

**INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS**

Rooted in the Covenant

**PLAN OF FORMATION
OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS**

ROME 2000

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Presentation</i>	9
<i>Initials and abbreviations</i>	12
<i>Introduction</i>	13
History of <i>the</i> Plan of Formation	13
In the face of cultural challenges	14
Fundamental outline of the Plan	16
PART ONE	
THE FORMATION OF THE FMA	
The prophetic dynamism of the charism	21
In the Church for young people	22
The <i>sequela Christi</i> for a new humanism	23
A community in the style of the Preventive System	29
With Mary our Help	35
Requirements of formation	38
New formation requirements.	38
Priority choices	41
Formation perspectives	43
The formation model of the FMA	45
In the community	46
In dialogue with people and events	48
In the Church in dialogue with culture	49
In the heart of time	50
In different experiences	52
A never-ending journey	53

[p. 6]

PART TWO

JOURNEY OF LIFE AND OF VOCATIONAL GROWTH

Ongoing formation	57
An indispensable priority	57
In the daily life of every community	58
At the different stages of life	59
<i>Early adulthood</i>	61
<i>Characteristic aspects</i>	61
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	64
<i>Formative guidelines</i>	67
<i>Middle adulthood</i>	71
<i>Characteristic aspects</i>	71
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	74
<i>Formative guidelines</i>	77
<i>Later adulthood</i>	82
<i>Characteristic aspects</i>	82
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	85
<i>Formative guidelines</i>	90
Vocational dimension of the educational mission	94
Accepting a mandate	95
A challenge to education	97
Educational process	99
Educational accompaniment	104
Formative guidelines	107
Specific vocational guidance	109
Initial formation	112
The vocational experience	112
Relationships to be valued	115
[p. 7] <i>Period of assessment and guidance</i>	118
<i>Fundamental experiences</i>	119
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	120

<i>Formative accompaniment</i>	122
<i>Postulancy</i>	125
<i>Fundamental experiences</i>	126
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	127
<i>Formative accompaniment</i>	129
<i>Novitiate</i>	131
<i>Fundamental experiences</i>	131
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	132
<i>Formative accompaniment</i>	135
<i>Period of temporary vows</i>	140
<i>Fundamental experiences</i>	141
<i>Developmental tasks</i>	142
<i>Formative accompaniment</i>	145

PART THREE

CO-ORDINATION FOR COMMUNION

A choice for communion	151
In society and in the Church	152
In the Institute past and present	153
The reason for choosing this style	155
Personal unification	155
Planning mentality	156
A relational approach	157
Flexibility of structures	158
Co-responsible animation	158
Implementation	159
Different levels of co-ordination	160
<i>The general council</i>	160
<i>The interprovince conferences</i>	162
[p. 8] <i>The province community</i>	163

<i>The local community</i>	165
Key moments of co-ordination	166
Network of communications	167
CONCLUSION	169

APPENDIX
GUIDELINES FOR THE ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL
AND TECHNICAL FORMATION OF THE FMA

Underlying perspective	173
Guidelines for the study program	174
Guidelines for ongoing formation	176
Subject areas and core content for initial formation	181
<i>Theological sciences</i>	182
<i>Historical sciences</i>	187
<i>Educational sciences</i>	189
Guidelines for acquiring a life-giving knowledge of the charism	194
Sources used in the writing of the formation plan	200
Documents on formation prepared by the Institute (1894-1995)	203

Presentation

I am happy to present every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians with the Plan of Formation. Throughout its long period of preparation, the Plan has been enriched by the contributions of many Sisters, through constant communication on the document between the centre of the Institute and the provinces.

In this presentation I have been inspired by the title of the text which expresses both tradition and newness.

Tradition recalls the biblical roots of the Covenant and, above all, expresses the fidelity of God to the Chosen People that continues from one generation to the next. In Jesus, by means of the Spirit, God enters into solidarity with all of humanity, the new people of the Covenant, entrusting to the Church the mission of proclaiming the Gospel. Following Christ, some women and men have initiated different traditions of life in the Spirit, often giving rise to religious families.

Our vocational experience has been sown in the furrows tilled by those who preceded us in the history of salvation and by generations of Sisters who, in different ways and at different times, have fulfilled the Covenant of Love with Jesus. They, like Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, dedicated themselves to the mission of evangelisation through education (cf C 9).

