

Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The Greatest of All is Love

Acts of General Chapter XXII

Rome, September 18 - November 15, 2008

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Presentation

Dear Sisters,

I am happy to present you with the Acts of General Chapter XXII, celebrated in Rome from September 18 to November 15, 2008. The document was published on December 8, a feast that the Church celebrates with solemnity, and that the Salesian Family acknowledges with particular intensity, as it recalls the charismatic roots of the institutions founded by Don Bosco.

Through the Internet, you were able to follow the development of the work of the Chapter *almost in real time*. What reached you, was the echo of that enriching experience marked by the living presence of the Holy Spirit. The icon of Pentecost guided us throughout our journey while we kept the Gospel of love before us, not only as the Chapter theme but as an experience of communion in diversity, as a renewed call to witness and proclaim love in the mission of evangelizing through education.

As Mother Antonia highlighted in the Report on the life of the Institute, General Chapter XXII placed us in continuity with the General Chapters that preceded it, beginning with the special post-Conciliar Chapter.

In the chapter work, we emphasized the fundamental charismatic nucleus of our call: *To be, today, sign and expression of God's foreseeing love* for the younger generations (cf. Constitutions 1).

The input from the Provinces, gathered in the *Working Document* of the Chapter was greatly valued in our discussions. We trust this input will continue to offer our communities an opportunity for frank dialogue on the challenges, the difficulties, and the reasons for hope that, in different ways, affect our realities throughout the world.

We decided to use St. Paul's words – *The greatest of all is love* (cf. *1 Cor.* 13:8,13) – as the title for the final document of the Acts.

The intent of the document is to bring us back to the roots of our charismatic passion: love that outlives faith and hope, the love that is Jesus; the love to which Mary and the disciples bore witness, as they gathered in the Cenacle to welcome the Holy Spirit; the love that permeated the very existence of St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, Don Bosco and Mary Domenica Mazzarello. At the same time it is the simple and strong love to which so many of our Sisters bear witness in daily life, at times in silent and hidden ways that are nonetheless efficacious.

When it is authentic, love becomes a *sign* that all can understand. Authentic love is a reliable sign for those who have not been able to experience it, particularly the younger generations who seek the meaning of life and a future of their own.

More than an exposition of concepts and ideas, the document is meant to offer us the possibility of an encounter with people: with Jesus, the amazing sign of the Father's love, and with others who followed in his footsteps. Mary, the first believer, is the one who accompanies us on our way so that we may experience true encounters

that are capable of inspiring real paths of conversion.

The Acts of GC XXII are made up of three parts: the *first part* deals with the chapter document, which is simple and essential in itself; the *second* presents the guidelines and decisions taken by the Chapter Assembly; the *third* part contains the addresses and messages given at the opening and conclusion of the Chapter. The appendix lists the participants and the members of the new General Council.

The Chapter was like a great Cenacle, characterized by attentiveness to the Spirit and listening to reality with Mary's faith-filled heart. We lived it as an experience of discernment, of communion, and of co-responsibility in making decisions concerning the life of the Institute at every level.

The Cenacle experience continues today in the 73 Provinces and 9 Pre-Provinces, on every continent, where we live and work. Today, every individual, every FMA community, and every educating community must prolong this experience of pausing together in an atmosphere of prayer and of listening, of fraternal communion, and of searching for the paths that place us decisively alongside the young.

The Spirit of Pentecost infused the Chapter Assembly with *fire in our hearts, new words on our lips and prophecy in our glance*. This same Spirit will lead us all to open the doors of the Cenacle and to renew our charismatic passion for proclaiming: "*Jesus loves you*" as Joy-filled News to younger generations. We will be able to do this if our encounter with the Spirit transforms our life. The strength to be *signs* is rooted in this transformation which calls us to paths of conversion according to the Gospel, rekindling in our hearts a renewed passion for the *da mihi animas* so that we might also welcome the demands of the *cetera tolle*.

We want to continue writing this document together, not with words, but with the creativity of a faithful love that enables us to face any adversity and leads us to feel the great need to evangelize, for: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor. 9:16*). For us, this urgent call to evangelization becomes a new stimulus to put the Preventive System into action. It is a system of love, witnessed to the young through credible Gospel signs.

May Mary, the Immaculate Help of Christians, accompany us during the next six years, helping us to take up the directives of GC XXII and to make them a lived experience together with the educating communities who share with us the responsibility of developing the charism and of making it a reality, today.

Rome, December 8, 2008

Sr. Yvonne Reungoat
Superior General

THEME OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXII

**Called to be, today,
sign and expression
of God's foreseeing love**

Part One

CHAPTER DOCUMENT:

The Greatest of All is Love

As In a Cenacle

With Mary, the Mother of Jesus

**We share the story of a grace-filled event:
General Chapter XXII,
which called us together from every continent to live
a profound experience of the Holy Spirit,
as in a great Cenacle.**

**Gathered around Mary, we paused to listen
to what the Spirit is saying to our Institute today.
As Church, we experienced the fire of the Spirit's love
in the communion that we lived intensely amongst ourselves,
which united us to all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,
to the educating communities and most especially to the young,
to the Salesian Family, and to all of humanity.**

**Communion and discernment,
the vision and strategy chosen by General Chapter XXI,
led us to the heart of the Salesian charism:
Called to be, today,
the sign and expression of God's foreseeing love,
the theme of General Chapter XXII.
The commitment to centre our life upon Love
is the path that will give continuity and depth
to the courses of action taken by our communities throughout the world.**

AS IN A GREAT CENACLE

The experience of General Chapter XXII

The Chapter Assembly

1. The Chapter Assembly, made up of 193 Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, represented nearly 14,100 Sisters who live in 92 nations, on every continent. The Chapter members came from Africa and Madagascar (17), the Americas (69), Asia (33), Europe (72) and Oceania (2). Each brought the treasure of her personal life experience in the educating community, with its challenges and resources, and was animated by a sincere desire to listen to whatever the Spirit asks of the Institute, today.

In an attitude of docility

2. The Assembly was transformed into a large Cenacle where, guided by Mary, we placed ourselves in an attitude of docility to the movements of the Spirit and of receptivity to diverse cultural expressions. This was an indispensable condition for discovering the designs of God's love and for re-expressing our charism in a time characterized by serious educational challenges and by the urgent need for evangelization.

of listening

3. Our attitude was one of listening and discernment, of searching and of frank dialogue. This outlook opened our eyes and our hearts to become aware of the signs of love that God has sown in our lives, in the life of our community, in the hearts of young people and in the events of history.

to the Word of God

4. In step with the Church, gathered for the Synod on the Word of God ¹ and while celebrating the bi-millennium of the birth of the great evangelizer, Paul of Tarsus, we

¹ Celebrated in Rome from 5 to 26 October 2008

placed the Word of God at the centre of our Chapter experience. *A lamp for our feet* (cf *Ps.119:105*), it enlightened our pathway, leading us toward unity and helping us as we searched for what is essential, careful to appreciate the variety and richness of our intercultural Assembly.

**to the message
of Mornese**

5. Our restful pause at Mornese, the land of hearts docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, allowed us to encounter Mary Domenica Mazzarello and to listen once more to her message, which is clear, fresh, and ever new. Urged on by the theme of the General Chapter, we looked afresh at every place, every encounter, every event and every aspect of the life of Mary Domenica as *signs*, so as to discover the secret of her simple and humble existence, which was ordinary in its development, yet great in love.

The retreat preached by the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, also brought us back to the heart of our consecration to God for the young, re-awakening our understanding that "only one thing is necessary" (*Lk. 10: 42*).

