



ADMA

Associazione di Maria Ausiliatrice

Families

Implementing the Rector Major's Strenna 2017

--- Some Ideas that Work!

“But now that we are preparing for marriage, Father, is there anything for us?”

by Fr. Tom Dunne, SDB, and Sr. Denise Sickinger, FMA

ADMA Families: Committed to helping families become *Schools of Life and Love*

One benefit of attending the Salesian Family Spirituality Days in Rome is that we had the chance to meet Salesian Family members from around the world who are already implementing the Rector Major's Strenna of 2017 and have been doing so for a number of years. This is a Strenna theme that works ... and that makes a difference in the lives of young people and families in need.

Both of us were moved by the simple but effective interventions that these ADMA members make to benefit families and young people in their areas. We invite all the E-Service readers to come to know ADMA and these members of the Primary Group from Valdocco and their spiritual and educational projects. Perhaps a number of us in the Salesian Family in our provinces of North America will be inspired to establish groups of ADMA in their locale and then imitate them in implementing Strenna 2017 during the coming year.



The three pairs (beginning with the gentleman in the white sweater, and moving right from him) from ADMA who shared their personal and Group's journeys with us.

The following vignette contains excerpts from the talk given by Tullio and Simonetta, members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) in Turin (Tullio, is, in fact, the World President of ADMA), who gave one of the more memorable presentations of the conference. This married couple described a pastoral project that they, and the members of ADMA, have been carrying on for the past 24 years. The project is an outreach to families in the spirit of Don Bosco's charism. Their efforts on behalf of other married couples and their children seek to foster the growth of marital and familial love within the family and to form a community of Christian families centered around the characteristics inherent to Don Bosco's spirituality, educational ministry, community-building, and service. The ADMA community pursues these objectives through programs of family formation, networking, and service. Their talks were inspiring as we heard of their personal journey as a couple, bound with the journey with ADMA. What began with one simple question: "But now that we are preparing for marriage, Father, is there anything for us?" has blossomed into well-established programs for marriage enrichment, networking for shared family support, and family retreats for developing a community of Catholic families that share Don Bosco's charism.

Let us introduce ourselves: we are Tullio and Simonetta and we are part of the Association of Mary Help of Christians founded by Don Bosco in 1869. We live in Torino and we feel very fortunate – no, blessed – because the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians is there – the center from which all the activities of the Salesian Family began: from Mary's home to our homes.



Tullio and Simonetta outside Valdocco

For about 24 years now – a number which makes us very happy – we have been making a journey with other families. We can truly thank the Lord, Mary, and Don Bosco because they have guided us up until now and continue to guide us along an experience which has as its precise goal to teach families to become “a school of life and love”. Our experience grew out of desire which moved us to ask a Salesian Priest who had accompanied us as young people: “But now that we are preparing for marriage, Father, is there anything – any initiative or proposal – for us?” Our journey began with this question and this desire, which other friends shared, and now providentially exists in the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA).

It moves us to realize how, in a long-ago 1869, when Don Bosco felt the call from Mary to found the Association Mary Help of Christians for the defense of the faith of the people, he thought about so many people – and among these was our family, as well as many others.

The dream of a journey which welcomes and gathers in

In truth, the first desire that we felt was not to isolate ourselves: with matrimony, family commitments multiply themselves and the temptation is always there to be absorbed by them and

to isolate from others. Instead, we felt called to live the promise heard during our journey as young people – the one where Jesus says: "I have come so that they might have life and have it in abundance." We understood that this promise of joy was almost our right and, in the final analysis, is the meaning of our call to live as spouses.

When trying to identify the essential traits of the dream which we felt, we could say that, before all else, we wanted to find a welcoming environment ("a home which welcomes," as we Salesians say) and a journey on which everyone would feel welcomed – at whatever point they might be in their life. We wanted a path that we could walk together, in mutual accompaniment: today I support and sustain you; tomorrow you will do so for me. Beyond this, we dreamed of a journey so beautiful that it would attract and would be simple: in a word, we wanted a journey that was fit for a family.

