

To the Provincials and to the
Superiors of the Pre-Provinces



Dear Sisters,

It is with great joy that I communicate to you the theme of the feast of gratitude that will help us to feel even more intensely in communion with the whole Institute, alive and active on the seven continents.

It is always beautiful to remember that this festival is a typically Salesian tradition, whose origins date back to 1849 when, at the Valdocco Oratory in Turin, the boys decided to celebrate Don Bosco's feast more solemnly. Two of them, though poor, put their coins together and bought two silver hearts to give to their father and friend. It was an exciting day for everyone, but especially for Don Bosco, who was surprised at the creativity and affection expressed by his "mischievous boys" (cf *MB* III 534-535). Thus it became a beautiful custom, expected and prepared for each year with joy and care.

The experience then passed on to Mornese where Mother Mazzarello, humble and reticent in receiving any attention to her person, learned from Don Bosco himself the educational significance of this celebration.

Today the Feast of Gratitude is for us, for the educating communities, an eagerly awaited appointment, in which together we can express our thanks to the Lord for each Sister, for the young people and for those who share with us the educational mission.

Above all, we want to express our affection and gratitude to our Mother, bond of communion and center of unity (C 116), for her untiring self-giving, for her as a sign of the Father's love, a guide who directs the path of the Institute with wisdom and courage.

**This year the festival will be celebrated on April 26, 2019
in Bellflower, California
in "Mary Immaculate" Province of the United States.**

The theme proposed to us by our Sisters, is taken from the inscription on the base of the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of the people of the United States:

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free” (Emma Lazarus)

The United States of America was born from the merging and the meeting of many immigrant peoples who, together, gave birth to a new civilization.

Immigration is a typical reality of our time and for us, as FMA, it is a challenge with strong educational values. Through our mission, we are called to help the growth in young people in the culture of encounter, interpersonal relationships, acceptance, and respect for the human rights and dignity of all, by breaking down walls and building bridges.

In history, there are sad pages that tell of the suffering, marginalization and elimination of the Native Americans, the only inhabitants before the European colonization. This suffered affair was followed by that of the thousands of people from Africa, captured and forced into slavery.

In this story, however, there are also luminous pages that tell of the reception given to those who came from the South, from Mexico, from Central America, from Asia and from Europe, escaping persecution and misery. They were looking for freedom and better life opportunities. Since the birth of this nation to date, millions of people have risked their lives crossing oceans, countries, borders, and bridges to get to the United States, despite having to face political pressure, discrimination, and violence.

This is a country where families from all over the world have found hospitality. Together, respecting cultural diversity, they have shaped this nation. They have shown over time that a just and fraternal society is possible and can become the alternative to closing borders, building walls.

The slogan chosen for the Celebration of Gratitude is:

“I entrust them to you ”

It makes the entrustment to Mary Domenica Mazzarello resound in our hearts, a call to sow hope and trust in the hearts of the people and young people, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

Our Sisters of "Maria Immacolata" Province (SUO) offer us this interpretation of the logo chosen for the celebration:

Mary Help of Christians gathers all her sons and daughters under her maternal mantle. The image takes us back to the origins of the Institute, in a time of uncertainty for the future, when in Mornese Maria Domenica, walking down the street, had a mysterious vision. She saw a large building with many girls running and playing in the courtyard, and she heard a voice that said to her: "*I entrust them*

to you". With these words, Mary entrusted Main with the mission of being her "helpers" especially among the young people (C 4).

Mary's presence is always alert and active also in our lives. It is she who accompanies our journey, our mission, it is she who continues to "walk" in our homes, to inspire courage, to sustain fidelity and hope, to help us overcome weaknesses and difficulties. It educates us to be "helpers" who accompany young people to discover God's plan in their lives.

The Statue of Liberty. Historically, this statue represents freedom in the broadest sense. The seven points of the crown represent both the seven continents and the seven oceans in the world. At the base of the statue, not visible in the logo, is a broken chain and other chains representing oppression and slavery.

