the Dominicans, and by frequently shuffling their religious guides, the women of the Pietà could avoid
falling under the control of a particular religious order. Confraternities commonly followed this practice, and while most orders accommodated it, Dominicans were less open to it and Florentine Dominicans were particularly resistant.\footnote{65} The women also gave the girls their own old breviaries and psalters for use in worship, and may have passed on other spiritual literature.

Savonarola’s female disciples were self-assured activists who frequently clashed with the Dominican friars over the organization and direction of their charitable and devotional activities.\footnote{66} The Pietà women’s nemesis was a fervent Savonarolan friar, Alessandro Capocchi. Capocchi was a seasoned combatant in church wars, having fought against his brothers at S. Maria Novella in order to see the friary moved under the jurisdiction of the Roman Province of the Dominican Order, where it joined S. Marco. He had been spiritual director of one of the key piagnone confraternities, S. Benedetto Bianco, and at the Carmelite convent of S. Maria degli Angeli, where he first had contact with the Pietà women and girls. Capocchi’s public association with Savonarola could have generated more trouble politically had he not also been one of those who was subtly redefining the friar as a kinder, gentler, miracle-working proponent of Catholic spiritual reform—a Savonarola without the millenarian prophecies or the aggressively anti-Medicean republicanism.\footnote{67} In order to secure the position as the Pietà’s spiritual director, Capocchi levied a charge of heresy against the Jesuit cleric who was then serving the women and girls. The charge stuck, the Jesuit was removed to Rome, and the gratified women of the Pietà appointed Capocchi in his place.\footnote{68}

Capocchi was a charismatic and determined director, and in the course of a decade (1558–68) he convinced the women of the Pietà to make some fundamental changes to their shelter and confraternity. The girls’ eclectic worship forms were reformed to match current conventions, and all were enrolled in the Company of the Rosary, a confraternity founded and heavily promoted by the Dominicans. The Pietà’s informal and open administration was described as “resulting more often in confusion than order,” so Capocchi wrote statutes that regularized practices and vested authority in an executive council of seventeen, and later, nine members.\footnote{69} Yet the biggest change was a move to a new location.

The shelter’s home in the old pilgrims’ hostel of S. Maria dell’Umiltà in Borgo Ognissanti was cramped, surrounded by prostitutes and textile workshops, and next to a Franciscan friary—all threats to its integrity in Capocchi’s estimation. In spite of the fact that they had just been given an adjacent property that would allow them to expand, Capocchi convinced the women to move,
and then used all his influence and that of a courtier for whom he served as private confessor to intercede with the reluctant Medici. He was nothing if not persuasive. Both the Bigallo captains and Cosimo I’s secretary Lellio Torelli also opposed moving the Pietà, and the shift involved some complicated property transactions. Capocchi aimed to get the Pietà closer to the neighborhood of San Marco, where the Dominicans had been slowly building up a community of women’s enclosures, including the piagnone convents of S. Lucia and S. Caterina di Siena. In December 1563 the Pietà bought three houses behind the Annunziata friary and over the next five years had them restructured into a more thoroughly enclosed conservatory with workspaces. The girls moved before reconstruktion was even finished, with rituals that were a celebration of Florentine Dominican traditions. The date chosen was 10 May, the feast of S. Antoninus, the Dominican who had been Florence’s archbishop from 1446 to 1459. One hundred and sixty girls donned white clothes and made the processional trek to their new quarters, likely accompanied by Gondi and some of the over three hundred Florentine women who had pledged to support them to that date. En route, they stopped at S. Maria Novella to hear Capocchi give a sermon and then, one by one, the girls kissed the relic of S. Vincent Ferrer kept there. They then issued from the church and moved north to the convent of San Marco, the center of Florentine celebrations of S. Antoninus’s feast. A couple of priests met them at the door to sprinkle them with holy water before they proceeded to the saint’s tomb. Each girl kissed the relic before the group headed out again and processed the short distance north to their new home. The new complex was on the edge of the city and in sight of the walls, a great distance and a far cry from the pimps, bawds, apprentices, and shops of Borgo Ognissanti.

Capocchi had overreached himself. According to the Dominican chronicle, some women of mali voli (bad will) in the Compagnia della Pietà opposed the friar, adding mysteriously that “he left the Governing Council of those Abbandonate because he was not able to realize one of his ambitions for them.” A day after the new church at the new quarters was dedicated, arguably his crowning triumph, Capocchi was replaced as padre confessore. Administrative records show that the women of the executive council that he had put in place had discussed Capocchi’s tenure three days earlier and voted 8 to 1 to replace their energetic Dominican; it is the only time in the Pietà records that the appointment of the priest is noted, and the only time that a vote tally is recorded. In his place, they appointed a Camaldolese friar, Fra Franceschini.