**to the life of
the Institute**

6. Mother Antonia's report on the past six-year term **2** and our visits to the various Areas of Animation³ helped us to take a look at the life of the Institute, with its lights and shadows.

During the Chapter experience, this perspective was enriched by the evaluations of the formative programmes promoted by the Central Leadership of our Institute. Their purpose is to renew us in our charismatic identity, that we might live the Word radically and revive our missionary ardour through: *Project Mornese*, *Project Jerusalem*, and the *Missionary Spirituality Project*.

The presentation of several new publications enabled us to learn about the progress the Institute is making in

² Cf *Relazione sulla vita dell'Istituto nel sessennio 2002-2008*, Roma, FMA Institute 2008.

³ Areas of animation for Formation, Youth Pastoral, the Missions *ad gentes*, the Salesian Family, Social Communications, and Administration.

inculturating the Preventive System and the Plan of Formation adapting them to diverse educational contexts 4 and different recipients.

The meeting with representatives of the World Confederation of Past Pupils and with the young adults of VIDES International strengthened our conviction that our educative charism is a gift that is lived and shared so as to be given, in turn, to others.

**to the charism
and to the
educating
community**

7. Our reflection on the theme of General Chapter XXII, integrated by the journey undertaken in the Provinces and synthesized in the *Working Document*,⁵ was deepened through the celebration of two days of study and of sharing, lived with a number of lay people from our educating communities. Together, we listened to the history of the Institute in the light of the reality of religious life in the Church, today.

The testimony of the different representatives of our educating communities helped us to realize how the Salesian charism, welcomed and shared, is incarnated in diverse educative realities, in ways that are ever new.

**in an atmosphere
of discernment**

8. The period of discernment for the election of Mother General and the General Councillors was lived intensely. In a climate of reflection, prayer and dialogue, we experienced the presence of the Spirit, invoked upon us by all the Daughters of Mary Help

4 Cf RUFFINATTO Piera – SEIDE Martha (a cura di), *L'arte di educare nello stile del Sistema preventivo. Approfondimenti e prospettive*, Roma, LAS 2008.

BORSI Mara – RUFFINATTO Piera (a cura di), *Sistema preventivo e situazioni di disagio. L'animazione di un processo per la vita e la speranza delle nuove generazioni*, Roma, LAS 2008.

DEL CORE Pina – FISICHELLA Maria (a cura di), *Il Noviziato tra vecchi e nuovi modelli di formazione. Contesti e percorsi formativi per una responsabilità condivisa*, Roma, LAS 2008.

SECTOR FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION, *Educommunication: Taking Small Steps in the New Culture* = Gong 4, Rome, FMA Institute 2008.

5 Cf *Strumento di lavoro del Capitolo generale XXII*, Roma, Istituto FMA 2008.

of Christians, by the Salesian Family and by those who accompanied us closely.

In the same climate of discernment, we deepened the Chapter theme in the individual commissions and in our Assembly. This reflection is now offered to all our communities so that it may be welcomed, shared and assimilated, and become life in our every day reality.

Called to be signs of love

The Chapter theme

9. The theme of General Chapter XXII is a new call for the entire Institute to revive our *charismatic identity* as a prophecy to the world; it is an appeal for us to be converted to love and to express love, as a community, in the educative mission.

The great innovation of biblical faith is that *God is Love*, a gratuitous and foreseeing love. By the very fact that God loved us first (cf. *1 Jn.* 4:10), love is no longer a commandment, but is a response to the love with which God draws near to us.⁶

From this love springs forth our being, today, in the Church "a sign and expression of God's foreseeing love"⁷ for the young.

By the grace received in Baptism, and renewed in the experience of a religious vocation, we have the amazing possibility of entering into relationship with the Triune God: with the Father who continually recreates us; with Jesus, who redeems us through the Paschal Mystery; with the Spirit, the giver of a life that is ever new.⁸ Even in our fragility we can daily become an expression of this infinite love.

The pedagogy of signs

10. Love is relational and needs to express itself and to be experienced. To manifest his foreseeing love to humanity, God used many signs, revealing himself at times through disconcerting wonders,

⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus caritas est* (December 25, 2005), n. 1.

⁷ *Constitutions and Regulations*, Rome, FMA Institute 1982, art. 1.

⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata* (March 25, 1996), nn. 17.18.19.

and at other times in the silence of daily life.

A *sign* reveals, evokes, provokes, recalls, announces what is new, points to something beyond, and involves the totality of the person. With the pedagogy of signs, God educates his people to acknowledge his love, to experience it with gratitude, to announce it with joy and to make one's own life a response to love.

Jesus
the love of God
appearing
in human form

11. In the Incarnation of the Word, God's pedagogy expresses itself in a sign that has no need to point to something beyond: this sign is Jesus, God's love appearing in human form. His life, his actions, his words, his example, his steps on our earth and his days within our history - all is a message of love that will find its highest expression in the Paschal Mystery. In Jesus' cross and resurrection, we can perceive the immensity and the radical nature of God's love that "surpasses all understanding" (*Eph. 3:19*).

In Mary, the
beauty of love
shines forth

12. The human creature who is closest to Jesus is Mary, his mother. She gave witness to the mystery of God's infinite love revealed in Christ by participating actively in the obedience of faith. In her, immaculate and full of grace, the beauty of foreseeing love shines forth. In her, mother and helper, the fruitfulness of a love that generates love is revealed.

The Church:
sign of unity
in love

13. Christ's love is made manifest in fraternal love. It is Jesus' explicit desire that reciprocal love should be the sign by which His disciples would be recognized (cf *Jn. 13:35*). The Church, therefore, is a community founded on love. One and universal, she gathers persons of different races and cultures into one and is an expression of the unity of the whole human race,⁹ a sign that unity in diversity is possible when love is present.

⁹ Cf VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium* n. 1.

**Consecrated life:
a manifestation
of God's love**

14. Within the Church, consecrated life is, in a more explicit way, "a manifestation of God's love in the world." ¹⁰ By following Jesus radically, consecrated persons are called to be "a reflection of the infinite love which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity."¹¹ Their consecration is an expression of a love that is gratuitous and pure. Their chaste, poor and obedient life is a "very clear symbol of the heavenly kingdom."¹² The communion that religious express gives eloquent witness to evangelical charity.

**The Institute:
a sign
of God's love
for the young**

15. The Institute, in which we live out our religious call, is a clear sign of God's love which, by means of the charism of Don Bosco and Mary Domenica Mazzarello, is spread throughout the world and reaches out especially to the young and women, those who are littlest and poorest. The theme of the General Chapter focuses on the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians as being a sign and expression of: *God's foreseeing love*. As consecrated women in the Church, we are "a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting."¹³ As an FMA community, we are "a response of salvation to the profound hopes of the young"¹⁴ in collaboration and co-responsibility with the laity. We respond to this call, which is the foundation of our *vocational unity*, by "constantly striving to grow in love," ¹⁵ living our life "for the glory of God by our work for the evangelization of young people, walking with them on the path to holiness."¹⁶

¹⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, title of the third chapter.

¹¹ *Ibid* n. 21.

¹² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree: *Perfectae caritatis* n. 1.

¹³ *Vita Consecrata* n. 22.

¹⁴ *Constitutions FMA* art. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid* art. 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid* art. 5.

**To be a sign of love
here and now**

16. God's call to be signs of his love reaches us here and now, in this moment of history. Now, in fact, is the favourable time to re-ignite the flame of fidelity. The dramatic and wonderful world in which we live calls us to an open dialogue. This world bears the imprint of the love of God who created it, as well as the painful wounds of a humanity that lives between the *already* and the *not yet*.