The Salesian tradition is a fruitful soil that needs to be tilled every day through the work of personal and community formation, so that it may bear fruit in every season of life. Still today, through the radical response of each one of us, the furrows of Mornese seek to open themselves to the sun of the Spirit. In this way, we will continue to be the good soil of the Gospel.

In all cultures the earth is one of the most meaningful cosmic elements. It suggests images that are characteristic of the formation journey i. e. the effort of sowing and the joy of harvesting, fruitfulness or aridity, the struggle to cultivate a piece of land and the joy of a rediscovered homeland.

[p. 10] The **newness** of the Plan of Formation is inspired by the changing times and the new challenges given by the Spirit to the Church, which require today a different kind of response from the woman dedicated to God. It is not a question of possessing extraordinary ability, but one of qualifying our presence, our *being*. We still have the certainty that God is in solidarity with us in the educational mission so that all, especially the poorest, can be freed and involved in the mystery of a promise that will never fail.

The present is also the place where God repeats to us the words spoken to Moses from the burning bush: *The place where you are standing is holy ground* (cf Ex 3:5). So that our incarnation in the furrows of the Covenant may continue we are asked, like a seed in the womb of the earth, to wait patiently throughout a long gestation period before seeing the fruit. We are asked to learn to make our home in the Word of God, within the dynamism of change and growth. Jesus complained of the lack of workers for the harvest. Today the harvest itself is also less abundant, sometimes even scarce. Given the complexity of our times, it is even more difficult to distinguish the seeds of life from what could suffocate them or make them fruitless.

Side by side with this newness which might alarm us, we have the certainty of the Covenant that rises before the sun each day. There is the newness of the seed of the Word, ready to take root in every type of soil, as long as it is cleared of stones and thorns and prepared to receive it.

Finally, the image evoked by the title, *Rooted in the Covenant* [Italian edition: *Nei solchi dell'Alleanza*], is also that of the consecrated woman, of a land that is *married*, as God calls the Chosen People in the Scriptures. In this lies all the power of the biblical imagery that primarily recalls Mary, the womb of God and our mother. It is with her help that we want to begin each day of our journey of formation. We ask her to be a companion on our journey, a sister close to us in every season of life, one who helps us to discover the forms of a future yet unseen.

I use these biblical images in writing to you because they also reflect the Gospel parables. They form part of our remembering and that of our young Sisters who love symbolic language.

[p. 11] My wish for every FMA is that this Plan of Formation may open a new furrow. May it be a vision that leads us to lift up our eyes, so that through our lives the dream of God and our founders is renewed every day. May it be a dream of holiness, lived in educating communities, that produces a more humane society in the areas in which we live and, at this time of globalisation, a new solidarity that promotes a culture of peace.

Our commitment to inculturate the Plan in the different contexts in which our educational mission takes place will make it more fruitful. It will be like a new shoot sprouting in the furrows of the Covenant giving hope and quality of life.

Rome, July 24, 2000

Sr. Antonia Colombo
Leader of the Institute

Initials and abbreviations

DOCUMENTS OF THE CHURCH

<i>ChL</i>	<i>Christifideles Laici</i>
<i>EN</i>	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>
<i>EV</i>	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fides et Ratio</i>
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
<i>IP</i>	<i>Iuvenum Patris</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Marialis Cultus</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Mulieris Dignitatem</i>
<i>MR</i>	<i>Mutuae Relationes</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
<i>PI</i>	<i>Potissimum Institutioni</i>
<i>RM</i>	<i>Redemptoris Mater</i>
<i>RMi</i>	<i>Redemptoris Missio</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vita Consecrata</i>
<i>VS</i>	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i>
<i>VFC</i>	<i>Fraternal Life in Community</i>

DOCUMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE **FMA** AND OF THE **SDB**

C	Constitutions of the Institute of the FMA
GCXX	General Chapter XX 1996
Circ	Circulars of the Leader of the Institute, Mother Antonia Colombo
Cron	Cronistoria of the Institute of the FMA
DA	Discernment and Accompaniment
L	Letters of Maria Domenica Mazzarello
MB	Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco
MO	Memoirs of the Oratory
R	Regulations of the Institute of the FMA
FMA	<i>Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters)</i>

INTRODUCTION

formation from the beginnings From the beginnings of the Institute, Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello paid particular attention to formation. Generations of formators, educators and spiritual directors have followed in their footsteps with creative fidelity.