It is not clear what constituted the last straw for the Pietà women like Mari-
etta Gondi and Lucrezia Ricasoli. Capocchi’s statutes, relocation, and changes to the girls’ worship gradually made the Pietà more like a convent, but each move had been approved by the women. With these pieces in place, it could be that his unstated “ambition” was to now formally turn the Pietà into a tertiary convent, and that this galvanized whatever opposition there had been to individual changes in the past. Certainly the women’s decision to appoint a Camaldolese in place of a friar from nearby San Marco suggests that they were now determined to put some distance between themselves and the Dominican friars’ influence and expectations. Some difficult years followed. Now distant from the contacts, donors, and volunteers built up over fifteen years in Borgo Ognissanti, they were weakened financially. More critically, local church politics entered the dispute as Cosimo I finally made peace with Florence’s archbishop Antonio Altoviti and allowed him to enter the city.

Altoviti had been appointed twenty years before but had not since set foot in Florence. His father Biondo had supported the assassination of Duke Alessandro I in 1537, and had consistently opposed Medici rule. Antonio Altoviti himself was associated with the Savonarolan piagnone movement. Not surprisingly, Cosimo I took Altoviti’s appointment by Paul III in 1548 as an affront. He refused to allow the archbishop to enter Tuscany, and confiscated his revenues. For two decades, Florence’s ecclesiastical government was fluid at best, and this may have allowed the women of the Pietà to be as free as they were in supervising their young wards’ spiritual lives. Their liberties were about to end. Altoviti finally entered the diocese in May 1567 and began an aggressive program of Tridentine reform. He conducted an extensive visitation from April 1568 to October 1569, convoked a diocesan synod in 1569 to formally adopt the decrees of Trent (which Cosimo I had already published in 1564), and planned a provincial synod for 1573 with the same purpose. Among the Tridentine reformers’ goals was a determination to put more order, discipline, and regularity into the disparate variety of women’s religious communities. In June 1570, Altoviti ordered the women of the Pietà to draw their next padre confessore from the Dominican Order, and from San Marco in particular. Fra Franceschini’s fate is not clear.

San Marco had been dealt a strong hand and used it to wring concessions that would permanently change the nature of the Pietà community. It agreed to provide a confessor on condition that the Pietà take only friars of S. Marco in perpetuity, and that the San Marco prior supervise future Pietà elections. He also took one of the three keys to the church. The new padre confessore, Fr. Battista Salvetti, immediately reenrolled the girls in the Company of the Rosary and
secured spiritual benefits for the girls from the Dominican Order. As we saw in the previous chapter, before this time the Pietà had routinely sent out about one-fifth of its girls into private homes as domestic servants, but now the practice ended and the girls remained locked up inside their new enclosure. There they were set to work. As Table 5.3 shows, from 1566 to 1571, their work had generated 40 percent of the home’s income and through the balance of the decade it averaged 42 percent and rose as high as 64 percent. The generosity of shopkeepers, textile workers, church goers, and prostitutes around Borgo Ognissanti had generated almost 60 percent of income before the move, but in the empty streets around the new quarters in Via Mandorlo, alms gathering of all kinds dropped to 36 percent of income and fell to under 20 percent by the end of the decade. Receipts from the girls’ trips around town with their alms boxes disappear from the ledger, though this may simply reflect a change in accounting procedures. In one short decade, the Pietà moved from being an alms-supported open shelter to being a closed workhouse. This set the stage for a further radical shift: in 1586 a Flemish friar, Gherardo Fiammingo, arrived as padre spirituale and began moving the home definitely toward its eventual status as a third order Dominican convent. He vested the first eighteen girls as tertiaries on 25 March 1595, the Feast of the Annunciation and the beginning of Florence’s new year.

Sensitive to the controversy stirred up by Capocchi a few years earlier, the Dominicans had bided their time until the last of the group of women who had founded and run the Pietà had died. Marietta Gondi died in 1580, after spending twenty-six years as madre priora. Her successor Lucrezia Ricasoli was the last of the founding group, and died in 1586. The first resident prioress, Alessandra di Girolamo Lignuialiolo, had died in 1583 after twenty-nine years of continuous

Table 5.3. Income Generation at the Pietà, 1566–1578

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ordinary Alms</th>
<th>Extraordinary Alms</th>
<th>Work</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lire</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Lire</td>
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<tr>
<td>1566–71</td>
<td>20,506</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19,417</td>
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<tr>
<td>1572–73</td>
<td>4,998</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3,580</td>
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<tr>
<td>1574–75</td>
<td>2,775</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1576</td>
<td>7,294</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1577</td>
<td>2,626</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1578</td>
<td>2,799</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>371</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ASF, CRSF ms. 112/57, cc. 142r–v, 182r, 208r, 264r, 307r.