Lady Liberty is a neoclassical copper sculpture, located on Liberty Island, in New York. It was donated to the people of the United States by France. Its full name is "Liberty that illuminates the world". It symbolizes the universal desire for human rights and was the first icon that immigrants of the second half of the nineteenth century saw upon entering the port of New York when they arrived. A symbol of freedom, it has welcomed people from every nation looking for better opportunities for their families and also for living their faith in freedom. As history attests, America is a *home* for peoples. For two centuries, men, women, and children from various nations of the world have helped to build this nation with their unrepeatable gift of thought and humanity, bringing with them the traditions of their own cultures and hard work.

Among these immigrants, there were four very young FMA, who had left for America on June 24, 1908. Their journey had lasted three weeks, before finally being welcomed by the majestic figure of *Lady Liberty*.

The bridge: Golden Gate Bridge. Many think that the name of the bridge derives from its color, but it is not so. It derives from the Strait of the Golden Gate, which connects the Pacific Ocean with San Francisco Bay. When Army Commander John C. Fremont, in 1846 saw him, it, he called it with a Greek name "*Chrysopylae*" or "*Golden Gate*" because it reminded him of the Bosphorus Bridge in today's Istanbul, the so-called "Golden Horn ". The color of the Golden Gate Bridge has an orange tone called "international orange" and symbolizes the connection between many peoples.

The tired and suffering crowds, huddled close to each other, indicate the path of humanity: All of mankind is *on its way* to a better life, whether it is to a country or by an inner itinerary to get to know God's plan in one's own life.

The FMA figures, seen in silhouette, represent a characteristic of our mission among youth, the *accompaniment* of young people.

The "huddled masses" evoke the "tired and suffering crowds" of the poem by Emma Lazarus which is inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The world sphere represents “. . . our strong missionary characteristic, our spiritual heritage of bringing to the whole world the charity of Christ, the Good Shepherd.”

"The missionary dimension - an essential element of the Institute's identity and the expression of its universality - has been present in our history from the beginning" (C 75)

For the study of the theme, the following references are indicated:

* *“Truly I say to you, all you have done for of the least of my brothers (and sisters) you did for me. ”* (Mt 25,40).

* *“...may you truly clothe yourselves with the Spirit of our good Jesus and thus do so much good for yourself and for the dear neighbor who is so much in need of help”* (Letter of Mother Mazzarello, 26. 4).

Our Sisters in the US province of "Mary Immaculate" propose the living of the word of Jesus, particularly significant in today's reality, where many of our brothers and sisters leave their land in search of a better future. We may commit ourselves to:

- cultivating a greater sensitivity for the situations of the world, educating ourselves and others to welcome the poorest and the weakest, who ask us to see their reality through their struggles, fears, and dreams;
- expressing trust, respect, and appreciation for the unique treasure that exists in every person, and which we discover in the Sisters of the community, in the Young people, and in every person we encounter.

As a sign of communion, each Province is invited to prepare a PowerPoint slide depicting its own educating community on a bridge or with a bridge in the background, presenting a meaningful experience of apostolic presence among migrants.

The slide, in the standard size, in jpg format is to be sent to the coordinator of the Feast of Gratitude: Sr. Carmen Botello at the following e-mail address gratitudedayusa2019@gmail.com no later than March 24, 2019.

Information on the Province can be found on the FMA Institute website.

Every Feast of Gratitude is also characterized by a practical sign of solidarity, which makes the family spirit visible and helps to broaden our gaze to the world. This year the offerings, which the various Provinces intend to collect, will be sent to the General Bursar and will serve for the urgent needs of the Institute and in particular to help a new community, planned by the two Interprovincial Conferences CIMAC and NAC on the border between Mexico and USA, that will collaborate with other institutions to offer education and formation to young migrants.

To Mary, Immaculate, our powerful Help, Mother, and Teacher, true Superior of our Institute, we entrust the life and mission of our Mother, who from now on we want to reach with our choral gratitude and our grateful prayer

I greet you on her behalf and the Sisters of the Council. Together we continue to pray for vocations, for peace, for the whole of humanity, and for our Sisters who live in wounded lands and affected by war and violence, sharing the fear, suffering, and hope of so many people.

With affection and gratitude,

Rome, February 11, 2019

Sr. Chiara Cassuola
Vicar General