



# ADMA Primaria

Torino—Italia

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*Pro Manuscripto*

*Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between eros and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.*

(Benedetto XVI, Deus caritas est, 11)

*"What happens in the life of a person when he has the experience of God through the motherhood of Mary? He begins to transform, almost to relive the experience that Madonna herself did: she felt looked, she felt loved, she felt called, she was graced."*

(Don Pascual Chavez, Czestochowa 2011)

# A DREAM...

Don Bosco was a saint dreamer; he lived with his heart in the sky and his feet down on earth, and loved to express himself with dreams. He narrated them to his children, especially during his "good night", the farewell he gave the boys at the end of the day.



These pages are for all those who, in these difficult times when the family is put to the test, try to anchor the family to the two columns of Don Bosco's dream: Jesus in the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians.

In the famous "dream of the two columns," Don Bosco sees the ship of the Church attacked by numerous small vessels that want to "hit it with their rostrum and cause every possible damage." While the battle rages, two "high solid columns" rise from the sea, not far from each other. Above one of them there is a statue of the Immaculate Virgin, at whose feet hangs a large placard with the inscription "Help of Christians"; on the other one, which is much taller and bigger, stands a Host of proportionate size to the column and, below it, another sign with the words "Saviour of the faithful". The battle still rages fiercest until the Pope, overcoming every obstacle, manages to dock the ship to the two pillars of the Church. The enemies flee and scatter, and the sea goes back to a great peace.





Our experience tells us that not only the Church as a whole, but also the small fragile boat of each family, anchored to two columns, may continue safely on its way. With this small booklet we want to share the experience of many families who, for years, have been in the footsteps of Don Bosco in ADMA, the Association of Mary Help of Christians founded by the Saint in 1869, one of the group of the Salesian Family.

Every action we do is transparency of infinity: to love without measure, to accept without exception, to give without waiting for an answer, to forgive without blackmailing, to serve without compensation. Truly, "the measure of love is to love without measure" according to the example of Jesus in His Passion, who "consumed" all of himself for ourselves! Only Crucified Love Rises! But without Him we cannot do anything, and we must learn to nourish ourselves with the Eucharist and the Word of God, which is always alive and new. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit to help us to fully live the sacrament of marriage, and we entrust our families to the maternal protection of Mary, to learn to love as Christ loved us. (*Andrea and Maria Adele*)

The more we are able to convey to the reader the joy and the daily reality of our path, the more we can circulate that Grace we are receiving in abundance.

To present our experience we have tried to answer some simple questions.

# WHO ARE WE?



## FAMILIES FOLLOWING IN DON BOSCO'S FOOTSTEPS!



We are families who have been walking together for about twenty years, under the guidance of Salesian priests, along a path that has borne much fruit:

- the love between spouses that is renewed each day,
- spiritual growth both as individuals and as families,
- training for parents in the difficult task of education,
- friendship among our children that makes them more able to share their faith and witness it to others.



All this is achieved not without difficulty, but with the trust that this project is fully entrusted to the Lord and to Mary. Our experience has made us realize how important it is to deepen our formation in the life of faith with regular meetings, under the guidance of priests. Each family participates with simplicity according to its abilities; we just encourage assiduity, to be able to receive the most benefit. We are, however, invited to cultivate participation in the life of the Church by taking active part in parish life or oratories.

Following in Don Bosco's footsteps means to cultivate different aspects of the Salesian charisma in our families: the joy of living, the attention to prayer, the union with God in daily life, the service to others, particularly the young and the poor, the confidence in God, provident Father, the entrustment to Mary, who is our Mother and Teacher.

# THE BEGINNING: GOING TO THE MOUNTAINS, TO LEARN HOW TO PRAY.

Our story begins at the fort of Santa Chiara, in Val di Susa (Piedmont, Italy), with a week of spiritual exercises under the guidance of a Salesian priest. Since then the experience is repeated every year: the number of participants is growing and the weeks have been multiplied and enriched with other opportunities for formation and spiritual guidance during the year.