Note: % = percentage of total income.
service. With their long terms of service and close personal involvement in the Pietà’s day-to-day operation, these women had given and guarded a particular communal identity. While they had been forced to take the friars of S. Marco as their confessors, most friars remained for only two or four years, and none attempted the ambitious changes launched by Fra Gherardo. With his arrival the pattern of officeholding reversed, with the madre priora and the resident prioress serving shorter terms, while the confessors remained longer—Fra Gherardo was in office for eighteen years. As the founding group came to the end of its term and influence, the Pietà’s hitherto clear and through record keeping deteriorated. While the Compagnia della Pietà had begun its work with a systematic and well-maintained set of records, none of the volumes bearing financial accounts are extant from the time of Madre Priora Marietta Gondi’s death in 1580 until after Fra Gherardo’s death in 1604.

Changes also crept into the language used internally and the way it framed relationships. Early records specifically and consistently referred to the women collectively. Account books and ricordi are all headed with some variation of “this book is of the women and girls of the Pietà” (“questo libro e delle donne e fanciulle della pietà”), while letters sent to Duke Cosimo I regarding property transactions are signed not by Marietta Gondi or an executive, but by “The women who govern the abandoned girls of Borgo Ogni Santi” (“Le donne che governano l’abandonate di B. Ogni Santi”). The members present when girls were interviewed and admitted to the home were known as the madre priore, or mother prioresses, a term never restricted to Marietta Gondi. It emphasized their close personal and maternal connection to the home, a connection that they substantiated with frequent alms and periodic visits. Yet when one of the newly arrived terziaries Caterina began contributing sections to the chronicle in 1593, she recorded a subtle shift. Madre priora now referred only to the resident prioress, an overseer whom the longest resident girls and women elected from among their own number on the model of conventual elections. By contrast, the gentlewoman who headed the Compagnia della Pietà was now called the priora generale, or more tellingly the priora di Fuori. Sister Caterina’s redefinition was consistent with the tone of the Dominican chronicle generally, which consistently asserted that the closest emotional relations in the home were not those between the women and their metaphorical daughters, but those between the clerical confessors and girls. It is subdivided into chapters organized according to the length of time that particular priests spent with the home, and seldom describes anything the women do. In the chronicle, the girls shed tears of glad-
ness and grief for their confessors, but only hot tears of rage at the meddling women of the Compagnia della Pietà. Oddly, it says nothing at all about the tears that both girls and women must have shed over the many deaths that gave the Pietà the dubious distinction of having the highest mortality rate of all Florentine conservatories.

Any hot tears of rage dried up through the early and middle decades of the seventeenth century. The Compagnia della Pietà dropped from the records; the chronicles mention instead a panel of five signore governatrice, headed by a priora generale and willing to institute the restrictions characteristic of a self-sufficient convent: no more alms gathering in the streets by any girls other than novices (1623), no more instruction in reading and writing (1624), conversion of the scrittorio into a granaio for food storage (1624), and construction of an oven on site so that the girls would no longer have to go out on the street to buy or beg bread (mid-1620s). In 1624, the Pietà started a new matriculation list, the Libro Nuovo, and registered 106 women: the youngest was 8, the oldest 79. One-third had been there thirty years before when Fra Gherardo began vesting tertiaries. By 1634 the administrative records referred to the institution as the Monastero delle Fanciulle or the Venerabil Collegio delle Fanciulle della Pietà, and it had completed its metamorphosis into a third order convent.

The same metamorphosis from conservatory to convent came over another Florentine home that was for a brief time run by women. The records are less numerous and the history more contested, but here again Savonarolan politics added heat to an administrative dispute. As we saw in chapter 2, the Florentine cleric Vittorio dell’Ancisa received his early spiritual formation in Savonarolan and Dominican confraternities, was padre confessore for the conservatory of S. Maria Vergine, worked with Philip Neri (another follower of Savonarola) at the beggars’ shelter of S. Trinità dei Pellegrini in Rome for a decade, and then opened the Carità home as a paupers’ hostel in 1583 using the proceeds of an inheritance. Orphaned and abandoned girls first entered the home six years later. Dell’Ancisa never got around to writing formal statutes but sketched out an administration based around two companies of forty, one of women and one of men. These were modeled on the piagnone charitable confraternities that he had known and joined as a young man, and also on the Compagnia di S. Maria Vergine, which he had rejoined after returning to Florence from Rome. The women and men of these two companies undertook the day-to-day work of the shelter, with men in charge of feeding beggars and women in charge of educat-
ing and governing the girls. Each met separately and elected from their number a proposito and some deputati to handle administration. Together they formed the Congregation of Charity (the name of a piagnone confraternity that dell’Ancisa had joined in 1568 but that had since disbanded), and while both sides had a voice, the men exercised ultimate authority. Dell’Ancisa was the governatore who brought the two together, much as Bologna’s rectors brought together the Larga and Stretta groups of their charitable confraternities.81