We live in a space and time in which we find beauty and creativity, progress and searching, generosity and the joy of living. At the same time we also notice our era's complexity and confusion, individualism and rejection, solitude and refusal to be the image of a God who is the essence of love.

Our world seeks dialogue, respect, justice, and relationships that are more authentic and intense, in communion and freedom: our world thirsts for love and happiness. It is in this world and in this time that we hear a resounding call to allow God's love to shine through us and to be converted to this love, giving new meaning to our charismatic identity. God's Word guides us on this journey. The Pentecost event, as narrated by Luke, enlightens us and enkindles a fire in our hearts.

The Pentecost narrative

**The Word of God
gives us light**

17. The Pentecost narrative, offered by Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles*, accompanied the entire Chapter journey. We meditated and shared upon it through the *lectio divina* which clearly marked the stages of our reflection.¹⁷

¹⁷ The artistic interpretation of Pentecost by Marko Ivan Rupnik SJ helped us to assimilate the biblical text at a deeper level, in reference to both the Chapter theme and our identity as FMA (cf Appendix, pp. 43-44).

"When they entered the city they went
 to the upper room where they were staying [...]
 They devoted themselves with one accord to prayer,
 together with some women
 and Mary the mother of Jesus
 and his brothers [...]
 When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled,
 they were all in one place together.
 And suddenly there came from the sky
 a noise like a strong driving wind,
 and it filled the entire house in which they were.
 Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire,
 which parted and came to rest
 on each of them.
 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit
 and began to speak
 in different tongues,
 as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim...
 [The people] heard them speaking
 in their own tongues
 of the mighty acts of God."
 (Acts 1:13,14; 2:1-4,11)

**it draws us
 into the life
 and action
 of the Spirit**

18. The description of the time spent waiting for the Spirit is rich in detail. It specifies *where they were staying* -- the Cenacle, situated *on the upper level*. The twelve apostles are listed by name. Mary is present, called by name and by her singular identity: *the Mother of Jesus* and of the other men and women who make up the new family born of the Spirit. Their attitude of *devoted prayer with one accord* reflects Jesus' own prayer, particularly in receiving the Spirit during his baptism, (cf *Lk.* 11:5-12).

The assembled community is the *new Israel*, a community gathered to listen to the voice of the Lord and to walk in his ways, according to the model of the first Covenant. The Spirit, the gift par excellence promised by Jesus,

descends on this community gathered in the Cenacle on the Hebrew feast of Pentecost, the feast of the Covenant and of the gift of the Law. The outpouring of the Spirit, accompanied by wind and fire, symbols of divine power, *fills the entire house*. The apostles, as a result of this outpouring, *begin to speak in other languages* announcing the good news of the resurrection of Christ.

We are dealing with a true and real *Baptism by fire of the community* (cf *Mt. 3:11*), a kind of new creation. At Pentecost the Church is established as a living memorial of and witness to Jesus, alive with the strength of the Spirit and accompanied throughout time by Mary, *the mother*. Immediately the Church is seen as a community, both one and universal, overcoming Babel's division (cf *Gen. 11:7-9*). The Holy Spirit creates unity in love and in the reciprocal acceptance of diversity. It is the Spirit who infuses courage in evangelizing (cf *Acts 2:17-18*).

**and helps us to
experience the
power of love**

19. Enlightened by this biblical icon, we lived the Chapter experience as a restful pause in the Cenacle with Mary. We contemplated the face of Christ who loves us even to the point of giving his life for us (cf *Gal. 2:20*). We had a more profound experience of the Father's love "poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (*Rm. 5:5*).

Urged on by the love of Christ (cf *2 Cor. 5:14*), we go forth now from this Cenacle with renewed apostolic passion to bring this love to young people.

WITH MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

**Mary, Mother
of Love
guides us on
our way**

20. The foreseeing love of God offers us his masterpiece in Mary. She is the human space, little but docile, in which God accomplishes *great things*. She is the witness of what a poor, humble creature can become if she allows God to dwell within. As a shining example of the love of God, Mary is given to humanity as a motherly help and as a sure sign of hope.

Mary is present in a particular way in the history of the Institute and in our personal history. Through her direct intervention, in fact, Don Bosco founded our Institute. Our vocation as *helpers*, especially among the young, is summed up in the name Don Bosco chose for us -- Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.¹⁸ What is more, in John Bosco's dream at the age of nine, Mary is given by Jesus as the teacher. Under her guidance, John was able to acquire the wisdom to make himself loved and to love the young with gentleness and kindness.¹⁹ Thus, Don Bosco learned the art of educating from Mary, the woman who opens the way that leads to Christ.

In that Cenacle too, which the Chapter experience was for us, Mary was the teacher of wisdom. She accompanied us in our ardent searching and in discerning how to be, today, a sign and expression of God's foreseeing love for the young and for every person that we meet, beginning with our Sisters in community.

21. The central part of the Chapter document is divided into three elements.

¹⁸ Cf *FMA Constitutions* art. 4.

¹⁹ Cf BOSCO John, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: Autobiography of St. John Bosco*. Translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB. New Rochelle, Don Bosco Publications 1989, pp.18-22.

Each element was introduced by a reflection on the Word of God, taken from the Pentecost narrative and unfolded in a process encompassing *challenges* that require us to assume a definite stance, *signs* to take note of, and *paths of conversion*.

These call for practical steps to renew the authenticity and coherence of our response of love, both in the places where we already carry out our mission, and in the new frontiers of education. Let us allow Mary to guide us in this journey.

As believers, we look at a world thirsting for love

Mary was in their midst

22. Before Pentecost, the Cenacle in Jerusalem hosted heavy-hearted disciples. This place of encounter, of intimate and rich experiences of communion, now seemed emptier than ever before. The disciples really felt the absence of Jesus, but the closed doors held no promise of joyful surprises. The magnitude of the mandate entrusted to them – to be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth – made them feel all the more fearful, worried, uncertain, fragile and inadequate for the mission. In the Cenacle, with them, Mary prayed and invoked the Holy Spirit, shared their worries and hopes and helped them to face their reality courageously.

Mary was present at our Chapter, as well. We, too, have looked at the reality of the world through her womanly and motherly eyes, seeing its many lights and shadows, so as to interpret it as believers.

helping to understand the challenges

23. Mary teaches us not to avoid challenges, but to welcome them as possibilities for renewing our educative and missionary passion, leading our communities back to times of *open hearts* and profound sharing among ourselves and with young people so as to recreate family environments, rich in human and Christian values. Mary helps us to be aware of our littleness and of the cries of humanity,

a humanity that is rich in scientific and technological conquests, but poor in real wisdom. She, the strong woman, will give us the courage to discover where people suffer a lack of love, where life has no meaning, where there is no joy and where the presence of Jesus is not recognized.

**Young people's
thirst for
love**

24. With Mary's anxious heart we let ourselves be provoked by the questions *about love that arise from the younger generation*: their questions about existence, their need to fulfil themselves as persons, their search for intimate relationships and their commitment to transform the present and to plan for the future. Young people manifest a strong desire for friendship, affection, companionship and solidarity, along with the need for a profound experience of God. These young people, thirsting for love and for happiness, challenge us. Often, though, the weakening of our Gospel mentality and the waning of our educative passion, forms of spiritual mediocrity and affective fragility, relativism and activism, a middle-class mentality and a lack of reciprocal accompaniment can weaken our educative response to their pressing need for love.

The profound *crisis in which the family is immersed* in many contexts worries us greatly. This crisis affects the younger generations who endure the hardship of being abandoned to themselves and of not having guides who encourage and support them on their journey of growth. On the other hand, we recognize and value the educative potential of the family, the first environment where a person learns to live and to enter into relationships marked by reciprocal respect and co-responsibility.