Today, in radically different situations, the Institute is challenged by profound questions regarding the significance of its presence in various cultures, the profile of the future FMA and the quality of formation.

History of the Plan of Formation

why a new plan In religious life today there is an urgent need to rethink *new plan* formation in its models and processes. This has urged the Institute to develop the Plan of Formation, starting from the necessity to *respond to the new needs* emerging from the plurality of contexts and cultural situations in which it finds itself.

The Institute listened to the appeal of the Holy Father in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, "*Vita Consecrata*", to develop a *ratio institutionis* i. e. a plan of formation inspired by the charism, in which the journey to be followed in order to assimilate its spirituality, is presented in a clear, dynamic form (cf VC 68).

General Chapter XX entrusted the task of developing this plan to the General Council who took *it as a priority commitment for the six-year period 1996-2002*. The Plan, formulated with the involvement of the provinces and communities, constituted an occasion of personal and community vocational growth for the Institute.

[p. 14] In drawing up this document the Institute has kept its gaze turned towards the development of the charism within the ecclesial reality, in *continual reference* to the challenges coming from a changing socio-cultural context.

In the face of cultural challenges

the phenomena of transition and the new needs The great phenomena that characterise the present-day transitions are: globalisation and its consequent interdependence, the fall of ideologies and the reaffirmation of religious fundamentalism, the emergence of feminine self-awareness and of the identity of new peoples and groups, the increase of the migratory flow, multicultural and multifaith groups and the new technologies with their applications. These present enormous possibilities and resources, but also tensions and problems.

An attentive reading of these phenomena challenges the Institute, both as women who are believers and as educators, and urges it to focus on the quality of formation with the intent of responding to emerging needs.

Globalisation tends to level and cancel out differences. This calls for a *quality of relationships* which runs counter to functional relationships and those of self-interest and fosters the emergence of a culture of reciprocity.

The *new technologies of communication* require an adequate awareness and management of information, new ways of learning and of handing on knowledge and a professionalism that is constantly renewed and updated.

[p. 15] Scientific and technological progress, in particular *genetic engineering* that is applied indiscriminately even in the [p. 15] area of human life, reveals a profound crisis of meaning. This demands a commitment to emphasise the reasons on which respect for human existence is based and supported.

The co-existence of *multiple cultures and religions* calls for an education to multiculturalism, so that people do not limit themselves to merely tolerating one another but, avoiding any form of dominance and manipulation, enter into dialogue and become enriched.

The spread of *poverty* in its old and new forms affects especially the younger generations and women in particular. Marginalisation and exploitation, ever more extensive migratory movements, traditional and new forms of illiteracy, various types of difficulties - from the physical to the psychological and spiritual - family and institutional crises all challenge formal and informal education and demand *better qualified pedagogical and relational competence*.

A rationalist ideology tends to absolutise partial aspects, excluding questions of meaning and transcendence. This calls for a *new rationality* that permits the embracing of the diverse aspects of reality in a holistic manner. It is thus possible to integrate aspects that are apparently opposed, such as reason and religion, organisation and flexibility, efficiency and emotion, immanence and transcendence, body and spirit, theory and praxis.

In view of the above, it is also possible to focus on the *question of meaning* or the need for a *quality of life*, perceived as a yearning for that which is *beyond*, even if at times unexpressed.

[p. 16] Also evident is the search for a deeper *spirituality* as a desire and nostalgia for transcendence. It is a more or less explicit quest for spirituality which, if not accompanied by adequate discernment, could easily be [p.16] exploited. From this comes the need for authenticity and ethical transparency on the part of the Christian community and the individual.

The *demands* emerging from the cultural challenges are of great significance for this Plan, which is based on the analysis of *the new formation requirements* and the corresponding *choices and perspectives* considered as priorities for formation.

Fundamental outline of the Plan

key ideas Some *key ideas*, from which the Institute derived specific strategies, permeate the whole Plan.

Formation as a journey of life is a dynamic and progressive journey towards vocational unity. It is discernment, in the Spirit, of the continual call of God throughout time and in the diverse contexts in which the Salesian charism is lived. It draws its meaning from the Word of God, from the pedagogy of the Church in its liturgical, sacramental and magisterial wealth, from the source of charismatic remembering and from the challenges of history: past, present and yet to come.