Having a Company of Men and one of Women made sense as long as the Casa della Carità served both genders, but in 1595 dell’Ancisa bowed to pressure from the Buonomini di S. Martino and the duke, and made the Carità a shelter exclusively for young girls from the ranks of poveri vergognosi, or “shame-faced poor.” The Carità’s congregation sheltered them and groomed them for marriage or the convent, hiring the extended family of a widow Margherita Camerini to be the core of the residential community. A critical distinction from the daily lives of girls in other conservatories was that Carità wards were not expected to work for a living; relatives, sponsors, the Buonomini di S. Martino, and the Magistrato dei Pupilli paid fees to cover the costs. The superfluous Company of Men now disbanded, and the remaining women constituted the whole of the Congregation of Charity. Dell’Ancisa also sketched out notes for a set of statutes. He entrusted the now all-female Congregation of Charity with supervising widow Camerini and the girls, but set four male protettori over them to handle temporal affairs. Two of these men would be well-born administrators, while the other two would be experienced bookkeepers. The four men together with dell’Ancisa would also choose the gentlewoman who headed up the Congregation of Charity for a three-year term, and who joined the men to discuss and vote on business. The Congregation of Charity could not make a decision without the approval of the men.

The women reacted strongly against these new rules. They met and wrote a letter to dell’Ancisa claiming that they recognized his authority in spiritual matters only, that the home was their main charge, and that they would take the lead in administration.82 Though no record of their names survives, theirs was described as a company of gentlewomen. Given the status of the girls in their care, they most likely had the kind of rank, experience, and skills found among the founders of Pietà. They may also have shared the piagnone orientation that dell’Ancisa had deliberately highlighted when naming his shelter and its governing Congregation of Charity. Their letter suggests that they wished to turn the Casa della Carità into a lay conservatory on those lines. Were they reacting
against the fact that only a few months before the Pietà had begun its transition into a convent? They felt strongly, and seem to have enlisted others into their cause. The controversy became so violent that dell’Ancisa had to take shelter in a convent for a few days to avoid being beaten up, and Archbishop Alessandro de’Medici was forced to intervene.\textsuperscript{83}

The women’s rebellion, if we can call it that, was short-lived. Dell’Ancisa died three years later, while in the process of writing new statutes. The Company of Women, the Congregation of Charity, and indeed most laypeople were effectively written out of the conservatory. In the decade after his death, the move began to transform the home into a convent under the authority of the archbishop. New rules adopted in 1607 removed laypeople from all but financial administration and gave the archbishop final say in everything, including which girls entered through its doors.\textsuperscript{84} Girls entered as novizzi (novices) and passed to an intermediate stage as giovani (youths) before applying to become stabilite (fixed, established). A fanciulla stabilite at the Carità was neither a nun nor a tertiary, but neither was she going to leave the home. As at the Pietà, the first women to take this step were older women who had lived many years in the home and who had no dowry to ease their way into a conventional convent. 36-year-old Christina Giorgi was a twenty-year veteran, having entered when dell’Ancisa opened the Carità. She was prioress when she was stabilite. Seven other women ages 24 to 39, who had lived at the Carità for between eight and nineteen years, joined her. This was almost half the residents of the small home.\textsuperscript{85}

The next step in the Carità’s evolution into a religious house came in 1627, when the archbishop assumed full authority and imposed full enclosure. New statutes of 1644 cleared up the remaining ambiguities.\textsuperscript{86} The Carità sisters wore the habit and were under the authority of the diocese of Florence. Neither widows nor married women could enter the enclosure for lessons, devotions, retreats, or retirement. The nuns’ chief work was precisely that of sheltering and educating needy girls, both fee-paying and pieceworking, age 16 and older. It was serbanza in all but name. Some of these girls would eventually leave as wives, others might be stabilite and join the nuns, and yet others of greater infermità or lesser qualità might stay on as servants.\textsuperscript{87}

Women in Bologna generally had more rights, greater influence, and a broader social sphere in which to operate compared to women in other cities in Renaissance Italy. Historians and art historians have uncovered a vibrant cultural life embracing both female artists and patrons. More secure dotal rights, the pa-
triciate’s preference for marrying within the city, and the frequent absence of patrician men on diplomatic or bureaucratic missions made upper-class women significant and active players in the political game. Moreover, the city was completely untouched by the politics of Savonarolism, and had a tradition of using lay institutions like confraternities and hospitals as a vehicle for resisting—or at least circumventing—ecclesiastical authority. Did this make a difference in who ran conservatories and how? In the long run it did not. The local politics of charity worked against shelters built on the model of the widows’ community and pushed instead toward institutional forms in which men dominated. Women were necessary participants in these homes, and at least one was established and run for a period by women alone, but by the mid-seventeenth century all followed the local administrative template in which men dominated. That said, none became convents. They were too valuable as lay institutions to be allowed to slip under clerical control.