**A world
where love
is scarce**

25. It is with both apprehension and hope that we face a complex and problematic reality that is bringing the whole of humanity to experience a lack of love: – the *globalization of the planet* which, though creating

new possibilities, is often driven by an individualistic and consumerist anthropology that is incapable of focusing on respect and the promotion of all life, especially of the weakest and most fragile;

- the *world of communications*, which has great potential, influences culture and daily life, contributes to the shaping of our mentality and creates *new* languages, which are often difficult for us adults to understand and which we struggle to learn;
- the worldwide *economic crisis*, brought about by a lack of ethics in financial markets founded on a neo-liberal vision, today both impacts the great economic powers and increases the poverty and marginalization of developing countries;
- the ongoing emergence of *new forms of fundamentalism* which increase discrimination based on faith, ethnic origin and social condition;
- the *exploitation of natural resources* which threatens creation and the future of humanity;
- the *violence perpetrated* against young women and children, the most fragile and vulnerable segment of society;
- the enormous problems that result from the growing phenomenon of *human mobility and migration*.

**Called to
demonstrate
love**

26. This situation challenges us and all in our educating communities to assume a mentality of change with determination. We must rethink the vocational and charismatic quality of our presence, and bring new energy to the mission with the ever-present strength of the Preventive System. We are, in fact, convinced that communion and the experience of love are the conditions for evangelization.

There is no lack of competence, means or strategies in our communities, but the freshness of love that gives quality to life, is sometimes weak.

In this setting, Don Bosco's letter from Rome of May 1884 has not lost its significance. It is a letter in which we can identify ourselves.

In it, he points out the lack of credibility of a community committed to love, but incapable of demonstrating that love with visible gestures that can be easily understood by the young, a community that struggles to unify the administration of our works and the living of our charism. Today, just as before, the greatest challenge remains that of helping new generations to realize that God loves them.

We learn to welcome the signs that express the foreseeing love of God

Memorial of the greatest love

27. In the Cenacle, Jesus shared amazing signs of God's love. Before leaving "he loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end" (*Jn.* 13:1). By washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus left them a sign of love that humbles itself in service. He handed on to them a memorial of his love for us and his thanksgiving to the Father, giving himself as food and drink in the Eucharist.²⁰ Being in the Cenacle means being sensitive to love, knowing how to be amazed by the ever new and varied ways in which God manifests his infinite love for his creatures. Being in the Cenacle means having a heart full of gratitude and praise.

Mary is our teacher par excellence. As the mother of Jesus she was a protagonist in living the mystery of a God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (*Jn.* 3:16). Attentive and emptied of self, she knew how to keep all these things in her heart and meditate on them (cf *Lk.* 2:19,51). She perceived the greatness of the love manifested even in the smallest events of daily life. In the Cenacle, Mary was the *living memorial* of her Son; she made Jesus present to his disciples, even though he had already left this world.

²⁰ Cf CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE Instruction: *The Service of Authority and Obedience* (May 11, 2008), n. 8.

**Jesus is the most
amazing sign
of God's love**

28. Mary is the one who leads us to discover *Jesus*, *the most amazing sign* of God's Love. In Jesus, we experience the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love that surpasses all understanding (cf *Eph.* 3:18-19), filling our life with joy and motivating us to respond to him as his grateful children.

He is the sign of contradiction (cf *Lk.* 2:34) who overturns the structures and logic of this world, bringing hope and salvation with his redeeming love. He continues to take on flesh in situations of human suffering, in people who are uprooted from their lands and in the young who suffer because of poverty, injustice and exploitation.

For us, these situations are the Father's call, guiding us to live *a Samaritan's life*, capable of lovingly welcoming and healing the wounds of others so as to infuse hope.²¹

In Jesus, the divine and eternal Word enters time and space, taking on a human face and identity. Authentic listening to the Word calls us to obey and to act; to allow justice and love to blossom in life and to offer a prophetic witness that unites "the Word of God and life, faith, integrity, worship and social commitment."²²

In Jesus, the bread that is broken, God is revealed as the One who loves us and calls us to become part of his Paschal Mystery, to be conformed to his death and thus participate in his resurrection. In the Eucharist, source and summit of life and of apostolic action, we find the wellspring of our communion and passion for life.²³

²¹ Cf *Passion for Christ, Passion for Humanity. International Congress on Consecrated Life* (Rome November 23-27, 2004), Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2005.

²² Final Message of the Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, n. 10.

²³ Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*. V World Day of Consecrated Life (February 2, 2001), in *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 4, 2001.

**Our founders
and patrons:
signs of God's love**

29. *Don Bosco and Mary Domenica Mazzarello* are expressions of the foreseeing love of God for the young. Educational charity, lived in evangelical radicality and contagious joy, shines forth from their lives. Their deep communion with God and readiness to learn from Mary made them attentive and sensitive to the cries for help of younger generations. Drawing from God's love, they became creative and daring in responding to the needs of their times. Don Bosco was convinced that the human person finds complete fulfilment in love and must be educated to love.

At Mornese, Maria Domenica and the first Sisters committed themselves to build "the house of the love of God"²⁴ with and for the young. Our founders' educative charism is a gift of God's love for the young people of every time and place. It makes the living presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd palpable.

30. In *St. Francis de Sales and St. Teresa of Avila*, given to us by Don Bosco as patrons, we can see a transparent sign of the tender and strong love of the Father.

Love has a place of honour in the humanism of Francis de Sales, because God created us in his image, in love and for love. Because of this, our first responsibility is to see to it that this image takes shape by promoting each person's integral growth through the practice of accompaniment, a typical characteristic of Salesian spirituality.²⁵

In the spirituality of Teresa of Avila, the experience of God's love is central. If this is authentic, it leads us to the joy of communion with others and the gift

²⁴ MACCONO Ferdinando, *Saint Mary D. Mazzarello* Vol. I, Paterson, Alexander Hamilton Printing Company, Inc. 1980,244.

²⁵ Cf *Rooted in the Covenant. Plan of Formation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Leumann (Torin), Elledici 2000, p. 29; cf also *That They May Have Life and Have it to the Full. Guidelines for the Educational Mission of the FMA*, Leumann (Torino), Elledici 2006 nn. 110-119.

of self. For Teresa, growth in charity is the proof of genuine prayer and contemplation. A mystical woman and an untiring missionary, she leads us to the source of every missionary impulse: love and communion with God.

**Young people:
a call to grow
in love**

31. *Young people*, especially the poorest, are the greatest wealth and treasure that God has entrusted to us. They are the *theological place*, the *holy land* where God speaks to us. He invites us to conversion so that we might live the charism of preventive love as our renewed covenant with him and with all those who are co-responsible for our educative mission. As in a family, the young people offer their original and creative contribution according to their age and their degree of maturity, becoming protagonists in their own growth and the growth of the entire educating community.

**The educating
community:
the place where
love is expressed**

32. *Educating communities* are a sign of the foreseeing love of God for the new generations. They are committed to living the Salesian mission in diverse ways, in the style of the Preventive System. The multiplicity of vocations present in our educating communities grow together as God's family through a fruitful exchange. Every educating community is an experience of communion and a place of grace, where the commitment and struggle to *evangelize through education and to educate through evangelization* contributes toward harmonizing the divine and the human, the gospel and culture, faith and life.²⁶

In reciprocal relationships with the laity, we FMA witness to the primacy of God and of love in our radical choice to follow Jesus with an undivided heart. This choice is, before all else, a presence, a spiritual and charismatic animation that involves each and everyone, regardless of their role, age, or condition in life.

