



HOGARES DON BOSCO

POZOBLANCO (CÓRDOBA)

This current installment by Fr. Tom Dunne, SDB, and Sr. Denise Sickinger, FMA, concerning the presentations at the Salesian Family Spirituality Days focuses on another initiative of the lay members of the Salesian Family – the Salesian Cooperators of Spain. They, like the members of ADMA, first sought a way to help strengthen families already on the path of building their lives and their families on Christ in Don Bosco's way. Also as ADMA, the members of the *Hogares Don Bosco* Organization has since branched out to offer their help to aid, encourage, and support couples just starting out or in difficulty to help them build their families on the solid Rock of Christ.

DON BOSCO HOMES

A Family Pastoral Movement of the Salesian Cooperators (SSCC) of Spain
by Andrés and Carmen from Pozoblanco (Córdoba)

A Personal Presentation



Good Evening! We are Andrés and Carmen, a married couple from Pozoblanco, Spain, a town with a great Salesian tradition. Both of us have been linked to the Salesian Family from our childhood: first as oratorians and then as animators. During our engagement and in our marriage, the Salesian spirit and the love of Mary Help of Christians have always been present. As part of the Salesian Family, we feel that we want and we need to continue to grow in Christian spirituality and in our own personal formation, both as a couple and as a family.

Because of this, 10 years ago we decided to become part of *Don Bosco Homes*. As married persons, we felt the need to form ourselves as a couple and to seek help and support in our Faith together with other couples with similar concerns. And that's what we found in Hogares Don Bosco.

What is "*Don Bosco Homes*"?

Don Bosco Homes is a Salesian ecclesial Movement in the realm of the Family Pastoral. It was founded in 1965 by the Salesian Cooperators with this motto: "To God together with our children, in Don Bosco's hands". From Spain it has spread today to Mexico, Argentina, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Chile. In Spain, 100 groups of married couples make up the Movement.

Don Bosco Homes are organized into groups of married couples who freely accept its spirit and who want to make a journey to grow as humans, Christians, and Salesians, and as a family. We are part of the Salesian Movement. We know we are in communion with all the Groups of the Salesian Family - especially the Association of Salesian Cooperators, who are our animators. We draw our spiritual formation for couples and our growth as a family from the charism of Don Bosco.



We adopted the name of "**HOMES**" because of its special reference to the family, the "Domestic Church", and to Don Bosco - so as to express the idea that our *sequela Christi* is inspired by the Gospel spirit of the Saint. We base ourselves on this ideology wherein our identity as belonging to the Salesian Family is reflected. Our goal: to form ourselves and to grow as responsible Christian parents and educators of our children.

We do not limit our love to ourselves; we manifest the love we profess through gestures and in little details, with optimism and simplicity. We want this love to be creative and to help those around us, especially our children, to achieve their full realization.

Like Don Bosco, we believe that Reason is a foundation of communal living, both between ourselves and with our children. That is why we cultivate conversation, dialogue, and listening within the family. As Don Bosco did, so we, too, seek to create a family environment by taking advantage of all

the means that offer us love, reason, and a life of faith. We seek, above all, the educative strength that arises from the ordinary situations of each day. To us, this is the essence of the spirituality of the Preventive System lived in families. Belonging to this Salesian Family Movement means growing as persons, as a married couple, and as a family.

Basic moments in the life of the Movement

Monthly gathering. We meet in the home of one of the married couples that comprise the group, with a different family hosting each month. During this gathering, we share about a particular topic that each couple has worked on individually. Guided by the host couple, we share about this common topic and deepen our understanding of it. A Priest counselor always accompanies us during these gatherings.

The formation process of *Don Bosco Homes* unfolds over three complementary stages, conceived as concentric circles that expand upon, help us deepen, and cover thoroughly the principles of this ideology.