Come Lord Jesus, break into our lives, make us capable of opening our hearts and of following the advice Mary gave us at Cana: "Do whatever he tells you." Help us to be faithful to the moments of prayer and to convince us that from the Eucharist your life flows into us, and that only by being met and fed by you we can be love, live fully, be your apostles. Give us as a couple to preserve your love, to overcome our hardships to be one in you. Teach us that Heaven is built here in everyday life and that every sacrifice in You for You and with You enlarges our heart. Fill us with joy, grant us to live the small and large crosses knowing we are entrusted to Mary, and belong to Mary, as a safe way to get to know You, love You, and offer any suffering to You (*Simonetta*).

## A PROVIDENTIAL ENCOUNTER

In this journey we have met the ADMA, Association of Mary Help of Christians, founded by Don Bosco in 1869, with the aim of promoting and defending the faith of the common people, paying particular attention to families and young people, and spreading the cult of the Eucharist and the devotion to Mary Help of Christians. We see in this providential meeting Mary's style who, with simplicity and concreteness, protects and encourages all her children and takes care of our families by guiding them step by step. Today ADMA is open to a growing number of families seeking to live and share Christian values in today's world, focusing on the love of the Eucharist and the devotion to Mary.



# WHAT TO DO?



## CATECHESIS

Ours is a formation that consists of annual cycles of catechesis.

This year's theme is chosen and developed by Salesian priests in line with church indications and the pastoral proposals of the Salesian Family. Over the years various topics have been covered such as: Spouses and Parents, The Entrustment to Mary, The Reality of the Family and the Primacy of God, The Beatitudes, Affectivity, Going to Saint Paul's school, Education, The Prayer.

The catechesis are proposed during the summer retreats, the milestone of the year-long journey, and during the monthly retreats.

All the catechesis have always three indispensable references: the centrality of the Gospel and Sacraments, the attention to marital and educational dynamics, the goal of a more intense life of prayer and a greater loyalty to our own duties at home, at work, in the Church.

For some time we needed to stay a little together as a couple and not just as parents of two children, or as two people sharing the same roof, in addition to a flood of daily work and home commitments. In this way we found some valuable time for "us" in the company of other couples in a continuous and necessary progress, and in the company of the Lord, to whom we entrusted the success of our family

*(Aldo and Tiziana)*

# THE WEEK OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

The retreats are held in the lovely Salesian home in Pracharbon (Val d'Ayas, Italy), once a year, at the beginning of August, in two shifts of one week each. The week is lived in a climate of commitment and of rest, friendship and simplicity. The retreat is the centre of what is developed throughout the year in the monthly retreats.



The rhythm of the day is marked by traditional fixed moments: the morning prayer; the catechesis, personal prayer and couple prayer; the recitation of the Rosary in groups, to express the love of the families for Mary, to ask for her maternal protection and to give thanks for



the gifts received; group sharing, inexhaustible source of valuable lessons, heartily donated; the Holy Mass, which is the heart of the whole day. People can also spend an hour a day in Eucharistic adoration. All this in the spirit of a Christian family holiday, making friends, talking and joking. The day ends with the "good night" farewell and the

prayer of Compline.



The week has its peak in the desert, a moment of silence and prayer in which to find God and find oneself, to grow surrounded by love and come to decisions. In silence and recollection, prayer and prolonged meditation, the spouses can reap the rewards of the whole journey, fruits that will become practical resolutions to be lived in their own homes in their daily lives.

The week ends with a day's outing, in which our gratitude to the Lord is expressed through friendship and happiness, rest and play, sharing and singing.



## THE MONTHLY RETREATS

The monthly retreats last a day and are held on Sundays, from 9 to 17. During the day moments of catechesis are combined with moments of sharing in groups. We cheerfully share a packed lunch.

The hospitality in the houses of the Salesians of Don Bosco and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians has permitted an ever increasing number of participating families and children.

## ON THE 24<sup>th</sup> OF EACH MONTH, DAY OF MARY

The meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of the month is a little gem, one hour that combines the things that Don Bosco loved so much and wanted to convey to young people: Eucharist, Mary, the Gospel, Confession and family spirit. In Valdocco at 21.00 we meet for Eucharistic Adoration and the Rosary, we are given a short catechesis and the chance to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation on the commemoration day of Mary Help of Christians. Meeting her every month is a way to thank her, to renew our trust in her and ask her many favours.



At 19.00 the young meet for a moment of instruction and sharing and a cheerful meal, before joining us for the commemoration.