Formation is situated in the *vocational experience*, which is the root and synthesis of the whole formative process. It is within this experience that each FMA develops her identity as a woman called to the following of Christ, to proclaim Him to young people, making herself, with Mary's help, a sign of His love in the world. It is, therefore, a journey of the integral maturing of the person towards a progressive configuration to Christ, realised in the educational mission and lived in the community in fidelity to the Preventive System (cf C 77-78).

[p. 17] The foundation of this journey is the reality of *vocation as a nuptial Covenant* with God in the *sequela Christi*, made possible by the Spirit. In the biblical-liturgical perspective, the Covenant is rooted in the very nature of the Church, in the specific spousal figure of Mary and in the particularly feminine response characteristic of consecrated women (cf VC 34).

The *Word of God*, listened to and lived on a personal and community level, is the great frame of reference within which the Plan operates. It is the primary source of every spirituality and of every process of renewal and of formation.

The true prophecy of consecrated life, in fact, comes from God, from the attentive listening to God's Word. It moulds life according to the Spirit, offers the correct criteria to evaluate the events of history, is the source of prayer, of contemplation and of missionary daring.

A *feminine perspective* permeates the whole Plan. It reveals the need for a continual redefining of the identity of the FMA as women, called to express with their characteristic resources the *Marian dimension* of the charism and the inexhaustible richness of the Preventive System (cf C 4,7).

In the Salesian Family and within the educating community, the Institute promotes the culture of life and reciprocity at all levels, educating women to assume, with men, a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity.

formatation perspectives *Ongoing formation as the horizon of all formation* constitutes another basic approach that the Institute has assumed as a perspective in the Plan. It is a choice that is primarily dictated by the conviction that life generates life; in fact, the presence of adults who are deeply human and open to the Spirit, is a condition for educational efficacy.

[p. 18] Ongoing or continual formation, furthermore, responds [p. 18] more adequately to the new cultural sensitivity, that sees in the process of ongoing education the key to facing the challenges of a complex society.

For this reason a large part of the Plan of Formation is dedicated to growth at the different stages of life of the FMA. Living in community, each one creates a space that welcomes, generates and accompanies the younger generations.

The vocational dimension of the educational mission, situated at the heart of this Plan, constitutes a key perspective. The Institute holds that the goal to which every educational action tends is that of accompanying young people, helping them to discern God's Plan for their lives and to assume it as a mission (cf C 72).

Co-ordination in the style of animation is, finally, another choice that makes the implementation of this Plan possible. Formation, considered as a relational reality, is carried out through the combination of diverse *roles*, that need to be co-ordinated towards unity and convergence so that communion may be realised.

Part One

THE FORMATION OF THE FMA

The formative journey of the FMA grows out of the vocational experience and the call that the Father addresses to them to enter into the Covenant of Love established with Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello.

Within the Church, the Institute participates in the salvific mission of Christ "... through the Christian education of the young according to the Preventive System" (C 1).

***The educational charism** that shapes the vocation of the FMA, in so far as it is a gift of the Spirit, has an **intrinsic prophetic dynamism**. It requires the daily assumption of a mentality of change in line with the Gospel, in order to translate the creative vision of the founders into the context in which the FMA live and work.*

*The aim of formation is "... the maturing of the whole person in a gradual, progressive putting on Christ sent by the Father, following the plan outlined in our Constitutions" (C 78). This configuration becomes real only if entered into through a process of ongoing conversion, starting with the **formation requirements** and leading towards identification of adequate **choices and perspectives**.*

*The process of maturing implies a need for a dynamic **formative model**, in which fidelity to the charism enables the FMA to accept a "sacred trust" and to enrich it continually through personal and community living, in response to evangelical and cultural requirements.*

THE PROPHETIC DYNAMISM OF THE CHARISM

*You will complete the work that I will begin:
I shall sketch it, you will color it.
Now we have the seed...*
(Don Bosco, in MB XI 289)

the charismatic experience Formation embraces the characteristics of the charismatic experience which Don Bosco and Maria Domenica began and have transmitted to the Institute through their passion for education, rooted in a deep Eucharistic and Marian life. Today, the FMA are called by vocation to continue and to develop their heritage, valuing the resources of being women and remaining open to the call of God in history .

