

THE **MESSAGE** OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

DON ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

FAMILIES

NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE

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My dear friends, readers of the *Salesian Bulletin*, friend of Don Bosco and his works throughout the world, and my dear Salesian Family: I greet you with all cordiality, wishing you the best in 2017, the new year that the Lord has given us as a gift.

Prompted by the beginning of a new year, and faithful to a tradition that comes down to us from Don Bosco himself, the Rector Major offers a stenna for that upcoming year. It is first delivered to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and, with them, to the entire Salesian Family around the world.

This year's theme, in keeping with Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, is on the family -- all families worldwide -- and has as its slogan: "We Are Family: Every Home, a School of Life and Love." Precisely this slogan and all that I have written as a commentary on it permits me to greet you with this reflection in which, with all sincerity, I state that **families never go out of style**: they are always "in fashion" in every age, for they are vital and essential in the lives of all people, in all ages, and in all cultures. Numerous studies and research reveal this.

And I wish to confirm this, too, by referring to the experience that each one of us, each one of you who is reading this, has had. We must recognize that, far beyond the limitations of our own families -- our real, "flesh and blood," imperfect families -- this notwithstanding, generally speaking, our family has been the most precious resource we have had in life; it was what led many of you to form your own family, following your lay vocation. It was truly a cradle of life in which we felt loved, cared for, protected, and accompanied so that we can manage on our own in life. It has been, and continues to be, for many of us, the place where we receive affection and where we replenish our energies and the "life space" that gives us serenity and creates personal harmony.

While writing this letter to the Salesian Family around the world, I felt in my heart that I should expound upon what the very Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, did: He had not only a mother chosen by God but also a family in which to be loved and cared for; a family in which He lived and learned many things, just as happens with us. Ultimately, He "learned how to be human."

And I also thought about Don Bosco. He himself narrated to us what living without a father from less than two years of age entailed - certainly having a family but feeling like an orphan, even with the gift of an exceptional mother like Mama Margaret. Mary Domenica Mazzarello (Maín) also came to mind. She lived in a religious context on a farm, very similar to that of Don Bosco, but different in that her infancy, adolescence, and young adulthood were lived entirely in her native town of Mornese and in the bosom of a numerous family that had the protection of both father and mother

There are many other life and family stories I could share with you.

My travels around the world have helped me see how important the family and families are, with their cultural and ethnic diversity, and how truly essential and fundamental they still are in all societies, as *the first and common school of humanity*.

Together with this, I invite you, dear readers, as Pope Francis has done, to take very seriously the value of and contact with families, for they are the house and the home for every boy and girl. It is here that one learns the fundamental value of love and of the affection that upholds and which parents give to their children. It is in the family that one teaches and learns the arts of dialogue, communication, and understanding, in living together day by day, with encounters and disagreements, and what life itself is like. It is also in the family that one experiences limitations, but also the most precious and essential of values: love, faith, freedom, respect, justice, work, honesty, etc., putting their roots into everyone's life.

There are yet other things that are not so much in fashion these days but which, with great reason, ought to exist in families, for they are significant. It should be the family that educates to temperance and moderation and that teaches that a word pledged has great value, and that committing oneself to something or someone shows the quality and dignity of the person. It is the family – or it ought to be the family – that offers the great gift of passing on the Faith.

And so, in answer to Pope Francis's strong appeal, what can we do to support the families and their children whom we meet on a daily basis in our educational presences around the world? We can:

- place our bets decidedly on accompanying, to the extent that they need and want us to, the journey that many of those families who are known to us are making;
- help families educate and grow through affection and the heart;
- be a “home open” to them where they know and feel that they will always be well-received;
- accompany the young who have a dream for their life plan and for matrimony;
- be fearless in proposing human, moral, and spiritual values to our young people and their families for, certainly, they desire and need these more than they can say;
- foster in the families of the young people under our care, the sense of joy in loving.
- help, through this awareness, to eradicate every type of discrimination against girls and women wherever we encounter them;
- maintain always an attitude of empathy and be ever ready to grasp the sometimes difficult realities in which many of the families around us are living; and

- return, decidedly, again and again, to *the authentic family atmosphere of Valdocco that Don Bosco so desired.*

I hope that we will be able to go forward to make some of these things happen. May the Family of Nazareth help us, as Pope Francis asks in his prayer:

“Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God’s plan.”