## PILGRIMAGES

They are special moments when the family sets off to meet Mary, who as a caring mother invites us to convert and helps us to deal with our difficulties with faith. These are important chances to live together, where children learn to trust in God naturally following their parents, sharing moments of prayer not only with their parents, but also with boys and girls of their age. In these occasions we experience the joy of the love of God among us, and we feel the need to proclaim it and share it with the people we meet in everyday life.



# HOW?

## A PATH ALSO FOR OUR CHILDREN



Our families participate as a whole: it's our style. So the family grows together, and yet each has its own place and friends.

The entertainment of children is entrusted to young animators, largely our elder sons. Thus, while parents find the chance for meditation and prayer, the children, organized in different age groups, play, learn, act, pray. Certainly the children enjoy themselves a lot, and we see that they grow up well.



By observing their parents pray and share faith, they learn to live with their family in the presence of Jesus and Mary. For them it becomes natural to do the same. Seeing the footsteps of our children, we are increasingly convinced that the testimony of our faith is the greatest gift we can offer them, and the richest legacy that we leave them.

To rely on our Mother in Heaven is now essential, because we feel that alone we cannot do anything. Living a 'bubbling' life, with many children, helped us to be a bit more aware of this inability to get everywhere, and therefore it is natural to ask for help. Asking for help to Mary is to fully live every moment, knowing that our Mother in heaven helps us, asking only our conversion, asking we follow her Son. Jesus asked his mother to stay close to those he had called to follow him. With our efforts and even our mistakes, try to follow him too, knowing that we have another mother in heaven who teaches us the way on this earth.

*(Ada e Andrea)*



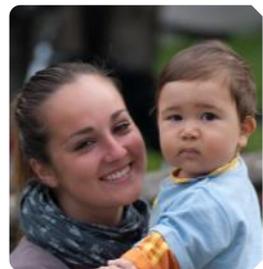


## WITH A SPIRIT OF SERVICE

The organization of retreats and spiritual exercises in summer requires the commitment of many people. For this there are couples that make themselves available as needed: organization, children entertainment, cooking, cleaning ... No matter whether humble or complex: everyone has the opportunity to make himself or herself useful by offering something of himself.

Among other things, by offering their availability, many often discover hidden talents: there are brides who discover with amazement in their spouses abilities and gifts so far unknown, and become new motives to develop relationships even further. Children learn to serve following their parent's example in the simplest way.

Watching them behave in accordance with our principles fills the heart with joy. Truly the spirit of service is a vital ingredient in our formation!





## "FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY YOU GIVE"

There are no economic barriers: even this must be a legacy of Don Bosco. The cost of the monthly retreats is reasonable, thanks to shared packed lunch, and so a few Euros are enough for accommodation and materials. Each family according to its possibilities covers the cost of a week of spiritual exercises: "He who has no money, come anyway!" When some families cannot bear the cost, it's the rest of the group that covers the costs, with discretion and fraternal spirit. Money should not preclude a family who wants to receive God's gifts.

This occurs especially nowadays when many sorrows affect families: the loss of jobs, the difficulty of covering necessary expenses! When this happens, we understand once more that we are truly a "family of families". Often during the retreats we are asked to help a family in need and offerings are collected, made according to the possibilities of each. It does not matter to know who it will be for or why. But it's comforting to know that in times of need, we have brothers and sisters whom we can ask for help.



# AND IN EVERYDAY LIFE?

## PRAYING TO NEVER STOP THINKING ABOUT GOD



Each family receives gifts and graces. In daily prayer the consciousness of being truly sons and daughters of God grows and family and marital love increases. Prayer raises awareness that God renews the Grace of marriage every day, filling life

with meaning.

We have experienced that monthly retreats are a real breath of fresh air that regenerates everyday life: they are an invitation to renew an increasingly deep and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, enlighten the soul push us to overcome fears and resistance, and to entrust all our joy and suffering.



Each family then prolongs the prayer in their homes, each with different solutions, attentive to the needs of all its members. Listening to what families say about the way they pray at home is always very rewarding and is a way to realize the great variety of forms that prayer takes on, when it enters faithfully and creatively into everyday life.

One day it occurred to some of us to publish a prayer request on our website. From that day, it has become habit for many to access the site to take note of the requests for prayer. It's comforting to realize we are not alone in asking God for help, knowing that other families have spoken of you with God. And it's heart-warming to see how many graces God bestows on us.

