

NOVENA TO THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION 2017

**“Mary, Mother of God and of the Church, is actively present in our lives
and in the history of the Institute.”**

(Constitutions, Art. 44)

We, in the very first House in the Americas, Villa Colón, offer the following proposal of how to prepare for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception: to allow our hearts to live very many important moments of giving our love to Mary, patterning ourselves after our missionaries who were the first to set foot on American soil, in Paraguay. WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER. Our first Sisters succeeded in impressing on all American hearts this love for Mary: She guided their life towards the fullness of total self-giving to God and to neighbor. She was their Teacher, Mother, and Confidante. It was She who dried their tears of homesickness and She who encouraged them all the time to go forward in their mission.

We are invited to compare our own Marian devotion today with that of the missionaries in their early experiences and to ask Mary to be our powerful *Help* in not limiting ourselves to vocal prayer alone, but to live apostolic zeal. This zeal will help us commit ourselves to hand on love for Mary to all those around us - above all, to the children, teens, and young adults in our educational environments.

FIRST DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

Devotion to Mary in the first Community in Mornese was lived in a progressive way, a Marian journey. It was a true and proper per Marian *iter*. Without ever losing their profound devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Community members successively made the transition to devotion to Our Lady of Consolation and then, definitively, to devotion to Mary Help of Christians. From then on, they lived and spread that devotion with a great sense of love and veneration. This is why in the Cronaca of the Collegio in Mornese, to put an end to the accusations being made against Don Bosco's new Sisters – namely, that of being unfaithful to their original commitment to be Daughters of Mary Immaculate – they state: “To be Daughters of Mary Help of Christians does not mean we are any less Daughters of the Immaculate. On the contrary, the formula for our vows concludes with the beautiful invocation: ‘Oh Mary, Immaculate Virgin, powerful Help of Christians.’ Further, we always end our practices of piety with ‘May the Holy Immaculate Conception be blessed.’”

Don Pestarino tells us that in all Salesian Houses the Feast of Mary Immaculate is celebrated solemnly Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco did not distance himself from his earlier devotion but perfected it. We are now Daughters of Mary Help of Christians because we love Mary Immaculate. Don Bosco joined the two devotions by calling the Immaculate Virgin the Help of Christians at times and at other times the Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians. (see *Cronistoria*, vol. 1, p. 160)

N.B. – the page numbers listed throughout this document refer to the Italian versions of the texts cited

WITH MARY TODAY

What impact does the Feast of the Immaculate have on me, on both personal and apostolic levels? Let us call to mind and thank those who taught us to love Mary.

Mary Immaculate, pray for us.

SECOND DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

Before Don Costamagna left Mornese, the painting of Mary Help of Christians had disappeared from the Collegio's Chapel – the one that Don Pestarino had had blessed by Don Bosco for his beloved chapel. It was one of the first reproductions of the painting of the Blessed Virgin of Valdocco.

Before the departure of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for their first missionary expedition, Don Costamagna entrusted this image of Mary Help of Christians to Sr. Teresa Mazzarello, with the recommendation that she give it to no one, but that she safeguard it until they should arrive on American soil, keeping it as a memento of Mornese. The missionaries rejoiced and kept the picture as a precious treasure. It was before this image that the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians had professed their Vows. (see *Cronistoria*, vol. 2, p. 145)

Today, this painting is found in the "Room of Memories" in Almagro, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

WITH MARY TODAY

During the day, let each of us prepare ourselves personally to renew our consecration to the Lord, praying to Mary for our fidelity. Let us remember, in particular, our missionary Sisters: that She may guide, accompany, and sustain them at every moment – especially in moments of difficulty.