Women took a leading role in Bolognese conservatories from the start, though not as founders. As we saw in chapter 3, Bolognese conservatories set strict entrance requirements and actually followed them in order to ensure that girls were local and respectable. Determining reputation, health, virginity, and resources could require three or four separate steps, complete with written nominations, interviews with neighbors, checks of civic baptismal records, and votes of the executive and confraternal membership, and could take six months or more. These time-consuming and physically invasive procedures were too important to be left to female staff, and could not be conducted by male administrators, so women were drafted into conservatory administrations from the very beginning, and usually formed a separate group within the collegiate model.

Two of the confraternities overseeing Bolognese conservatories, S. Maria del Baraccano and S. Croce, recruited parallel companies of laywomen, who in turn elected a trio of officers to conduct some of the more delicate exchanges with girls. These women checked the virginity of applicants to the homes, visited periodically to see that living conditions were acceptable, and even kept tabs on women who had married out the home and now lived in the city. The Baraccano gentlewomen were active from the time the former pilgrims’ hostel began sheltering orphaned and abandoned girls in 1527. Women like Pantasilea, Camilla, and Alexandra Bentivoglio, Julia and Gentiles Paleotti, Helena Guastavillani, and Ginevra Lambertini came from the highest social class. They reported to the twelve-member male executive, which reported in turn to the confraternity as a whole. These women were an integral part of the collegiate system, sharing
authority with the men much like their brothers, husbands, and fathers in Bologna’s senate shared authority with the papal legate. While they kept no separate records, the gentlewomen of S. Maria del Baraccano did have a set of statutes directing their activities. Approved in 1548, they were extremely rudimentary, but this in itself is not surprising since they predated the general statutes for the conservatory, and indeed would appear to be the first statutes of any kind for a conservatory in Italy.\textsuperscript{89} Names of all the confraternity’s women (one list accompanying these statutes notes fifteen names, and another twenty-six) went into a bag, from which three were drawn monthly to oversee the group’s activities and visit the home regularly. On this rotation, each woman would serve at least one month’s term in the year, and some might serve two. Girls had to pass a secret vote in the women’s company, with two-thirds of the beans cast before the men would even consider their application, and the men could not allow into the home a girl who hadn’t been approved by the women. The women also appointed the conservatory’s resident female warden and the chaplain who heard confession and administered sacraments to the girls.

The Compagnia di S. Maria del Baraccano expanded its statutes for the conservatory five years later in order to describe more fully the procedures for administration, accountability, and the \textit{governo} of the girls. While the provisions on girls’ age, citizenship, virginity, and honor remained unchanged, the power to determine entrants into the home shifted decisively to the sixteen male officers. Under these 1553 statutes, the women didn’t vote at all, although they still interviewed and inspected applicants and passed on recommendations orally to the twelve male deputies and their four superintendents, all of them serving life terms. The women had been demoted from their original status as co-governors of the conservatory to a level not far above the staff, whom they no longer had the authority to appoint.

This subordination in 1553 seems to have come out of a few intersecting forces. It may have been a price for the resolution a few months later of a long-standing fight between the Baraccano’s Larga and Stretta companies. These had warred from 1439, when the confraternity was one of the first in Bologna to experiment with this internal division. Stretta devotional values were aggressively male, stereotyping women as the source of sin and temptation, and requiring men to atone for their own sins and the sins of their communities by whipping themselves. This was a devotional exercise that few thought appropriate for lay women and the flagellants’ whips effectively drove women out of most confraternities. Though Bolognese women had traditionally made up half the mem-