²⁶ Cf CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools. A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (September 8, 2007), nn. 15-19.

The Sisters who are more directly involved in educational responsibilities and collaboration with the laity are sustained by the richness of the faith, prayer and witness of the entire community.²⁷

We undertake paths of conversion to foreseeing love

Love urges us to go forth

33. The Cenacle, the place where the disciples met together, is not a permanent dwelling but a launching pad. The Spirit transforms them from fearful men into *ardent missionaries* who, filled with courage, carry the Joyful News of the Risen Jesus into the world. Love urges us to go forth and to reach beyond ourselves toward new frontiers in self-giving: "Love grows through love."²⁸

Mary, who from the time of the Cenacle teaches us to open wide our doors, was the first to live this exodus experience and to set out on a journey. The first to be evangelized became the first evangelizer. Carrying Jesus to others, she offers her service, bringing joy and making love tangible. Her prompt concern on the road to Ain Karim and her thoughtful intuition at the wedding of Cana reveal Mary's enterprising, decisive and creative style in offering concrete and supportive signs of love.

Mary: teacher of accompaniment

34. With these attitudes, Mary expresses the *ministry of accompaniment* which she fulfilled throughout her life. She, in fact, both as mother and disciple of Jesus, is the one who accompanied him with total dedication throughout the entire span of his life, from his birth at Bethlehem to his death on Calvary. At the foot of the cross, Mary accepted her new calling to be mother of the Church and of humanity (cf *Jn.* 19: 26-27).

²⁷ Cf Letter of Convocation of General Chapter XII, n. 882, p. 15.

²⁸ *Deus caritas est* n.18.

Mary, as the Help of Christians, accompanied the Church in its birth, in its growth, and as it spread throughout the world. She continues to be present, particularly in the difficult moments of history.²⁹ We, too, feel her maternal presence, always alive in the Institute and in every community.

In the Chapter Assembly, Mary accompanied our journey of docility to the Spirit. She helped us to *take stock* of the challenges posed by today's reality, *not to avoid* the many questions about love posed by today's world, and *to acknowledge* the foreseeing love of God present in the very fabric of history as it unfolds.

She now *urges* each of us and our communities to undertake courageous, daring *journeys of conversion* to give renewed life to our *charismatic identity* and to make this identity clear and credible. In fact, only if we allow ourselves to be converted by God and evangelized by his Word, will we be able to manifest love in our communities and in the new frontiers of the mission.

**Accompaniment:
a charismatic
choice**

35. A sure means to real paths of conversion is mutual accompaniment at all levels. This is a great need that is felt in our communities. In the history of our charism, the experience of accompaniment has been present from the very beginning. It is a means of implementing the Preventive System as a community that lives the Family Spirit, a community where we care for one another, together with the laity and the young people who are entrusted to us. The promise made to Don Bosco: *I will give you a teacher* and the message Maria Domenica perceived: *I entrust them to you*, directs us to assume

**accompaniment
as an *experience* of communion
and a *style* of expressing love.**

²⁹ Cf *Lumen Gentium* n. 62.

**expressed in
our relationships
with others**

36. At all stages of life, accompaniment takes place through relationships with those who express the love of God in different ways.

For each person, the goal of every relationship of accompaniment is to fulfil God's plan and to refine the image of Christ, which was imprinted in him or her since the beginning of creation (cf *Gal.* 4:19).

In the paths of conversion that we are called to travel, we allow ourselves to be accompanied by *Jesus*, Word and Bread, by *Mary*, Mother and teacher, by the captivating witness of *Don Bosco* and of *Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, and by the spirituality of *Francis de Sales* and *Teresa of Avila*. Every day we move ahead on this journey with the *educating community* and in particular with the *young*, sharing the experience of reciprocal accompaniment with them all.

As we travel these paths, we *are keenly aware* of the signs by which God reveals himself. The challenges posed by the reality in which we live, increase our awareness that *we are called* to respond in creative ways to the needs of our time.

As an educating community, *we commit ourselves* to taking practical steps in expressing the greatness of a love that becomes a credible sign in the Church and in the world.

We acknowledge that

37. Jesus Christ is the most amazing sign of God's love, but we do not always keep him at the centre of our life and mission.

We are called to

be a living memorial
of Jesus' way of living and acting.

We commit ourselves to

- 1.** Rediscover the fascination of a *personal relationship with him*, in the radical quality of a chaste, poor and obedient life
- 2.** Persevere in our commitment to be *missionary disciples of the Word*
- 3.** Be reconciled with God, *purifying our hearts* and renewing them in love
- 4.** Celebrate and *live the Eucharist* as the power that generates communion in the Church,³⁰ witnessing to the beauty of belonging to the Lord in a joyous gift to our brothers and sisters
- 5.** Value the *personal encounter* ³¹ and *reciprocal accompaniment* as privileged means of discernment for personal and community growth in following Christ
- 6.** Live the *service of authority* within our communities with an evangelical heart, promoting the conditions that favour the growth of life and joy, and valuing each one's contribution in the style of coordination for communion.

30 JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), n. 24.

31 In the Salesian tradition, the *personal encounter* is a specific experience of discernment and spiritual accompaniment. It reinforces the Family Spirit and helps to better understand the demands of the charism in daily life (cf *Const.* art. 34). According to Don Bosco it "is so important that we might say it is the master key to the structure of the Congregation." (BM XVII, 346).

We acknowledge that

38. In the Church, our founders are signs of God's love for the young and for the world, but we do not always succeed in being transparent expressions of this love.

We are called to

Give new life to the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*
of Don Bosco
and to Mary Mazzarello's response to the assignment:
I entrust them to you.

We commit ourselves to

- 1.** Enhance *the prophetic and mystical* dimensions of our vocation in our communities, vitally assuming the educational spirituality of Don Bosco and of Mary Mazzarello
- 2.** Return to the *charismatic sources* of foreseeing love lived in the joyful and demanding style of the Preventive System³²
- 3.** Rediscover the roots of our *spirituality* in *Francis de Sales* and *Teresa of Avila*, both signs of a life unified in God and given to others, and expert guides on the path to sanctity
- 4.** Rediscover the missionary courage of the *da mihi animas*, overcoming the risk that the administration of our works could suffocate the energy of the charism
- 5.** Adhere to the demands of *cetera tolle*, by renewing our trust in Divine Providence and living evangelical poverty in a *real and concrete*³³ way as individuals and as communities.

³² The need to know the language of the founders surfaced more than once during the Chapter. It favours direct access to historical documents and resources on Salesian spirituality, and is a means of communion within the Institute (cf *Regulations* art. 2, 81).

³³ Cf *FMA Constitutions* art. 22; *Cooperation for Development. Guidelines for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, Bologna, EMI 2007.

We acknowledge that

39. Young people are the Father's gift of love for us and for society, but we do not always make them feel that we love them and that they are loved by God.

We are called to

Be, with them, a sign and expression
of the foreseeing love of God.

We commit ourselves to

- 1.** Move outside of our comfort zone to *be* with the young, to listen to them, to share our time, to open our hearts and homes, creating family environments like those of Valdocco and Mornese
- 2.** Believe that there is *a part of every young person's heart that is open to goodness* and develop it, so as to make each one a protagonist in his or her own growth. This enables young people to offer their own contribution towards building a society founded on peace, justice, and care for creation
- 3.** Get into step, in the style of preventive education, with the new generations' *ways of communicating* so as to encounter them, to dialogue, and to promote their active participation and self-expression
- 4.** Witness the foreseeing love of God in *our ever-changing ministries* and in the *new educative ministries we assume*, so as to reach the young where they are and to welcome them as they are
- 5.** *Announce Jesus* to young people and *accompany them* as they encounter Him personally, as they assume apostolic commitments, and as they discover God's plan for their life
- 6.** Promote a *vocational youth pastoral*, educating the young to mature in love, in interpersonal relationships and in social responsibility, also through volunteering; teaching them to open themselves to God, the source of an authentic love that enables them to give of themselves to others.