The journey of formation requires that the FMA enter ever more deeply into the mystery of the Covenant with God. For this reason they commit themselves to follow Jesus chaste, poor and obedient, totally available for His mission of salvation especially among girls and young women.

Within the Salesian family and in the various socio-cultural contexts in which they work, the FMA seek to realise that special way of relating to each other and of educating which is proper to the Preventive System, “ ... the hallmark of our vocation in the Church” (C 7). In this mission they are inspired by Mary, mother and educator.

[p. 22] **In the Church for young people**

in the spirit of the da mihi animas The life-giving energy of the vocation of the FMA springs from the *gift of the Spirit*, who never ceases to enrich the Church through multiple charisms and ministries, bestowed for the building up and growth of the People of God.

Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello, inspired by the Spirit and through the direct intervention of Mary have, in their *educational charism*, made real to young people the presence of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gives His life in abundance.

In the reality in which the FMA live and work they express, in different ways, their preference for the poor and for the little ones, lived in the spirit of the *da mihi animas coetera to lie*, and in obedience to the words of Jesus “Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me” (Mt 18:5).

They commit themselves “to keep alive the *missionary fervour of our origins*” (C 6), working for the Kingdom of God in Christian countries, often transformed by a prevailing materialism, as well as in those not yet evangelised.

from generation to generation By vocation the FMA are drawn *into the genealogy of many women* who, in the unfolding of centuries, starting from ancient Israel and especially with the advent of Jesus, have participated actively in the history of salvation. In Jesus, women discovered new possibilities for self-realisation. Throughout the centuries, by forms of charity which the inventiveness of love has created, like Jesus, they have identified themselves with the poor and suffering humanity. Their example constitutes a precious resource on which to draw, promoting in the FMA and in the girls and young women whom they encounter a *free, proactive feminine identity* (cf MD 13-16).

in the style of Mornese [p. 23] The *educational experience of Maria Domenica* and the first Sisters of Mornese still inspires the life of the FMA today. The first community embodied a model of the consecrated person who in the midst of the people, expressed the mysticism of a radical love for Jesus.

They cultivated a missionary spirit that opened daily life to broad apostolic horizons. In simplicity they lived that joy which is the "... sign of a heart that really loves the Lord very much" (L 60,5), even amid the frequently painful experiences of limitation, illness and death.

Active in the local Church and attentive to the needs of the people and the locality, they creatively united their being "... always in contact with youth" (cf *Cron* II 132-133) with their identity as consecrated women in whom the mystery of God abides, and who continually listen to God's voice in order to learn the true wisdom of life (cf L 22, 10-12).

Despite human limitations, but docile to the Spirit, together they built the "House of the love of God," living in a reciprocity of relationships rich in Gospel values.

The discreet, wise presence of Maria Domenica guided Sisters, girls and young Women towards a *joyful yet demanding journey of holiness*. Thus began an educational tradition characterised by a mystagogy, that is, an initiation into the mystery, revealed in generating life through the gift of the Spirit.

Still today, the FMA, like the first Sisters of Mornese, by dedicating themselves to the education of young people and of Women in particular, express *the joy of having encountered Jesus*, who calls them to be signs of a humanity renewed by His Paschal Mystery.

The sequela Christi for a new humanism

the evangelical counsels The vocation of the FMA becomes prophecy for humanity, in so far as it brings out the primacy of God [p. 24] and the love that Jesus came to reveal as the foundation of a new, evangelically inspired humanism (cf VC 84-87).

The *profession of the evangelical counsels* leads the FMA to authentic freedom, reinforces their relationship with Christ, intensifies the bonds of communion among themselves, with young people, with the environment and with all of creation. From here flows their witness as women always on a journey, committed to rendering visible the love of God, in a world that has a profound nostalgia for God and the promised peace.

the transparency of love Consecrated **chastity** is a precious gift of the Trinity, a reflection of the divine beauty that shines on the face of Christ and of whoever shares in His intimacy "... with an undivided heart" (C 12).

It is, therefore, a *reality of relationships* and, as such, balances and broadens the horizons of human affectivity, leading to gratuitous love and reciprocity among persons. In a society frequently polluted by the abuse of sexuality, consecrated chastity proclaims a new humanity in which the unification of the person, finally reconciled with self, is possible, making the FMA capable of assuming their corporeality and of transcending it in love.