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bership or more of some of the large community-based laudesi confraternities, they inevitably lost any public or administrative role—and sometimes even membership—in companies undergoing the Larga-Stretta division. This had not happened in S. Maria del Baraccano, perhaps because of the extreme animosity between the groups, but also because of the women’s wealth, power, and determination. Yet something changed in the early 1550s, that period of conjunction when Bologna’s senators began consolidating their administrative grip on the city, when individual charitable homes were drawn into a network, and when all of Bologna’s conservatories and orphanages received new statutes that enshrined a roughly standard collegiate model headed by an executive and a patrician rector. It was also a time when confraternities across the city were starting to devise, within the collegiate model, separate companies for well-born women that had a collective devotional life, but little real authority or even independence within the larger confraternity. These consororities would presumably blunt the appeal for women of heterodox groups like the Protestant conventicles that were known to gather in Bologna. Catholic reformers believed that women’s independence in spiritual matters led inevitably to heresy, limited as they were with weaker wills, intellectual frailty, and a troubling curiosity, and they had to look no farther than Ferrara, 40 kilometers to the north, to confirm their suspicions. Duchess Renée of Ferrara had turned her court into a refuge for Protestants for almost a decade and a half, and was soon (1554) to lose contact with her children and be sentenced for heresy as a result. Given a history of strong cultural ties between the two cities, Bologna’s patrician women had no doubt enjoyed her hospitality, particularly those with the wealth, power, and influence of the Baraccano gentlewomen some of whom, like the Bentivoglio sisters, had close relatives there.

Wielding real power had made the Baraccano gentlewomen anomalous in Bologna, and that anomaly could not be sustained as broader political and religious forces coincided with the drive to get the Stretta to support the home more fully. The gentlewomen retained their responsibilities as intermediaries between the girls and male administrators, but lost their decisive role as the home’s gatekeepers. This became the new local standard for involving women in charitable enclosures that might shelter poor women and children. A decade later, the men planning the operation of the Opera dei Poveri Mendicanti added a similar three-person team of gentlewoman auxiliaries to the Opera’s thirty-four-person rotating team of voluntary officials.
It was to be three decades before a new conservatory opened in Bologna. As we saw in chapter 2, S. Croce’s founder the merchant Bonifacio dalle Balle first gathered needy girls off the street in the early 1580s and entrusted them to a widow, whom he subsidized. A decade of hard work and two larger houses later, he turned to a community of male and female Franciscan tertiaries for help, and another decade after that his precarious finances forced him to bring into the administration some high-born men who were determined to bend S. Croce to the local model. The statutes they forced on dalle Balle in 1609 followed the Baraccano example in most respects, though the ten or twelve women of the Congregation of Gentlewomen were not to be drawn from the existing confraternity (which would remain exclusively male), but from the city at large. The men aimed particularly for influential patrician women, whom they would appoint to life terms; those of lesser status could join on probationary annual appointments. S. Croce’s men did not understand the real resource that these women represented, and assigned them duties on the level of a Ladies Auxiliary. Women reviewed applicants and visited the home to oversee staff and girls, but had no collective life, no voting powers, and no relations with the male company apart from oral reports between the women’s priora and the S. Croce rector. Their special charge to take particular care of “the laundry and other things relating to women” shows the limits of the men’s thinking here, and betrays an underlying class difference.

But these were women who did not do laundry. Administrative records suggest that they were many steps up the social ladder from the merchant Bonifacio dalle Balle who had started the home and the tertiaries who had staffed it. And indeed, the likes of Camilla Paleotti Gozzadini, Isabella Viggiani, and Hippolita Volta Boncompagni concerned themselves with more than just laundry, regardless of statutes. Yet for all their shine and status, they were coming into a home that had functioned for almost three decades without a Congregation of Gentlewomen. The resident tertiaries deeply resented their arrival and initially refused to obey the gentlewomen. The men never fully understood their potential and their indifference allowed the congregation to lapse into inactivity. It disappeared from the first statute review of 1647, but the women seem to have disappeared long before that. By 1630 Hippolita Volta Boncompagni moved over to the conservatory of S. Giuseppe, where she could be far more active.93

S. Giuseppe was quite different from either S. Croce or the Baraccano in that it was run solely by women. Twelve patrician women had established this conservatory in 1606, working with a Jesuit priest, Giorgio Giustiniani. Their meth-
ods were far closer to those of Florentine widows’ communities, though they did not live together. Like Florence’s Pietà, they had no elected executive of specialized officers beyond a priorress. Rather, all the women gathered for all the meetings and simply conducted business together. Like the Pietà, they had simple entrance requirements and procedures. Like the Pietà, they steered clear of the dowry business, refusing to offer these or even to arrange marriages at all. They seem to have seen themselves as best suited to offering emergency aid quickly to young women, eschewing the protracted and invasive review process of other male-administered conservatories in favor of immediate and always short-term shelter. Their most innovative strategy locally was a system of direct mentoring: each entering girl was paired with one of the twelve women, who would then take a personal interest in training her in domestic arts and preparing her for service as a maid in a Bolognese home. They did not operate at arm’s length, and were willing to take on hard work. At the extreme end of this kind of direct and protracted involvement in the lives of the girls, one of the women, Margherita Angiosoli Fantuzzi, actually moved into the home as the resident guardiana for a short term when the existing guardiana quit suddenly.94