We acknowledge that

40. The educating community is a sign that makes God's love visible, but at times we find it difficult to assume and share the educative mission co-responsibly.

We are called to

Believe that foreseeing love is more effective when we witness to it as an educating community.

We commit ourselves to

- 1.** Joyfully live our *identity as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, giving new meaning to our communities in fidelity to the Gospel and to our charism -- in dialogue with other vocations in the local church and particularly within the Salesian Family -- working together to create a culture of vocations
- 2.** Grow in our awareness that the *educating community* is a way of being and working together in the style of coordination for communion and commit ourselves to consolidating the *animating core group* ³⁴
- 3.** Form ourselves together so as to assume an integral vision of the *Preventive System*, giving it new expression in keeping with the cultural, evangelizing, social, and communications perspective characteristic of our Institute³⁵
- 4.** Dedicate special *attention to families*, especially to young couples, collaborating with them so that they become ever more aware of their own educational, ecclesial and social responsibilities
- 5.** Strengthen *a network mentality* appreciating the intercultural and international richness that characterizes our Institute; promote interaction with Church and civil institutions that are involved in the fields of education and evangelization
- 6.** Assume the *ethical criterion of moderation and voluntary self-limitation*

³⁴ Cf *Guidelines for our Educational Mission* n. 70.

³⁵ Cf *ibid* nn. 41-57.

where our needs are concerned, as a Gospel alternative to consumerism, in line with economic solidarity

7. Continue to offer a response to the *phenomenon of human mobility* primarily through education and formation - particularly of children, women, and young immigrants - and promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

8. Create the conditions for establishing *intercultural communities* and become ever more available to transfer from one community or Province to another, / where human migration is most prevalent and when required by the mission *ad gentes*.

AN OPEN CENACLE

We are this Cenacle,
we, the FMA and educating communities of the whole world.
We want to let the life-blood of the Spirit
course through our veins so that we may have
*fire in our hearts, words on our lips and prophecy in our glance.*³⁶

If God's Word satisfies our deepest hunger
our desires will not become scattered,
fragmented and confused.

If we allow ourselves to be purified by the Spirit
and open ourselves to listen,
a new word will rise to our lips.
It will be a word of blessing
that is rooted in silence
and pays careful attention to each person.

If we allow Mary to accompany us
as we set out upon pathways of conversion to love;
if we have the courage to join forces
and risk living the Gospel together,
searching for new answers to life questions
posed by the young;
if together we courageously continue
along the road of educating *in* communion and *to* communion,
the future will abound in hope and love for all.

We will be able to do this if, like Mary,
we welcome Jesus with generous availability
so that he may once again take flesh in our history;
if we allow the fire of the Spirit of Pentecost
to inflame our lives,
re-enkindling the ardour of the *Da mihi animas cetera tolle*,
restoring its prophetic strength,
which today's world needs
in order to *believe in love*.

³⁶ Cf PAUL VI, *Address* at the general audience of November 29, 1972, in *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI* 1972, Washington, D.C., USCC, 1973, p. 175.

PRESENTATION OF THE MOSAIC OF PENTECOST

An artistic interpretation of Pentecost created by Marko Ivan Rupnik SJ helped us to reflect on the biblical text, offering us interesting points for reflection regarding the Chapter theme and our identity as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The icon is part of the large mosaic in the *Redemptoris Mater* chapel that is found in the Papal Palace at the Vatican.

As was done in early iconography, it depicts both the Ascension and Pentecost in a single panel.

The scene is divided into three parts. In the *upper part* we see God's hand in a cascade of light, extending toward the Son. Jesus is pictured in the *central part* as the Lord of the Universe, the Word of God Incarnate. With one hand he holds the scroll of the Word, while with the other he blesses.

Pentecost is pictured in the *lower part*. The Holy Spirit descends upon Mary and the apostles under the form of tongues of fire (cf *Acts 2:3-4*). The power of the Spirit gives birth to the Church as a community of men and women of every race and culture, extending throughout the world and gathering all humanity in communion.

In a prayerful stance, Mary is a figure of the Church, around which the apostles are gathered. In her earthly life, she held the Christ of history in her arms. Now she accompanies the Church and guides all those who participate in the life of the Trinity on their journey to Christ. Her blue robes allude to her humanity, and her red mantle to her life as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. Three stars shine out from her shoulders and forehead indicating her perpetual virginity. St. Clement of Alexandria clearly states: "There is only one virgin mother and I love to call her the Church."

Every Apostle wears a garment of a different colour, symbolizing the Charism given to each, but all wear a mantle that is the same colour as that of Christ, who is the source of their communion.

The apostles, having become *spirit-filled* by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them, can contemplate and proclaim Jesus.

The first four, two by two, turn their gaze towards Christ. The next four, precisely because they are filled with the Spirit, are able to look deeply at each other. Another two look at Mary/Church, spirit-filled and Mother of Christ. Next to her, Peter and Paul look out from the mosaic towards those who pause to contemplate the scene. It is as if they want to step into our world, beckoning us to welcome the Spirit into our lives.

The Spirit has been poured into human hearts as the love that comes from God and flows within the Church community, that is, within the Body of Christ. Surrounding the central Ascension/Pentecost scene, we find four images representing four ways of practising love within the Church: *matrimony, fraternal charity, martyrdom* and *consecrated life*.

The wedding of Joachim and Ann represents chaste, married love. The Good Samaritan is a perennial symbol of merciful love towards one's neighbour. St. Paul's martyrdom is an eloquent illustration of Jesus' word: "The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them". (*Jn* 15:13). Finally, the mystical life of St. Edith Stein demonstrates how "consecrated life is important precisely in its being unbounded generosity and love."³⁷

In its totality, the mosaic shows a movement of descent and of ascent, of coming and returning. The Holy Spirit descends and moves toward the Son who is about to return to the Father. Love makes the human person like God, because God is love. The Holy Spirit, pouring out this love upon us, creates that union with God that makes the person a being who belongs to the Lord, removed from the darkness, immersed in light.³⁸

³⁷ *Vita Consecrata* n. 105.

³⁸ Cf contributi di CLÉMENT O. e di LANNE E., in *La Cappella "Redemptoris Mater" del Papa Giovanni Paolo II. Realizzata dall'Atelier dell'arte spirituale del Centro Aletti*. Volume a cura di M. Apa – O. Clément – C. Valenziano, Città del Vaticano, LEV 1999; cf UFFICIO DELLE CELEBRAZIONI LITURGICHE DEL S. PONTEFICE, *Il percorso di teologia e spiritualità della Cappella "Redemptoris Mater"*, Città del Vaticano, LEV 2007. Cf pure: <http://www.centroaletti.com>.

Part Two

GUIDELINES AND DECISIONS

Chapter Guidelines

Modifications to some articles of the Constitutions

Other decisions

Tasks entrusted to the General Council

Introduction

41. The Chapter Assembly, besides reflecting on the theme: *Called to be, today, a sign and expression of God's foreseeing love*, reviewed the 179 proposals that came from the Provincial Chapters, the Inter provincial Conferences, the Provinces and from groups or individual FMA. The Commission for the review of the proposals studied them carefully and presented them to the Chapter Members. Some proposals helped us study the theme with greater depth; others were entrusted to the Inter provincial Conferences or to the General Council for their implementation. Other proposals were discussed in the Commissions and submitted to the Assembly for approval.