The FMA, accepting the tenderness of God to whom they offer their powers of love (cf C 12), become capable of a gift which reveals *the face of loving kindness* lived as acceptance, in a familiar and simple style of relationships.

According to Salesian tradition, the secret of profound educational communication lies in chastity. The FMA are women who, having met God, become ever more capable of guiding young people along the path of unselfish, responsible and holy love (cf C 14).

[p. 25] Chastity *gives life to communion*, stimulates to that transparency of life which excludes insincerity and complicity. Therefore, aware of being called together [p. 25] by the love of God in Christ, the FMA seek to live as sisters who love one another with genuine affection, cultivate the gift of authentic friendship and share the same passion for education.

This leads to a *journey of growth* in which education of the heart and maturing in freedom find their fulfilment in the offering of themselves to a loving God. Since affectivity and sexuality are not automatically unified, they are called to continually integrate them in the context of community life and mission.

Chastity rooted in an *intense Eucharistic life* becomes, therefore, a daily journey of asceticism and a process of maturing in fidelity to Christ. It is a gift to be asked for constantly in prayer and to be lived in communion with God and with creatures.

The beatitude of the pure of heart is given to those who are disposed to lose all in order to find all in the love that is Jesus (cf Phil 3:8).

Mary, the Immaculate, is for the FMA and for young people the icon of a humanity that is fully realised according to God's plan. As the Help of Christians she accompanies and supports the journey of maturing, so that all may love with a free and undivided heart.

a love freely given Evangelical **poverty** makes the FMA participants in the mystery of Jesus, who became poor to enrich all by His poverty. Entering into the drama of life, He reaches out to all creatures, starting from those most in need and those deprived of love. He indicates where the freedom and dignity of the person lie: not in possessing, but in being the image of God, a reality which not even sin can cancel.

[p. 26]

Don Bosco founded the Salesian Congregation as a response of salvation for poor and abandoned young people and linked the fruitfulness of the FMA Institute to the joyful practice of poverty lived on a personal and [p. 26] community level. He said, "The Institute will have a great future if you remain simple, poor and mortified" (Cron I 303).

In carrying out the *educational service to young people*, who are affected by ever new forms of poverty and hardship, the FMA are called to witness to their being poor. The Sisters, therefore, live a simple lifestyle, accepting the uncertainty and the absence of privileges and guarantees. They promote the culture of not seeking recompense, of a balanced appreciation of work and time and of a right relationship with things. They commit themselves to denounce unjust situations and discrimination, especially those regarding children and women.

Faithful to the founders who were ready to sacrifice their lives for young people, the FMA travel the *way of loving kindness*, which excludes any sense of superiority and control. This makes them one in solidarity, in the sharing of goods, resources and time so that everything in the community may be placed at the service of the educational mission (cf C 23).

They are aware that the poor and little ones do not simply receive from them, but also give the gift of their appreciation of the essential, of the wisdom that comes from suffering, and of patient resignation. Their hard life is a continual exercise of endurance that makes the FMA aware of their own, sometimes exaggerated, needs and their expectations of respect for presumed rights.

In a society in which globalisation tends to mark the phenomena of impoverishment in a greater part of the world ever more sharply, the FMA, as educators, foster the spread of a *culture of solidarity*. This is realised through reducing consumerism, promoting a fair and equitable market, a micro-economy and all those forms of respect for the environment, which are expressions of the defence of life.

[p. 27]

[p. 27] Among the various forms of poverty, one of the most radical is that of meaning and values, which denies many young people, especially women, access to adequate means of personal growth and of planning for the future. For this reason the FMA commit themselves to education, in both the formal and informal sectors. They help the poor to take responsibility for their own lives, through the awareness of the causes of poverty and the involvement of women and young people in the areas of production and decision-making.

The FMA are sustained by the generous and enthusiastic witness of many Sisters, who have lived and still live *experiences of evangelical and missionary solidarity*, ready even to lay down their lives to defend the poorest and to help them in their quest for fundamental rights.

Ecclesial and Salesian traditions have always recognised a significant relationship between *service to the poor and the Eucharist*. Poverty, besides being a fruit of overcoming egoism is, in fact, a grace derived from participation in the mystery of the Eucharist, memorial and realisation of the self-emptying of Jesus, so that all might have life in abundance.