Each of these stages has its own objectives and specific thematic content:

- ◆ The initiation stage. During this stage, attention is given to the family, human, Christian, and Salesian formation of the members. It covers the topic of *Don Bosco Homes'* ideology and promotes its incorporation into the reality of the Salesian Family. It lasts three years. In this first phase, the group must be forged as such. An atmosphere of trust among its members must be achieved if they are to get to know each other and to plan together in personal and group work and promote the expression and sharing of feelings.
- ◆ The solidification stage. This has a duration of one year. It mainly takes care of the transformation of the families into Salesian Domestic Churches and of their growth in love of God and of neighbor. Integration within the group is fostered in such a way that the experiences of the already-solidified groups nurture, through experience and witness, those groups that are just beginning to form.
- ◆ The commitment and dissemination stage. This stage is distinguished by its diffusive and apostolic character, proper to what is received, and is concerned with exercising pastoral action in favor of others. "What you have freely received, freely give." From this point on, the groups continue to mature in age, in the experience of living together, in giving help in the experience of faith and of love, and in giving witness.

The *Homes* group, however, does not only deal with issues such as the Preventive System, the gift that children are, the Christian family as a believing and evangelizing community, fidelity in marriage, or *Amoris Laetitia* during a course in progress. It is, at the same time, a support for married couples.

We form a group of couples of similar age with whom we share about common problems and experiences. With the support of our counselor who, in addition to being our spiritual guide brings to us his knowledge and vision of the Church, the meetings turn our group into a family, our family of *Homes*.

The presence of the Lord is felt in a tangible way at every meeting. The topics help us mature in our Faith and make our lives more profound. Our experiences are shared in an atmosphere of trust, love, and prayer. We know that the one next to us speaks to us with tenderness, gives us his whole being, supports us, and opens our heart. A caress, a hug, a handshake, a smile, or some tears are common during our meetings. *Homes* helps transform our families into Domestic Churches so we grow in love for God and our neighbor. The feeling of belonging to the group grows stronger because the other married couples become part of you.

Through *Homes*, we are committed to the education of our children and to society, as part of the family pastoral of the Church. Many of us are active members of other Movements of the Salesian Family or the diocese or our parish.

Other meetings organized by the Local or Provincial Commission of *Don Bosco Homes* complement these for the married couples. They are meetings in which the feeling of belonging to Salesian family ministry flows because we feel like a family and because our children share with us and with other families experiences, friendships, devotions, and the handing on of traditions. Each member there present is unique and contributes what he has, giving him or herself entirely for the good of the community and the family of *Don Bosco Homes*.

Homes is for us the way to build, preserve, and rehabilitate the family and each one of our families. Step by step, day by day, and meeting by meeting, we feel closer to Christ and we grow as individuals, as a married couple, and as FAMILY, and we take on a commitment to society to make the family the main artery of evangelization.



Some especially strong values of the *Don Bosco Homes* experience

- The daily expression of love, building up and strengthening relationships in dialogue, trust, and growing together. The family is seen as a workshop of life, hope, and resurrection;
- Fidelity to love - return love with more love. This gift of love gives us reassurance because we get more by giving love than we do by receiving it.
- Sincere communication: with feelings shared and growth in conjugal communion.
- The moment of meeting – the intimate moment of marriage where two people who are one meet to analyze their plan of life in common.
- The experience of the Salesian charism - a charism that empowers like few others in the realm of one's own family, as well as that of the realm of the family of families that constitutes the Movement.
- The integration of children into a wider community in a healthy, inter-generational environment in which all (children, adults, and the elderly) teach and learn, live together, enjoy, grow, and become involved as protagonists. This great family of *Homes* is built among all.
- The Domestic Church experience, with well-defined values that serve as pillars supporting growth as individuals and as families.
- The fortitude that leaves its mark on everyone – a fortitude that encourages us to give witness and to undertake the mission of evangelization in our society, even when we come across roadblocks and rejection.
- The gratuitousness of relationships based on love, forgiveness, and support within our society which has become so commercialized, making it seem impossible to live such relationships.
- As Don Angel says, the facilitation of a broad deepening of the values of conjugal love, living it as a gift from God, and as an encounter of hearts that communicate, unite, and love each other, working at it as craftsmen.
- The experience of a love that transforms with age: it grows and matures in fidelity; it surrenders and spreads more and more each time; it is not only an emotion or a feeling but a path that leads us to God.
- The knowledge that we are agents of change to the benefit of our children and of the couples and families with whom we cross paths in our lives.
- And many others ... which have made and continue to make the experience of *Don Bosco Homes* a particularly rich place for the hundreds of couples that comprise them.