THIRD DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

November 1877. The first six FMA missionaries gather around Mother Mazzarello... These are their final moments with her... At a certain point, Don Cagliero appears with another picture: a beautiful canvas painting of Mary Help of Christians, who is holding in her arms a smiling Baby. He says with fondness: "I stole it from the sacristy of Valdocco for you." This painting was done by a man who was suffering from an eye ailment and was on the verge of going blind. He had turned to Don Bosco, who, after gliding the brush over the canvas, blessed him. In that very moment the man regained his sight. He gave Don Bosco this painting of the Virgin Mary. It is a miraculous painting. It gives one joy just to look at it. Don Cagliero continued: "Don Bosco has blessed it anew and sends it to the missionaries. Take it and may the Virgin Mary bless you on this long voyage." (see *Cronistoria*, vol. 2, p. 146)



This painting is found today in the chapel of Villa Colón, Montevideo, Uruguay.

WITH MARY TODAY

At Lauds or Vespers, let us present to Mary all those children who have lost their joy in living, who wander the streets without having anybody to whom to turn, and who are physically and affectively used and abused by adults. Let us ask Mary to touch the hearts of those persons and to aid these children in finding a helping hand to support them to get out of their situation and to live their childhood with dignity and hope. Personally, and in Community, let us ask ourselves: What can we do – concretely – for the children with whom we have contact and who are living in a difficult situation?

Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, pray for children.

FOURTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

November 14, 1877: Don Bosco watches the ship as it pulls away from port. Mother Mazzarello tries not to cry. Don Cagliero would like to make a joke to raise spirits, but he cannot. All of a sudden, a sound reaches them from the ocean: It is Don Costamagna playing the piano and the chorus of six Daughters of Mary Help of Christians missionaries singing, "Io voglio amar Maria."* The strains of the song then fade in the distance. It brings up a sweet memory because, when Don Costamagna had composed and played it in Mornese, Mother Mazzarello told him: "You are not the only one who wants to love the Virgin Mary – we, too, want to love Her!"

**I Want to Love Mary*

WITH MARY TODAY

In difficult moments that I have experienced, when I could not see the way clearly - What experience did I have of Mary? Did I propose to others near me during those difficult moments to look with faith and love to Mary?

Mary Help of Christians, Mother of Hope, pray for us.

FIFTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

From the letter written by the missionaries on the island of Flores (Montevideo) to Mother Mazzarello: "During the long nights, Don Costamagna played the harmonium and sang: *Il Marinaio, L'orfano*,* etc., etc., with the clerics. We, instead, would sing: *Voglio bruciare d'amore, Chiamando Maria**, etc., etc., and sometimes the *Ave Maris Stella**, but with a new tone taught us by a Spanish lady, Ernestina, who is very religious. Even the Director learned it and said that it was so beautiful that he would write down the music for it and send it to Italy."

**The Mariner and The Orphan; I Wish to Burn with Love and Calling Mary; Hail, Star of the Sea*

WITH MARY TODAY

During the Entrustment to Mary, we will pray for all the countries of the world - especially those in war or suffering natural catastrophes, for powerless immigrants, to stop violence from drug trafficking, and to end human trafficking, asking Her to be the Star which illumines and gives hope in the midst of these difficult situations in our world today.

We will share a significant initiative which our Province or Community is doing regarding these situations.

Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, pray for us in these concerns.



SIXTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

From the letter written by Don Costamagna to Mother Mazzarello from the island of Flores: "Certainly! Tell all the Sisters to come to the Americas, but first, to crush their own will, even in little things. I have discovered time and time again that the Virgin Mary loves Her Daughters very much, but it is necessary to love Her and make Her loved."

WITH MARY TODAY

The missionary dimension is a fundamental element of our identity as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and is the expression of our universal characteristic, present from the very origins of our Institute.

I shall reflect on the size of my missionary heart: How am I living this evangelization dimension of the charism in my own circumstances, in my Community, and in my work? Let us recall the witness of the missionaries whom we have encountered. Let us share about them and thank them. Let us renew our being missionaries of hope and joy.

Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, pray for missionaries.

SEVENTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

When the first missionary Community finally established itself at Villa Colón, the little house was far from being comfortable but it possessed a treasure: the painting of the Help of Christians. Sister Angela Vallese wrote to Don Bosco: "We thank you for the painting of Mary Help of Christians which you gave us. If only you could see it! It is here in our chapel, which is so tiny that the painting practically covers the whole wall. Due to the lack of churches in this place, on feast days our chapel is filled with people who come to take part in our services. All are won over by that beautiful painting of Mary Help of Christians and praise our dear Mother..." (From the *Cronaca* of Villa Colón)

WITH MARY TODAY

Today, we, too, can be missionaries *with* and *like* Mary, strengthening our missionary commitment by finding or visiting someone who is living through a difficult or painful situation – to bring them a little encouragement and hope. If possible, let us share with him or her a holy picture or a medal of Mary.

Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, pray for us.

EIGHTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

From Mother Catherine Daghero's log of her journey through Uruguay – November 1895: "I don't want to finish without highlighting that here in the Americas, one professes a special devotion to Mary Help of Christians. There is not one House that does not have a statue of Her in the playground."

WITH MARY TODAY

"Trusting in Don Bosco's word: 'It is Mary, who guides us', let us cultivate for Her a thankful and filial love and commit ourselves to hand it on to the young. In Mary, the Virgin Immaculate Help of Christians, we contemplate the fullness of self-giving to God and to neighbor... Let us turn to Her with simplicity and trust." (*Constitutions*, Art. 44)

Let us pray the rosary asking Mary to guide us, as does a good mother who is filled with mercy.



NINTH DAY

WITH MARY 140 YEARS LATER

In 2012, a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians was placed on the island of Flores in Uruguay, in memory of our first missionaries who, WITH MARY, stepped onto American soil 140 years ago.

The two paintings blessed by Don Bosco passed over to that island. From that solitary island, unknown to the world, Mary is still present in our hearts and blesses the successive generations which dedicate themselves passionately to the mission of evangelization.

WITH MARY TODAY

Let us look to the Help of Christians of the island of Flores and share whatever She suggests to us. She was and is a missionary among the missionaries. Let us ask Mary to intercede for all the future Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the entire world so that they may have the same apostolic passion as that of our first Sisters.

Mary Immaculate Help of Christians, pray for vocations.

We suggest praying this beautiful prayer, composed by Pope Francis, on December 8, the Solemnity of Mary, the Immaculate Conception.

ACT OF VENERATION TO THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AT THE SPANISH STEPS

PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Spanish Steps, Rome

Thursday, 8 December 2016

[\[Multimedia\]](#)

O Mary, our Immaculate Mother,
on your feast day I come to you,
and I come not alone:
I bring with me all those whom your Son has entrusted to me
in this city of Rome and in the entire world
that you may bless them and preserve them from harm.

I bring to you, Mother, our children,
especially those who are alone and abandoned
and for this reason are deceived and exploited.

I bring to you, Mother, our families,
who carry life and society forward
with their hidden daily efforts.
In a special way, I bring to you the families who struggle the most
on account of many internal and external problems.

I bring to you, Mother, all workers, both men and women,
and I entrust to you especially those who, out of need,
are forced to work at an undignified job
and those who have lost work or who are unable to find it.

We need your Immaculate gaze:
so we may rediscover the ability to look upon persons and things
with respect and gratitude,
without egotistical or hypocritical interests.

We need your Immaculate heart:
so we may love freely,
without ulterior motives, seeking only the good of the other,
with simplicity and sincerity, renouncing all masks and tricks.

We are in need of your Immaculate hands:
so we may caress with tenderness
and touch the flesh of Jesus
in our poor, sick, or despised brethren
so as to raise up those who have fallen and support those who falter.

We are in need of your Immaculate feet:
so we may go toward those who know not how to take the first step
and so we may walk on the paths of those who are lost
to seek out and find those who feel alone.

We thank you, O Mother, because in showing yourself to us
free from all stain of sin,
you remind us that before all else, we have God's Grace,
the Love of Jesus Christ who gave His life for us, and
the Strength of the Holy Spirit which renews all things.

Help us not give in to discouragement;
but, trusting in your constant help,
may we engage ourselves in full renewal of self,
of this city, and of the entire world.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God! Amen.