Mary, the servant of God, participates in the offering of her Son, and shares in the mystical and missionary dimensions of His poverty. As mother she guides the FMA towards becoming like the poor Christ. She involves them in her canticle of praise, as the poor of Yahweh, in whom the Most High has done great things.

the service of love **Obedience** immerses the FMA in the mystery of the availability of Christ who made the Father's will His food (cf Jn 4:34). He learned obedience through what He suffered (cf Heb 5:8) persevering to the point of giving Himself in death on the cross (cf Phil 2:7-8).

In this way, He "... discloses the mystery of human freedom as a path of obedience to the Father's will, [p. 28] and the mystery of obedience as the path to the gradual conquest of true freedom" (VC 91).

The FMA participate in this mystery of obedience especially through the *Eucharist*, memorial of that love which led the Saviour to give His life for all. In this way, they share in the "yes" of Mary of Nazareth, who, through her obedience, became mother of the living.

In a culture that exalts freedom even to the detriment of truth and moral norms (cf VS 31-35), the choice of obedience contributes to *liberating freedom* from selfish inclinations. As such, it becomes a way of realising a humanism based on solidarity and therefore finds its full realisation in persons capable of healthy autonomy, generous dedication, a strong sense of responsibility and *educational loving kindness*.

In Salesian Spirituality, obedience takes on a joyful, humble disposition (cf C 1885 IV) and helps the FMA to enter into the great plan of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello for the advancement of young people. It is, therefore, closely connected to the *educational mission* that is realised through a patient seeking of God's plan. This requires the courage to discern together their own and other people's convictions in the light of the Word and to challenge what is contrary to the Gospel.

Obedience becomes a reality in a *community* where interdependence is lived among the FMA who together seek to carry out the educational plan. In this context, the Sisters rediscover the meaning of *authority as service and a bond of communion* which, in the spirit of the Preventive System, fosters mutual trust and the sense of belonging to a world-wide family (cf C 33).

Obedience presupposes, therefore, a style of animation based on respect, appreciation of the person, loving kindness, the art of dialogue and trust. Loving kindness [p. 29] empowers the person and makes human relationships more authentic.

It requires a journey of *growth in personal autonomy*, a sense of belonging and an effective exercise of subsidiarity and of co-responsibility.

This requires *community discernment*, a mentality of working together on a project and an openness to internal and external dialogue, especially in the sphere of the educating community and the Salesian Family where working together finds its most efficacious expression. Evidently, this is possible if they have the

courage that comes from true humility, which makes space for the talents and plans of others.

It is within a family-like atmosphere and through working together on a plan that *accompaniment* becomes relevant, *also in the personal meeting*. The latter is an opportunity for growth and discernment, a sharing of experience and an evaluation of one's formative journey.

In a world marked by contrasts and rivalry for power, a commitment to responsible collaboration is the path towards a *humanity based on solidarity and reconciliation*. The FMA educate themselves and the young people to this on a daily basis, so that all may make of this planet *one great family of peoples* open to the diverse expressions of being human.

A community in the style of the Preventive System

in community for the mission Community life modelled on the Family Spirit is an *essential dimension of the charism*. FMA communities are called to serve God in joy and to work with optimism and *pastoral charity* for the Kingdom of God (cf C 49-50).
Living together for the mission means being rooted in and nourished by the Eucharist, in the same way in [p. 30] which the Church, through the memorial of the Body and Blood of Jesus, is continually being reborn in its nature and in its missionary mandate (cf VFC 14).

From the beginning of the Institute, the first FMA experienced not only being called by God through a personal vocation, but also being *called* to share the Salesian educational charism in a community of Sisters and young people.

Christian humanism of St. Francis of Sales

the Christian meaning of life founded on love The FMA style of relationship is inspired by the Christian humanism of St. Francis of Sales, adapted on the educational level by Don Bosco, embodied in a living way by Maria Domenica and continually enriched by successive generations.

This humanism is rooted in the Christian meaning of life and in an overall optimistic vision of the human being. In it openness to love has an important place, because all have been created in God's image, in love and for love.

This commits the FMA to give priority to fostering awareness of God's image in everyone, by promoting the integral growth and dignity of the person.

St. Francis of Sales teaches the art of guiding to holiness, the fundamental vocation of every Christian, preferring the efficacy of a *patient* love, a balance between excessive leniency and authoritarianism, and valuing human resources together with trust in God.