## ACCOMPANIED BY THE SPIRITUAL FATHER

In our experience we have learned how important the spiritual guidance of individuals and couples is. Priests are valuable guides that encourage our encounter with Jesus, console, support and invite us to ask for the maternal intercession of Mary. It's a conversion meeting that really transforms your life.



## THE GRACE OF BEING MARRIED...

It is essential to feed conjugal love every day, learning to be husband and wife, father and mother. These are challenging "jobs", no one has all the answers and no one starts with experience. It is a daily adventure. It cannot be lived alone: one person counting on his/her own strength alone, cannot build a happy marriage.

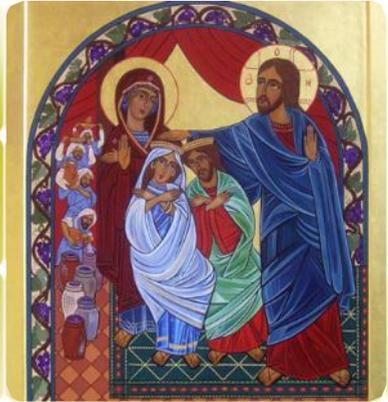
It should be understood that the differences between men and women are not merely the result of a cultural convention, but a plan of God: man and woman are called to be an "us" where difference and complementarity are the source of fertility. Forming the spouses means tracing with a sure hand the outlines of being husband and wife, father or mother, aware that the confusion of roles is a major cause of the deep crisis affecting the family today.



With Mary Help of Christians we want to grow as disciples and become real apostles. Apostles for our children who need to breathe the purity of the Gospel and become strong in faith, in a world so difficult for young people. And then apostles in our environment, on work, in the way we celebrate our holidays, the joys of living and in the way we face difficulties. To achieve the plan of God we need Her. With Mary Help of Christians close to us we feel safe and if we imitate her style we know the Lord is pleased with us. In summary, being part of ADMA represents for us a point of arrival as a thank you to Mary and a starting point with Her because we want to become true apostles of our Lord Jesus. *(Luca e Renata)*

## ...PUTTING MARRIAGE AT THE CENTER AND JESUS AT THE CENTER OF MARRIAGE...

Our desire is to have Jesus in our families and bring Him to others. We try to live our vocation of spouses and parents aware of the need to have Jesus dwelling in our everyday lives, entrusting our worries and labours to Him.

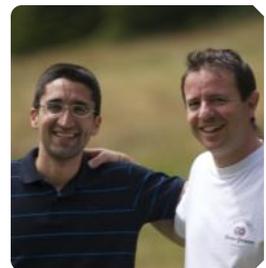


God wants to be present in our everyday life as spouses. This is why our commitment to work, to the education of children and to the duty of the apostolate is nourished by the communion with God and between spouses.

Thus we discover that grace abounds in our marriage and to sanctify every activity we ask for the strength that comes from Jesus in the Eucharist, entrusted to Mary.

## AND PRAYER BECOMES CHARITY

The gifts received on our journey are brought into everyday life. There are various ways: from facing the needs of families close to us or in difficulty, to Pastoral activity especially for the young or for the poor, or in formation of families and in the duty of the apostolate. We raise funds for families in difficulty, and we exploit our networks of relationships in order to provide each family with the service which it most needs. Particular attention is given to younger families, so that the experience of families who have walked together longer is put at their disposal to address common problems in their marriage and in raising children.



# A FEW IMAGES TO TELL OUR STORY



## THE EUCHARIST, THE BREAD THAT SUSTAINS US ON OUR WAY

The Eucharist is the first column on which to anchor our lives, feelings, desires and frailties. The Eucharist is the bread we eat on our way that nourishes us and helps us to take the same attitude and behaviour of Jesus. The only thing we know is that we cannot do without Him.

## THE ROSARY

Imagine this scene. The place has a large yard or a garden or a mountain meadow. There are mothers pushing strollers. Fathers with children in their arms. Boys holding hands with younger brothers or sisters. The parents hold a rosary in their fingers and pray. It 's the time before lunch, and families, as every day, recite the Rosary.

"Praying the Rosary is to contemplate the life of Jesus through the eyes of Mary".