The proposals regarding human mobility, intercultural communities, formation and particularly those relating to the elderly Sisters, gave rise to and favoured an interesting exchange of experiences helping us grow in sensitivity towards these needs.

We became more aware of the importance of better understanding the language of our founders. It is not only a means of communication but is also a means of direct access to our charismatic sources, and can therefore enhance unity within the Institute (cf *Reg. 2, 81*).

Since it is not possible to summarize all the wealth of our reflections, this second part of the Acts simply presents the Guidelines and the Modifications made to some articles of the Constitutions, together with two practical interpretations. It also presents other decisions that were made and particular tasks that were entrusted to Mother General and to the General Council, by the Chapter.

CHAPTER GUIDELINES

42. In the Chapter reflections, we gave great importance to **Evaluating the Deliberation of GC XXI** and to some proposals that dealt with poverty and the sharing of goods. From the dialogue within the Study Commissions and in the Assembly, there emerged two **Guidelines**.¹

¹ The Guidelines are directives of primary importance, approved by General Chapter XXII and entrusted to all the Provinces for implementation.

1. Continuing the process of vital renewal

We renew our commitment to carry on the process of vital renewal by means of the study and assimilation of the *Constitutions*, so that they may be ever more understood and treasured, and assumed both as a life project that directs us along the path of holiness in the Salesian style and as a personal and community criterion that enlightens and guides our choices.

Let us implement the following documents: the *Plan of Formation*, the *Guidelines for the Educational Mission of the FMA* and the guidelines for *Cooperation for Development*. We feel the need to move from an incomplete and compartmentalized understanding of these documents to a unified vision: each document sheds light on the others, and together with the *Regulations* they make up the Institute's own law. (cf *CIC* 587 § 4).

In particular:

- It is important that the *Plan of Formation* become a point of reference especially in regard to ongoing formation, the vocational dimension of the educative mission and coordination for communion.
- The *Guidelines for the Educational Mission of the FMA* need to be presented, studied and deepened on our own and also with the members of the educating communities so that they can be the basis for pastoral planning, appropriate to diverse contexts. In this way we FMA and laity together, promote a culture of vocations and the Salesian spirituality and educational method.
- The document *Cooperation for Development* needs to be studied and deepened so as to assume the vision of the Institute regarding economic solidarity, and the choice of working in favour of integral human development, starting from the anthropological vision which is the basis of our educational mission.

2. Poverty and the sharing of goods

We reaffirm the need for our prophetic witness to poverty and the preferential option for the education of the neediest young people using concrete and shared methods.

- Each Province will promote a culture of solidarity as an alternative to the capitalistic mentality; it will value the opportunities for, and the asceticism required to promote development projects to sustain our works and to enable the poor to be the primary agents in their own development; it will

strengthen networks of collaboration with agencies that defend human rights, especially the rights of the weakest.

- Each community will promote courageous and frequent evaluations of the way they live poverty in the Salesian style (cf C 23), of the transparency of its economic administration, and of its choices / of self-limitation. Each community will commit to preparing an annual budget and balance sheet thus becoming more aware of the cost of living.
- The sharing of goods will be carried out decisively at local, Provincial and central levels; competent FMA will be prepared in the field of finance with an understanding of economic solidarity.

MODIFICATIONS TO SOME ARTICLES OF THE CONSTITUTIONS

43. Modified articles of the Constitutions

General Chapter XXII voted to confirm the articles of the Constitutions that had been approved *ad experimentum* by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life on November 9, 2002, with the protocol N. T. 41-1/2002.

They deal with:

- a more significant representation, at the General Chapter, from all the continents in which we work (art. 139);
- a more significant representation at Provincial Chapters (art. 159);
- the duration in office of the Provincial Secretary and of the Provincial Bursar (art. 154 and 155);
- the composition of local councils (art. 166).

The Chapter also voted to modify article 28 of the Constitutions, that deals with the administration of goods according to the Salesian spirit.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life definitively approved the modifications to the above-mentioned articles on November 10, 2008, with the protocol N. T. 41-1/2002.

The parts in bold print indicate modifications made to the draft that had been approved *ad experimentum*.

Art. 139

Participation in the General Chapter

The following will take part in the Chapter with the right to vote:

- a. the Superior General;
- b. the Superiors General *emeritae*;
- c. the General Councillors, who will remain members of the Chapter in progress even if not re-elected;
- d. the Secretary General;
- e. the Moderator of the Chapter;
- f. the Provincials, and the Superiors of Pre-Provinces or, if they are prevented from attending for serious reasons, their Vicars with the prior approval of the Superior General;
- g. the delegate from each Province of not more than 300 Sisters, the second delegate **from each Province** with more than 300 Sisters and the delegate of each Pre-Province, elected by their respective Chapters;
- h. the delegate elected by the pre-Chapter Assembly of a community directly dependent on the Superior General.

Motivation

This new form of representation allows for greater participation by the numerically larger Provinces.

Art. 159

Participation in the Provincial Chapter

Members of the Chapter by election are:

- a. **one Sister from each house having at least 5 Sisters;**
- b. **in Provinces of up to 250 Sisters, delegates in the proportion of one Sister for every 15 or fraction of 15, elected by all the Sisters of the Province.**
- c. **in Provinces with more than 250 Sisters, delegates in the proportion of one Sister for every 30 or fraction of 30, elected by all the Sisters of the Province.**

The election of delegates to the Provincial Chapter will be held according to the norms prescribed in the Regulations.

All the professed Sisters have votes but only perpetually professed Sisters can be elected, excluding those who are members of the Chapter by right.

Motivation

- a. Participation in the Provincial Chapter by Sisters from the smaller communities encourages a more meaningful representation.
- b. The modification allows the Provinces with larger numbers to hold the Provincial Chapter in an easier and meaningful manner.

Art. 154

Provincial Bursar

The Provincial Bursar, who may be one of the Councillors, administers the movable and immovable goods of the Province in dependence on the Provincial and in agreement with the Council, to whom she will periodically give an account of the financial state of the Province.

It is her duty to co-ordinate and check the administration of the material goods of the houses and to prepare the annual administrative report to be sent to the Bursar General.

In her office let her always act with charity, prudence, loyalty and apostolic zeal, giving witness to poverty and trust in Divine Providence.

She is appointed by the Provincial in agreement with her Council according to the norms of article 152d.

She remains in office for three years and may be appointed to a maximum of four consecutive three-year terms in the same Province.

Art. 155
Provincial
Secretary

The Provincial Secretary,
who may also be one of the Councillors,
has the particular responsibility
of drawing up the minutes
of the Council meetings
and the official documents of the Province;
she has care of the archives, registers,
the statistics and chronicles of the Province.
She will offer her collaboration to the Provincial
in a spirit of co-responsibility,
prudence and sisterly availability.
She is appointed by the Provincial
in agreement with her Council
according to the norms of article 152d.
She remains in office for three years
and may be appointed
to a maximum of four consecutive three-year terms
in the same Province.

Motivations relative to articles 154 and 155

This modification takes into account the fact that the mandate of
the Provincial Councillors is for three years, and they cannot remain
in office more than nine years.
The roles of Provincial Bursar and Secretary are demanding and
require adequate rotation.