A project as beautiful as this had to be founded on the rock of the Love of the Lord. Because of this realization, we immediately grasped the importance of fidelity to personal and group prayer, even little ones, and of taking on commitments little by little - each one according to where he or she is on the journey. These, then would help us create something most important: a network of families who trust in the fact that, "If the Lord does not build a house, in vain do the builders labor."

The characteristics of this journey

And so, here, in a few words and after many years, is what seems to us to have given form and substance to our "family of families."

To live a life of entrustment because Two Columns sustain us: the Holy Eucharist and Mary. Our entire life as spouses unfolds in everyday life. Because of this, we feel it is important to learn to put prayer at the center so as to keep Jesus and Mary present in all the different situations that arise.

Each person lives this to his own degree and according to his or her possibilities: there is no set standard or pre-defined method to follow. What is suggested is that one begin simply, even if that means only with the Sign of the Cross in the morning, entrusting one's entire day [to the Lord and Mary] and, in the evening, to thank God and to ask for His forgiveness. After this, it is prayer itself which makes its own space in our life so that one eventually reaches the point of reciting the rosary and reading daily Scripture and even participating in Holy Mass during the week. In our experience, we find that the rosary is often said at various moments throughout the day: when we're in the car, when we're doing housework, while we're waiting for our child to come out from school, or while we're in line at the supermarket. This attitude, which we call entrustment, is one way of being simple, but gives our hearts tremendous peace. We can assure you that in the frenetic rhythm of our daily life, it is a prodigious weapon. We have learned to entrust ourselves, that is, literally, to handover to Mary and Jesus so many little and big difficulties and situations that we cannot reach to, either due to tiredness or because they are bigger than we are, and we have seen that... *it works!*



Self-formation to learn how to be spouses and parents

Life continually makes us question ourselves; therefore, we feel strongly that we must take responsibility to care for our own personal formation in order to be Christian spouses and parents. Thus, just as it is for babies who need to learn how to walk and to speak, so it is for spouses: we, too, need to learn. We need to learn what it means to live as spouses and as parents. Also, we must get to know each other, to share experiences, not to isolate ourselves, and not to lose hope.

It seems to us that it is important to share with you some of the more significant things that have been given to us and which we consider to be pearls guiding us along our journey:

- before all else, matrimony is a gift, a grace, which is certainly not exhausted on the honeymoon but which is active 24/7, on “4-wheel drive”. which Matrimony has placed in our poor life the ability to love as God loves – first and foremost where our spouse is concerned;
- for this reason, we can’t have any reservations in our family relationships: we don't give *something*; we give ourselves. I feel very much that it is my responsibility to make Simonetta happy, to help her grow to fullness as her own person, and to bring her to live Paradise already here on earth - but above all in heaven;
- to be husband and wife is to make a “WE” come into being, springing from the union of two diversities and also two fragilities; therefore, to love oneself is to pardon oneself. The idea of "always being right" doesn't work because it is together that couples win: the “WE” brings about the victory;
- arguments are part and parcel of the dynamics of a couple, but dialogue – above all about the feelings that we experience - and the ability to be the first to ask pardon are essential keys for growth. In our experience, we have always sought to respect and put into practice the teaching of the Psalm which says "Let not the sun go down on your wrath" by making peace every evening;
- As parents, we have understood and we continue to experience that our children are given to us but are not our possession. We have also learned a number of things: We need to be authoritative and not authoritarian. Our children see themselves as we see them. To educate a son or a daughter is to form a man or woman. More than words, the witness of

our lives is what counts. Both sweetness and firmness are necessary. Conflicts cannot be avoided but can be dealt with.