## ALL TOGETHER, AT THE FOOT OF MARY

At Pracharbon, on the lawn in front of the house that is home to the summer camp, shaded by two large pine trees, there is a statue of our Mary Help of Christians with the child Jesus in her arms. At the end of each camp, immediately after the last Mass celebrated outdoors, we take the usual photo, the one where we gather together at Mary's feet. One hundred and fifty smiling faces. Joy



is really overwhelming. In our hearts we have the Eucharist just received, in our ears we can hear the final blessing before our return. "Be families that bear fruit." And Mary Help of Christians, in that snapshot that lasts for a whole year, is there in the middle of everyone and everything, as the Mother who gives us her example and her care, who, especially, never ceases to offer you Jesus and to lead you to Him .



## WORSHIP NIGHT

Pray without ceasing! Stay in touch with Jesus, don't forget him or put him aside, especially in your daily chores, in the family or at work: this is what we are aiming for. And the dialogue with God needs strong moments, those able to make their mark. During the week of summer camp, the whole of Friday night is

dedicated to the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Spouses and parents, in turn, give up the warmth of sleep at night to go to be face to face with Jesus in an intimate dialogue that extends the living encounter with Him during the day.

## SPOUSES THAT DIALOGUE

Rare commodity in our everyday life, the time for review as a couple is a precious treasure in our retreats.

Forgetting for a moment the countless things that need to



be done, the heart softened by prayer and enriched by personal reflection, the couple choose a corner of the garden to be alone

and talk. Other spouses are at their service, taking care of the children to allow the necessary serenity. It's the ideal moment to deal with things unsaid, to dissolve

unresolved issues, to confess the most beautiful sentiments.

We share the deepest thoughts and resonances. It's a moment of marital intimacy. Sometimes just a quarter of an hour is enough to straighten out a problem, to find agreement.



## SHARING IN THE GROUP.

Sharing is giving others the treasures received from God in silence and prayer. In sharing we experience the wealth we give to one another, as the experience of one becomes inspiration and consolation for the other. "Do not hold your treasures within you! Give them out to all; do not

be afraid to show them to others! You can't imagine how much good it will do to those who listen! Courage!" This teaching, bequeathed by one of our priests, is now ours. So many times it happens that sharing will bring benefits to those who listen, but even more in those who have shared.



# WHO CAN WALK WITH US?

## WILLING TO TRUST AND ENTRUST

Our experience is open to all, each according to his own rhythm, his history and his capability. To choose the Christian ideal of family and the desire to share it with other families in moments of formation and fraternity are the only requirements.



We have seen that formation is now essential for all families. We are not born as



spouses and parents, we must become them. This path helps many families, even those with more fragile Christian foundations or who experience difficulty in their marriage and that, however, are confident that there is joy in being parents and spouses.

It is not necessary to be champions in the faith to live our experience: Jesus says that you need just "a grain".

However, what is really needed is the willingness of the heart, is being led by Mary's hand and letting God dwell within us.

It's great to see how many families find themselves at ease from the very first meeting. In these times where values are relative and upside down, where the family is left alone, we experience the joy of being Christian

couples .



Thank you, Lord, for this family of families, where we feel free and welcomed, not judged, but supported. Thanks because everyone is walking, each at a different point in the journey, but we all continue our progress with you at the center. *(Davide e Chiara)*

# IT'S UP TO YOU NOW!

With these few pages we have gathered those things that we consider most significant following in Don Bosco footsteps. The love for Jesus in the Eucharist and for Mary Help of Christians, the "two pillars" on which to anchor our lives, we have been given by Don Bosco and we preserve them in our personal, familiar and church's experience. Our dream is that many families can receive these gifts in their lives to experience its beauty.

## PRAYER TO MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, MOTHER OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY



O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, we firmly believe that yours is a special place in the history of salvation, and that you are the mistress and guide of our Salesian Family.

With joy we contemplate and strive to imitate your faith and willing availability to God and his loving designs, your humble acceptance of the great wonders performed by the Father,

your apostolic charity and your fidelity at the foot of the cross.

With filial devotion we place ourselves under your loving care.

Immaculate Virgin, lead us to the fullness of self-donation; Help of Christians, give us courage and confidence in the service of the People of God.

Holy Virgin, we implore your loving protection, on each one of us,

on each Group born of the charism of Don Bosco, on the entire Salesian Family

and on the young people you entrust to our care.

*Amen.*





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