Another parallel with the Pietà is that S. Giuseppe had no statutes until 1641. By this point its character had already begun to change significantly. Six men had come into the company in 1631 at the insistence of Giustiniani, who drew the six from the Jesuits’ local lay Congregation of Giesu Maria. By 1646 there were almost as many men as women in the company (ten to twelve).95 The ostensible reason, as conveyed in the first set of statutes drawn up in 1641, was that women experienced difficulties with some of the details of administration. Yet the picture of the women as well-meaning but hapless doyens is unconvincing.96 They were drawn from some of the best and most powerful families of Bologna, including Marchese Diamante Campeggi Pepoli, Marchese Giulia Pa- leotti, and Hippolita Boncompagni, and as such often had considerable experience tending family estates while their husbands were pursuing political and administrative careers elsewhere in the papal state.97 In less than a decade from their origin in 1606, the women had accumulated sixteen rural properties and two city homes.98 The account books demonstrate no signs of difficulty, and no complaints about it either. Yet the men took over the positions having to do with finance (depositario), provisioning (provveditore), and record keeping (secretario), and as they came into the home’s administration, other changes followed. The system of direct mentorships that paired women and wards seems to have ended by April 1636.99 Dowries and marriages were still avoided, but fundraising now
shifted to the girls and their sponsors outside the home. Just as Florence’s Pietà and Carità were gradually metamorphosing into convents, Bologna’s S. Giuseppe was turning into a boarding school or a lay shelter offering something like *serbanza*. Families or guardians seeking admission for a girl had to pay monthly fees (in advance) for subsistence, and the male administrators carefully kept admissions to within the financial resources available. The *qualità* of girls began edging upward, judging from their family names, and the number who went into domestic service began edging down.\(^{100}\)

**Cultures of Governance**

Men like Gian Galeazzo Bottrigari in Bologna and Francesco Rosati in Florence were fulfilling spiritual duties, charitable needs, and political ambitions when they undertook to start or run orphanages and conservatories. They worked with forms that were familiar to them, chiefly the confraternity and the *ospedale* as it had developed locally. In both cities they practiced a form of coordinated decentralization: what seem on the surface to be a number of entirely independent homes turn out on closer analysis to be a network linked together by a series of personal and official connections. Women like Lionarda Ginori and Marietta Gondi also aimed to meet spiritual, charitable, and political needs, and they too worked with forms that were familiar to them—in this case forms of community that Italian women had developed through the middle ages. Yet their distinct communities never lasted more than a few decades, if even that long, and their homes either disappeared, metamorphosed into convents or schools, or gradually adopted the local institutional administration.

Both cities’ networks of confraternities evolved in symbiotic relation to local political culture. Bologna’s tradition of subdividing charitable confraternities into a few semiautonomous groups that held together in a collegiate system and that sometimes allotted executive seats to particular social and occupational groups fit its evolving oligarchy. It was broadly representative and open to individual patronage networks, but it still preserved the ultimate authority of citizens, the well-born, and senators. As such, it was characteristic of early modern republicanism, with oligarchs preaching open participation and practicing closed control. They carefully divided up political, judicial, and economic power and fashioned formal and informal agreements to ensure the preservation of their rights, privileges, and spheres of control. What coordination there was existed largely through the efforts of those individuals who served as syndics, conserva-
tors, or massari in more than one confraternity, and also of those senators who became rector of one confraternity after another in turn.

At another level that we have not investigated here, the city’s Monte di Pietà handled the finances of a growing number of charitable institutions and so imposed further coordination. Some confraternal charities tended to move over time toward administrations that were more congregational and bureaucratic. Yet even in them, having large memberships, representative executives, and a very active and public cultic life were critical elements in maintaining the broad popular support base that generated officers, donors, and advocates. A long membership list gave these institutions a degree of legitimacy as public institutions. Coordinated decentralization fit local political needs so well that when the jewel was finally fit into the crown in 1563 with the Opera dei Mendicanti workhouse and poor relief system, it took the same confraternal organizational model.