Looking to the future: in what direction do we move?

We have spoken briefly about the origin of *Don Bosco Homes*, about their identity, about the simple elements that make up the Movement, and about some particularly powerful values for those living this experience ... But as a group and as a Movement, we also look to the future. Towards what horizon of ideas do we move? Basically, we seek to do these five:

1. *To continue to strengthen our identity as a family pastoral Movement within the Salesian Family.* The Rector Major's *Strenna* for this year presents us with a great challenge: "We are Family, Every Home a School of Life and Love". In *Don Bosco Homes*, we are well aware of the wealth that this experience has given to the married couples of the Movement. We feel obliged to give that witness which the Rector Major proposed by cultivating in our homes the characteristics of the Preventive System of Don Bosco and by offering our experience to the whole Salesian Family for we are part of this Family. We thank God that we have a simple but effective organization that pushes us in this direction. Belonging to a reference group like *Homes* ensures that we reconsider and restate each day what the values are that we must defend daily. It reminds us that we should never tire of loving.

2. *To continue to reinforce our participation as Don Bosco Homes in the pastoral care of the family of the Local Church (parishes and dioceses).* *Homes* is an ecclesial movement. As such, we collaborate with parishes and with ecclesial organizations involved in the family pastoral. We feel the duty and the urgency to fortify this collaboration, especially at a time when the Church feels it imperative to work "for" and "with" families as never before. The study of *Amoris Laetitia* that we have undertaken this year opens up to us a great horizon in this regard.

We parents must be the potters in each of our families. We must do the craftwork of a goldsmith to grow in our humanity as man and as woman. Our family will grow if we help our marriage grow, with our own hands and with our closeness. Growing together should be the goal in the relationship between spouses.

3. *To offer our society, particularly to young couples, the beauty and the significance of our way of understanding and living as family, putting God at the center of our family relationships.* *Homes* is conscious of the challenges posed by our society - the situations that are experienced by so many families and the difficulties of young people when it comes to think of their own marriage and family life. Since we are a Salesian Family Movement, we cannot live detached from this reality. Our aim is to unite our experience and our strengths with the other groups, particularly with that of the Salesian Youth Movement and of the Salesian Family, so that as many young people as possible can find reference points, models, who help them grow and live their vocation to marriage. The family is the pillar of the Church and society and is fundamental to their proper development.

4. *With regard to young people, a most concrete line of action is the following: to accompany young people during the time of their engagement and marriage preparation by offering and facilitating the formation of new groups of Homes.* We believe that the spirit, values, and style proper to *Don Bosco Homes* are particularly apt to help young couples strengthen their life, and their marriage and family experience. This is seen as being particularly necessary when we find that so many couples lack help and models to follow. The preparation of formation itineraries for young couples, in which a project of love consciously assumed is established, is fundamental for perceiving matrimony as a vocation and as a solid, strong, and lasting alliance that journeys towards God.

5. *One more line of action, still: the accompaniment of wounded marriages, particularly in the initial stages, as well as the accompaniment of broken marriages.* We all know that these are delicate situations, but the experience of *Homes* and the strength of the faithful witness of its members offer us a good prospect for this type of help.

Conclusion

By our presence here today, we seek nothing more than to offer our experiences so that the *Strenna* that the Rector Major proposed to the entire Salesian Family finds concrete channels to become a reality. We are not starting from scratch: *Don Bosco Homes* has celebrated its 50th anniversary of trying to respond to the needs of families. The current circumstances continue to put pressure on us. We vividly hope that in the future the family will have the shape and the presence it deserves both in society and in the Church. This is a task that falls to everyone.

The Rector Major calls upon the entire Salesian Family to foster and support the family. Don Bosco told us: "How many souls can be attracted by good example!" Through *Homes*, we offer that good example in which we believe and in which we grow - that of *Don Bosco Homes*. What better way than by helping and encouraging the formation of groups like *Don Bosco Homes* so that many marriages can be saved? May this be more and more a reality in our great Salesian Family. You can count on us for this. Thank you very much.



The video of Carmen and Andres' presentation may be found on "Hogares Don Bosco" Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Hogares-Don-Bosco-Llars-Don-Bosco-207844989278420/>