Art. 166
The service of animation in
local communities

In every local community
the Superior, in her service of authority,
will be assisted by the Vicar or by the Bursar.
Where the number of Sisters
and/or the complexity of the works require it,
the Provincial, with **the advice of** her Council
and in agreement with the Superior,
will set up a Council composed of the Vicar
and a **suitable** number of Councillors
who will collaborate co-responsibly
in the animation and in government.
The Bursar, if she is not a Councillor,

will take part in Council meetings
without the right to vote.

Motivation

The variety of situations suggests flexibility in the composition of the Council. The Provincial with her Council has the responsibility of deciding which communities need a local Council or simply a Vicar or Bursar.

Art. 28

**Administration
of goods according to
the Salesian Spirit**

Religious poverty according to the Salesian Spirit does not permit any form of profit-making, nor the ownership of immovable goods for the sole purpose of revenue, nor any other form of permanent, interest-bearing investment.

The Institute, therefore, may retain only the ownership of the material goods **necessary for the development of the mission.**

Motivation

This responds to the need to emphasize that all that we have and possess is at the service of the mission.

44. Practical interpretation of some articles of the Constitutions

General Chapter XXII confirmed and broadened two practical interpretations given by CG XXI to articles 120/132 and 28 of the Constitutions:

Art. 120

The Superior General will visit the Institute either personally or through her General Councillors, or, in exceptional cases, through other Visiting Superiors chosen from outside the General Council. The visits have the aim of strengthening the bonds of charity, deepening the commitment of fidelity to the Constitutions and fostering the development

of the our works in response to local needs
in the spirit of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello.
In both personal and community meetings
the Superior General will encourage spontaneity and openness
to facilitate constructive & sincere dialogue.
She will examine the economic administration
in the light of charity, justice,
evangelical poverty
and apostolic aims.

Art. 132

The Councillors delegated by the Superior General
to visit the Institute
– in addition to the duties prescribed
in article 120 of the present Constitutions –
have also the task of promoting
constructive and continuous communication
between the Provinces
and the Superior General and her Council,
and of encouraging effective collaboration
among the various provincial communities.
Through their service
they will be able to offer the General Council
a better knowledge of the Sisters
and of the environments in which our mission is carried
out, and thus be able to develop the apostolic work
of the Institute,
making the best use of the different cultures,
in fidelity to the Church and to Don Bosco.

**45. General Chapter XII confirmed and broadened, according to
the norms of the Constitutions (art. 171), the practical interpretation
of articles 120 and 132 of the Constitutions.**

The Visiting Councillor, delegate of the Superior General, will visit the

Provinces entrusted to her, as a Sister among Sisters, to strengthen communion in the Institute.

She will strive to gain an adequate understanding of the realities that she will be visiting. She will get to know the journey and the needs of the Provinces that have been entrusted to her through consultation with the Councillors for the different Areas of Animation.

With the Provincial and her Council she will prepare, plan and evaluate the visit. She will consider, with them, how to ensure its continuity. When possible, she will make a brief visit some time before the *canonical visit*.

By attentive listening to people and openness to the different cultures, she will accompany the Provinces in their commitment to their journey, while encouraging growth in their integration of life, in the quality of their educational presence and in the inculturation of the charism. She will facilitate the journey of the Province with a more systematic approach when particular situations warrant it.

The Inter provincial Conferences, according to their needs, may ask the Superior General for one or more Visiting Councillors to visit the Provinces belonging to their Conference.

One Visiting Councillor is assigned to each Inter provincial Conference as a point of reference. When it is possible, she will take part in the more important meetings of that Conference. When requested, and depending on the topic under consideration, a Councillor from one of the Areas of Animation may also take part. This Visiting Councillor will accompany the progress of the Conferences, and will propose springboards for reflection in view of the exchange of Sisters between Provinces and to support their progress in solidarity and networking. She will be a stable point of reference for the Conferences.

To bring about a co-ordinated and convergent form of animation, the Visiting Councillors of the same Conference will share their experiences. They will study the issues they faced and the recurrent challenges, so as to offer some common guidelines to the Conference.

Motivation

The interpretation of articles 120 and 132 adopts the choice of coordination for communion, expressed in the Plan of Formation.

This style of co-ordination involves the Provincial Communities, the Inter provincial Conferences and the General Council in seeking, together, ways of organizing visits that better respond to the needs of the Institute according to different situations.

46. General Chapter XII confirms and broadens, according to the norms of the Constitutions (art. 171), the practical interpretation of article 28 of the Constitutions:

In cases where the use of immobile property belonging to the Institute is no longer necessary for the functioning of apostolic works, it is permitted to rent it out on a temporary basis. Such a decision, clearly motivated, may be made by the Provincial with the consensus of her Council and will be communicated to the Superior General and her Council, to the Sisters and to our lay collaborators. The income received will be included in the annual Administrative Report.

In addition, to support the educative works and carry out the mission among the poorest youth, each community will study the possibilities provided by local laws for securing funds.

Every proposal is to be submitted to Central Administration and every decision is to be made with the consensus of Mother General and her Council.

Motivation

In today's changed socio-economic context and faced with world-wide impoverishment - which challenges us to live an essential and poor lifestyle - we feel the need to access economic resources in order to support our educative works, guaranteeing their development and favouring our mission among the poorest youth.

OTHER DECISIONS

47. Leave of absence from the religious house for a temporary professed Sister

General Chapter XXII reviewed the decision of GC XX and GC XXI regarding the leave of absence from the religious house for a temporary professed Sister and has reformulated it as follows:

A leave of absence from the religious house for a temporary professed Sister may be granted by the Provincial with the advice of her Council for grave reasons.

The absence will be no longer than six months, with care being taken that the last months, prior to the renewal of the vows, will be lived in community.

Motivation

We are aware of the rarity of this type of permission, but also of the fact that a temporary professed Sister may need a period of absence from the religious house for legitimate reasons.

48. The decision regarding Sisters who have left the Institute

With careful attention, the Chapter Assembly studied the request to re-accept Sisters who have left the Institute. The Assembly underlined the necessity of intensifying accompaniment in all stages of life, to give ever new meaning to our choice for Christ and to create the conditions whereby Sisters who find themselves in moments of particular difficulty can have an experience of good discernment. However, the Assembly confirmed what is provided for in *Regulations* article 106: "The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians bound by temporary or perpetual vows who leave the Institute, or who are dismissed from it, will be helped with charity and kindness, but they may not be re-admitted."

49. The annual report on the community evaluation

Based on the positive experience of this six-year period, GC XXII confirmed GC XXI's choice regarding the report on the community evaluation. Therefore, let us go ahead as follows:

- let each Province draw up a provincial strategic plan, in line with the recommendations of the General Chapter, choosing the areas most suited to its situation;
- let every community, in keeping with this plan, formulate their own community plan;
- let the community periodically evaluate its coherence in living its plan;
- during her visit to each community, let the Provincial share in the community's reflection on how they are living their annual plan;
- at the end of the year, let the community compile a written evaluation and send it to the Provincial;
- let the Provincial add her comments for each community and send the evaluations to the Centre.

Motivation

This format allows for community reflection and growth, thus promoting ownership of the guidelines from the General Chapter and a more responsible living out of the provincial and community plans.

TASKS ENTRUSTED TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL

50. The Chapter Assembly entrusted Mother General and her Council with the tasks of:

1. Establishing a commission of experts who will study the possibilities and means to:
 - transfer into the *Regulations* some precepts of the articles of the *Constitution* that could vary with changing times and local needs;
 - use gender-inclusive language;
 - update the notes with references to include more recent Church documents.
2. Creating an international team to promote the research, documentation and study of the history of the Institute.
3. Preparing the house in Mornese Mazzarelli to become a Centre of Hospitality open to the laity, young people and adults, in order to study our spirituality and educative charism.