A family of families

Perhaps what we like the most about our journey is that it involves the entire family – no one is excluded. For both our monthly retreat and our week-long spiritual exercises during the summer, everything is organized keeping the whole family in mind. On one side, there are the parents and, on the other, there are the children, divided into groups according to age. To the former, a journey founded on praying with the Word of God, interwoven with formation for living the dynamics of a couple and the challenges of education in our daily lives is proposed. For the children of kindergarten and elementary school ages, some type of animation is organized [in the form of a summer camp so the parents can be free to be with each other and with the Lord in prayer and intimacy]. For middle school, junior high, and college-age children, a spiritual journey is proposed. We ask the older children, beginning with those in high school, to collaborate in animating the younger ones.

It is beautiful to see the older children caring for the smaller ones as if these were their younger brothers and sisters. We know that the older ones do this thinking about giving back what they received [their parents' time]. In addition to this, every 24th of the month at 9 PM, the young people animate the rosary that we gather to say in Valdocco, in St. Francis de Sales Church, next to the Basilica. We also have the possibility of receiving the Sacrament of Confession.



ADMA, Torino, Day of Retreat for families

Together with the Salesian Priests, Brothers, and Sisters: Complementarity

One of the most wondrous things that we want to share with you is the beauty of the presence of the consecrated Salesian Religious. We have experienced how much richness there is in working on projects and in being together, discovering and sharing the characteristics of each of our vocations as we pray together and have our consecrated Salesians as points of reference for our children. This collaboration is not only fruitful for us families and for the consecrated Religious but is also a true gift for we make the marvelous discovery that we are all on this journey together and bring to it our own personal riches. Among other things, this has also taught us to make our families much more responsible in the area of service, thus helping us value the specific charisms

of each of the different vocations. We call this “the beauty of the complementarity of our different lifestyles”.

The fruits: joy and love

After having indicated some of the traits of our journey, we can tell you that we have seen its fruit - to our great wonder and awe. The first of these is joy. There is joy in seeing:

- families living in the midst of difficulties entrusting themselves and giving reciprocal aid;
- children creating profound bonds among themselves and learning to pray and to entrust themselves because they see this being done by their parents and the friends of their parents;
- family networks helping each other confront economic, educational, and relational problems; and
- our seeking advice from the consecrated Religious, which enriches and creates mutual growth.

Then there is the love of families that, after becoming aware of the gifts they have received, begin to give service to others: in their parishes or by opening their homes to give hospitality to and accompany other families. One of the greatest gifts has been Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on every 24th of the month in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. There has been a constant increase in the participation of families in these moments, so that today we have reached 250 participants on every retreat. We have also seen the creation of a course for young families, “Primi passi in famiglia” [“First Steps as a Family”], open to the entire province in collaboration with the Salesian Youth Pastoral team.



Then, too, new groups have arisen: most wonderful is what is happening in Aosta, where some couples who desired to make known the gift they had received decided to run a retreat in their parish. [In 2015, a total of about 400 people – 90 families – attended the three retreats offered.] The response was so great that now an Aosta group of about 80 members is beginning to form.



an ADMA retreat for families, 2015

The more we discover the gifts that God places at our disposition, the more we feel the need to share them with others. In particular, in these last years, we have felt strongly the challenges to make the Sacrament of Matrimony loved and to uphold it, to support the family, and to make it

understood that: "The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence". (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 57)

In the two coming weeks, we will present some vignettes from the other two ADMA pairs who spoke to us, describing their personal experiences and the family and youth ministry initiatives carried out by members of ADMA Primary. We feel sure that all our readers will be impressed with the way that these very creative Salesian Family members have instituted small community settings that bring Don Bosco's charism, spirituality, and educational system to young people and families.

To view the video presentation on ADMA Families as given during the Salesian Family Spirituality Days and to learn about the ADMA Youth initiative, please click below - with the caveat that you must have a Facebook account to view the videos:

[Presentation to all at the 35th Annual Salesian Family Spirituality Days, ADMA Families](#) (uploaded on January 22, 2017 - scroll down to find it

["Affida, Confida, Sorridi" ADMA Youth](#) (uploaded on January 27, 2017)