

A time rich in charismatic vitality

Dearest Sisters,

We reach you with joy before concluding the winter *Plenary* session of the General Council.

During these months as always, we lived in deep communion with all of you and together we felt accompanied by Mary's motherly gaze. Her presence at Cana and her words echo in our heart and help us to do what Jesus tells us.

Towards General Chapter XXIV

During this *Plenum*, preparation for General Chapter XXIV engaged most of our reflections in listening to the reality of the Institute, in prayer, and in community discernment.

We are grateful to the Lord for the signs of His presence in the Institute in the world, province, local realities, and in every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, in the young people, and in the laity who share our mission.

We thank everyone for the reception of the theme of General Chapter XXIV and for the journey taken in every Province in the preparation for the Provincial Chapters and in their implementation. The content that came to us is a sign of the vitality of the charism in every part of the world in which we are present.

Studying the *Letter of Convocation* (cf. Circ. 985), listening to the reality with availability to the Holy Spirit, and discerning in order to face contemporaneity according to the charism offered a valid contribution for the preparation of the *Working Document*, elaborated by the Pre-Chapter Commission made up of FMA coming from various contexts. The document, which has been reviewed and approved by the General Council, will be sent to the Capitulars.

We thank you for having collaborated in the diffusion of the *online survey* and we are grateful to all the young people and laity of the various Continents who participated, responding to the questions addressed to them. The result was valuable for drawing up the *Working Document*.

In the footsteps of history

With gratitude and joy, we continue to prepare for the **celebration of the 150th** of the foundation of the Institute that is arousing enthusiasm in the various parts of the world.

From Mornese on 5 August 2019, Mother opened the triennial of preparation, highlighting the importance of living it as a time of praise, of gratitude, of new educational and vocational vitality.

We desire it to be thus for the educating communities and for the Salesian Family. Together we can celebrate the joy of living this special event in our history as the Family of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello.

We let ourselves be inspired by Mary Domenica who with the first communities, outlined the feminine face of Don Bosco's educational charism, living it in Mornese and Nizza Monferrato in a creative and daring way.

For the upcoming feast of May 13, we invite you to involve the educating communities, especially the young people, in rediscovering and celebrating Mary Domenica in her richness as a young woman and in the prophetic dimensions of her spirituality and educational mission (cf. Circ. 989).

In view of the International Congress on Education that will be celebrated in 2022 on the occasion of the 150th of the Institute, preparations are taking place in various Nations coordinated by the Pontifical Faculty of Science of Education *Auxilium*. It regards carrying out at the national level, a research to identify how the current scenarios of each Country affect the youth reality and how they challenge Salesian education.

You already know the Logo that accompanies us in the time of preparation for the celebrations of the Jubilee of the Institute: “*Mary walks in this house.*” There were 54 proposals sent by 27 FMA Provinces.

We thank all the participants for the effort and artistic creativity shown.

The chosen Logo was the idea of a young woman, María Fernanda Bastida Zapata, past pupil and member of the Youth Pastoral Team of Mary Help of Christians Province of Medellín (Colombia). We thank Maria Fernanda for her contribution that expresses the fundamental elements of the charism and recalls the communion of our large Family united around Mary, inspirer and mother. We also express our satisfaction for the inauguration of the new Web Site of the Institute as a space for participation, communication, and formation. It is an open window on the world for sharing Salesian life and mission and for the visibility of the charism.

In the heart of the Church

On the world horizon, crossed by unprecedented crises and worries for the future, also in places where the FMA are found, and where it is difficult to keep hope alive, religious life is located like a little light that illumines. The gaze of consecrated persons, as the Pope reminded us in the celebration of the World Day on February 2, must be a gaze of light and of hope. The secret is to not distance ourselves from the Lord. “We become blind if we do not look at the Lord every day.”

In communion with Pope Francis, we welcome the call to continue to insert ourselves in the journey of the Church also through studying the ecclesial documents emanated at this time, above all the documents *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* on its first anniversary, and the Post-Synod Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*.

We are also invited to accompany with interest and prayer the coming events: *The Economy of Francis. The Young, a Pact, the Future*, that will take place in Assisi on March 26-28, and *Rebuilding the Global Educational Pact*, that will take place in the Vatican on May 14, 2020. Both events challenge us as educating communities to identify possible responses to the emerging formation questions.

In prayer for our Salesian confreres

We desire to be close with prayer to our Salesian confreres in this time of grace in which General Chapter 28 is taking place at Valdocco from 16 February to 4 April 2020 on the theme, *Which Salesians for today's young people.*

We follow their Chapter journey with fraternal interest and express our lively gratitude to the Rector Major Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime and his Council for their service of animation and government, for their collaboration in the common educational mission, and for their fraternal closeness during these six years.

May Mary continue to be Mother and Teacher for them and for us.

Before concluding, we thank each of you for the prayers and the many messages of closeness that we have received. These sisterly gestures have supported and accompanied us in this challenging and enriching time. They express the strong sense of belonging and the collaborative presence of each one, a blessing for the whole Institute.

We ask you to continue to pray for General Chapter XXIV and to prepare it together with all the participants in an attitude of openness and docility to the Holy Spirit. He is the one guiding us!

So that the upcoming Chapter may truly be for all the FMA and the educating communities an event of the Holy Spirit in the search for God's will and of new vitality for the charism, let us commit ourselves during these months of preparation to live authentic charity, ridding ourselves of all that blocks fraternal, serene relationships and asking the Lord for the gift of a free and pure heart.

Mary Help of Christians sustains us, accompanies us, and always smiles on us.

We greet you with the words of Mother Mazzarello: "I leave you in the heart of Jesus and I pray that He may bless you, make you totally His, and keep you always united and cheerful" (L 17: 5).

With affection and gratitude,

Rome, 24 February 2020

Mother and the Sisters of the Council