

*With Mary toward the 150th of the Institute
(1872 - 2022)*

Dearest Sisters,

We joyfully come to share with you what the Lord has suggested to us for the preparation of the significant event of the 150th of the foundation of the Institute. We consulted with a special Commission composed of FMA, laity, and young people of the Salesian Family who have offered us a valid contribution of reflections and proposals.

The event we are preparing to live is for everyone a call to transform the celebration into an opportunity for renewal in the Holy Spirit that makes our communities 'generate new life'. In fact, we have a magnificent charismatic heritage for which we are responsible not only for guarding it, but for making it grow to radiate its fruitfulness at the ecclesial and social levels.

Grateful to God and to Mary Help of Christians for the great history we have lived as FMA up to now, we want to revitalize the beauty of the charism so that it may be more meaningful and contagious in the diverse contexts of today's world (cf. Circular n. 985).

By involving the educating communities and the Salesian Family, we intend to celebrate fidelity to God that, through Don Bosco and the direct intervention of Mary Help of Christians (cf. C 1), gave rise to the Institute and accompanies it in time and space with vigilant love. Thus, together with the young and the laity who share the educational mission with us, we can give greater splendor and visibility to the charism, gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to the world for the salvation of the young.

A Religious Family that belongs entirely to Mary (cf. C 4)

Rethinking about the Marian inspiration of the Institute, we propose as the theme of this celebration Don Bosco's expression, *Mary walks in this house* (Cf. *Cronistoria V, 51-52*). The words that he addressed to the FMA at his last encounter at Nizza Monferrato in 1885 are in close harmony with the Chapter theme and thus it is easy to explain the connection. For 'house' we mean the world, there where the mission entrusted to the FMA and the educating communities is carried out; wherever Mary is present as protector, guide, inspirer in helping us to live the generative power of the charism in the today of history.

"Mary walks with us" is not an abstract phrase but a reality that evokes a 'vision', a certainty, rooted in faith and in the Salesian charism, a lived experience.

From the beginning of the Gospel we find Mary who from Nazareth, goes with solicitude towards Ain Karim to be a caring presence beside Elizabeth, a sign of God's foreseeing grace. Without delay, she leaves her home to bring the happy proclamation of joy: Jesus.

Mary's enterprising style is confirmed at the wedding at Cana: without being asked, she perceives a need and takes the first step that anticipates the hour of the Son. With the intuition of a mother, she involves the servants and disciples on the path of faith and ensures the joy of the feast. Her presence increases the happiness of the young spouses and contributes to forming the community of Jesus' disciples.

Mary is the Mother who, in accepting the entrustment of Jesus on the Cross, is close to all her daughters and sons, accompanies them on the journey of the sequela, and guards them in time of trial. In the Church, with her maternal solicitude, she takes care of her Son's sisters and brothers still in pilgrimage and in the midst of dangers and trials of various kinds, until they are led to the blessed country (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 62).

At Mornese, Mary accompanied the young Main and guided her, especially during the time of uncertainty about her future, towards a new horizon of the mission to take care of poor girls with a specific mandate, *I entrust them to you*.

In the history of the Institute, Mary is actively present and continues her mission in our communities as Helper and Mother. She sustains us in the commitment to educate the young and in helping us to find the most adequate ways to be with them and for them the "sign and expression of His foreseeing love among young people" (cf. C 1).

The stages of the celebration of the 150th

To prepare ourselves for the celebration as Institute, we will live a triennial of praise, of gratitude, of new educational and vocational vitality that will be interwoven with the Chapter event according to these themes illumined by the words of Mother Mazzarello:

2019-2020 *Give thanks*: "Let us truly thank the Lord who gives us many graces" (L 37,10)

2020-2021 *Accept the mandate*: "I entrust them to you."

2021-2022 *Plan the future boldly*: "Courage! Let us go ahead with a great and generous heart" (L 47,12)

We let ourselves be inspired on this journey by the one who traced out the feminine face of the educational charism of Don Bosco, reliving it at Mornese and Nizza Monferrato in a creative and daring way together with the first communities, with the young people, and with the lay collaborators.

During these three years, it will be everyone's commitment to involve the educating communities, especially the young people, in re-discovering Mary Domenica in her richness as a young woman and in the prophetic dimensions of her spirituality and educational mission.

In order to give greater depth to this knowledge, we can draw on the material of the Data Bank, of the FMA Studies Center, and of the written and audio-visual resources (films, songs, dramas, etc....) that the Institute and the Provinces have a wealth of.

Proposal for celebratory events

We invite every Province and community to celebrate with the young, the laity, and the groups of the Salesian Family the significant moments of this journey. It will be a new effusion of grace and of joy that can contagion other young people and even reawaken in them the attraction for Jesus who calls them to give them fullness of life (cf. *Christus Vivit*, nos. 248-277).

To begin the 150th celebrations, we propose living with a special spirit of gratitude, the coming **August 5th**, anniversary of the foundation of the Institute. On that day, from the room of Mother Mazzarello at Mornese, *our Mother will reach the whole Institute by officially opening the celebratory triennial of the 150th*.

As a sign of communion, we propose that for this year marked by gratitude, we live with special solemnity the *feast of St. Mary D. Mazzarello* with an accurate and engaging

preparation and allowing gratitude to emerge for the gift of her holiness and for the relevance of the Salesian mission in the world.

So that the celebratory event may touch life and transform it, we suggest translating into *daily experience* the proposal of the 150th of the Institute:

- Let us renew the certainty that Mary walks with us, “sustains and accompanies, protects and embraces us” (*Christus Vivit*, n. 45). With her, we pronounce our yes and from her we learn how to do whatever Jesus tells us (cf. *John 2: 5*) to be with her help, ‘helpers’ of life, custodians of joy and of hope.
- The witness of Mother Mazzarello inspires our communities in the commitment to renew that freshness of life and of action that flows from *concrete gestures*: assuming with renewed love the Constitutions and the ‘Preventive System’, we desire to witness to the feminine nuances of the educational charism of the Institute.
- Aware that Mary walks in our house and wants to reach many young people, we will make our *communities more open to welcome the young* to listen to them, to let their dreams, questions, and needs emerge. Enriched by their presence, we will have a way to weave dialogue, accompanying them to discover the plan of God for their life and involving them more actively in the mission, beginning with daily commitment.
- The *Official LOGO* and Hymn of the 150th, as a sign of unity for the whole Institute, will be chosen through a contest. To this end, specific guidelines will be sent for those who wish to make their own artistic and musical contributions.

We wish to live this year of preparation for the XXIV General Chapter with gratitude and wonder in contemplating the richness of sanctity, of educational passion, of missionary creativity that still flourishes in the Institute today. We see that there are seeds of life everywhere, signs of hope that make us exalt with joy.

Our wonder echoes the words of Mother Mazzarello who, after only four years of the foundation of the Institute, wrote to Fr. Giovanni Cagliari, “To say the truth, I remain both *amazed and at the same time confused as I see these daughters always happy and tranquil. It is apparent that, in spite of my unworthiness, our dear Mother, Mary Help of Christians, gives us great graces. Please have the goodness to pray for me so that this spirit may be maintained and grow more and more and so that the virtues that are seen blossoming may be more internal than external. (L 7, 2).*

In this journey of preparation we remain united in prayer and in the joy of belonging to the Lord and to our beautiful religious Family, entirely of Mary.

With affection we greet you by invoking upon all of you the blessing of the Trinity and of Mary Help of Christians,

Castelgandolfo, 16 July 2019

Mother and the Sisters of the Council