In Florence’s form of coordinated decentralization more of the strings went back to Medici hands, which pulled and slackened them inconsistently and in pursuit of dynastic political goals. Florence’s charitable confraternities reflected the historical and administrative trauma that came from having been frequently suppressed and co-opted. They had lost their broad memberships and turned into small congregations of directors who set policy and hired staff to carry it out. This was a step farther along the continuum toward early modern state bureaucracies, which goes a long way to explaining why the Medici found it excellently adapted to their purposes. Yet the grand dukes shied away from the logic of moving farther along that continuum until they could be sure of their own power and sure that powerful magistrates would buttress and not undermine it. This caution split care for boys from that for girls into the Bigallo and S. Maria Vergine confraternities, respectively, and ensured that neither confraternity would be able fully to realize the ambitions of its members. Yet too little coordination was at least as impolitic as too much. What emerged instead in Florence was a smaller set of congregationally run institutions with self-perpetuating patrician memberships and a modest overlap of members, coordinated informally through ducal management, patronage, and favorites. Few of these groups had the broad memberships or short-term rotating executives that lent popular legitimacy to Bolognese institutions; these were not broadly public institutions, but narrowly bureaucratic ones. Cultic life and public ritual were not a fundamental part of confraternal recruitment or collective life or, for that matter, of popular legitimacy. But finances were important, and Florence’s com-
pact administrations trimmed spending on food, clothing, and firewood so efficiently that they regularly recorded healthy surpluses (see Table A.2). Whether the Medici helped themselves to these funds, as they did with other Florentine charities, is not yet clear.

In both cities, conservatories opened by women initially ran by different models, but moved gradually toward local norms and into local networks. Women founding homes took their expectations from examples familiar to them, such as the communities of pinzocchere (which were decentralized and participatory) and the practice of serbanza (i.e., girls brought in to the religious community as a temporary home—and not just an institutional shelter as it was for the boys). These existing forms legitimate our talking about women’s particular approach to governo as arising from deliberate choice, and not just a practical response to legal or cultural restrictions. In all cases, women typically relied more on group meetings than on the decisions of an executive. Their administration was more informal, apparently conducted without benefit of formal statutes and often without leaving minutes. Innovative forms of fundraising and governance brought women far more directly into the day-to-day life of the home and of its wards. All started with relatively open doors, avoiding protracted reviews of applicants, demonstrating fewer concerns for dowries and marriage (arguably more an issue for males concerned with lineage), and focusing on helping girls through an immediate period of difficulty and giving them some skill with which to fashion a life outside the home.

This kind of community could not survive Bologna’s drive to a uniform model of civic institution that met social and economic needs. The spoiler in Florence was the particular and enduring politics of Savonarolism, which gradually turned these conservatories into convents. Though much diluted, Savonarolan values continued to resonate in spiritual songs, popular biographies, and the actions of laity and clergy whose memories stretched back to the middle of the sixteenth century. By century’s end, Savonarolan lay women seem to have been a greater threat than Savonarolan clergy, whose loyalty to the regime was accepted. In both cities, the distinct characteristics of women’s governance gradually disappeared as men took a larger role in administration. After this point, each institution adopted the administrative and financial conventions found locally. In each, the direct participation of a large number of women in the work declined, and in the Carità and Pictà even the confraternities themselves disappeared. More to the point, these latter two moved away from being conservatories offering emergency and temporary shelter to abandoned and orphaned girls, and
directed their care instead to meet the concerns of patrilineage—either preparing girls for marriage (as in S. Giuseppe and initially the Carità), or removing this possibility from them (as in the Pietà, the Carità, and eventually S. Caterina). Meeting these concerns—which many patrician women shared—required tighter forms of administration and different notions of participation and accountability.

We should not romanticize, or depict these women simply as victims. Although the Pietà’s gradual transformation into a convent and S. Giuseppe’s into a boarding school were processes that developed after men took a larger role in confraternal administration, some women supported the shift and cooperated in making it happen. Certainly both homes had in their confraternities patrician women who were not easily cowed, and neither seems to have repudiated the statutes or changes imposed on them by their Dominican or Jesuit spiritual guides. They knew too much about their fathers, brothers, and husbands, and were too experienced in gender restrictions to appeal to the law of unintended consequences. The broader shifts at work were generational. Change came when founders died and successors arrived with new inspirations, ambitions, and models.

Florence’s congregational model was undeniably more efficient and rational. It was more recognizably modern in its move to a few specialized institutions, its division of labor between a small core of appointed (and often permanent) magistrates and a hired staff, and the distance it placed between magistrates and wards. Bolognese homes moved toward this congregational model by the early seventeenth century, but they never entirely abandoned the broad-based collegiate model that brought dozens of confraternity members into administration in regular rotation. Some of these changes came out of the drive to make the institutions economically self-sufficient, a self-sufficiency built not on accumulated endowments or ongoing pledges but on the children’s own piecework. Some came in the shift of political accountability away from broad supporting communities and toward a single ruler or an oligarchy that wound itself ever more tightly together into a smaller and smaller knot by intermarriage. Did this more efficient bureaucracy have any effect on the care offered in the homes? We saw earlier that Florentine homes tended to invest less time and energy than Bolognese ones on the procedures for bringing children in. Did they do the same when letting children out?