Don Bosco chose the *doctor of love* as patron of the Salesian Congregation and of the FMA Institute so that "...he might obtain for us from God the grace of being able to imitate him in his extraordinary meekness and in winning souls" (MO 217).

the art of educating with a positive outlook [p. 31] From this model flows that *art of educating with a positive outlook* which the founders have handed down. It is expressed in love for life, understanding of the person, optimism in interpreting reality, acceptance of life "... in its utter gratuitousness, its beauty and its invitation to freedom and responsibility" (EV 83). This specific educational approach never gives up hope in the face of situations of poverty and hardship, but allows itself to be challenged by them and to seek meaning in them. It finds in each and every person *that accessible point for good* and a call to dialogue.

The Salesian synthesis of the Preventive System

an integral plan for education In his Preventive System, Don Bosco developed the art of educating young people by carrying out a synthesis between education and evangelisation. This system has been communicated to the FMA as a spirit that "... must guide our line of action, permeate our relationships with others and characterise our lifestyle" (C 7). It is, in fact, *an integral plan of education aimed at forming good Christians and honest citizens*. Following the path of preventive education means enabling the person, from the first stages of growth, to allow her /his rich potential to emerge and gradually develop, through a journey of freedom and responsibility, within a cultural, socio-political and ecclesial context.

founded on the aspirations of the person The Salesian educational method *responds to the authentic aspirations of the human person*: communion with God, love and the search for truth in discussion and dialogue. Precisely because it appeals to these fundamental human needs, Paul VI has aptly called the Preventive System "...an incomparable example of Christian pedagogical humanism." ([translated from] Paul VI, *Il valore del nuovo centro di studi superiori nell'armonia dell'alta cultura ecclesiastica*, in *Insegnamenti* IV, Città del Vaticano, Poliglotta Vaticana 1966, 530).

experience of meeting Christ [p. 32] The experience of openness to God's plan and the *encounter with Christ* allow the person to interpret life and history according to the depth and richness of the mystery that characterises them.

Meeting Jesus, especially in the *Eucharist and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, offers the possibility of experiencing the transforming power of God and of having the *Gospel of life* re-echo in the reality of everyday.

of loving kindness Furthermore, the educational style of the FMA is an experience of *loving kindness*, understood as the love of God, Mother and Father. It is made perceptible to every person, especially young people, as expressed in the words of Don Bosco "... [that] the boys are not only loved, but that they know themselves to be loved" (*Letter 10*, May 1884). From this comes the *pedagogy of one-to-one*, as an educational presence which helps to rekindle in young people trust, readiness for commitment and acceptance of values.

of meeting and of dialogue While respecting different outlooks on life, the FMA gradually offer young people, including those belonging to other religions, reference points and values which can equip them for a unified vision of reality, and a critical evaluation which guides them to make responsible choices for solidarity and active citizenship.

A pedagogy of the environment

in the Family Spirit As Salesian educators the FMA carry out their mission as a *community animated by the Family Spirit* (cf C 50). In it they find space to pray, think, plan, work and celebrate together, valuing and integrating the contribution of different generations.

Don Bosco's words are particularly relevant today. He said, "The fact of there being so many of you together is a great help towards producing this honey of cheerfulness... encourages many of you to bear the [p. 33] burden of school work and arouses competition and the sharing of knowledge. The good example of many helps us also spiritually without our even being aware of it" (*MB VII 366*).

All of this constitutes a *climate* in which the Salesian Family, the local area, the families and the young people meet in the shared mission. This synergy is facilitated by complementary roles and competencies, by cordial acceptance, familiarity of relationships, reciprocal trust, the ability to collaborate, patience and pardon and by a continual tending towards love in optimism and cheerfulness.

Being united in the name of God should remind everyone of the early Christian communities, whose contact with people of other faiths caused the latter to exclaim "See how they love one another!" ([translated from] Tertullian, L 'Apologetico. *La prescrizione contro gli eretici*. Roma, Città Nuova, 1967, 137).

The founders knew how to form communities where confidence and holiness flourished. They were also aware of the difficulties and dangers that at times can exist within relationships. In order to live the genuine Family Spirit, it is necessary to *journey towards authentic freedom*, that finds its motivating force in love. The Spirit gives the person the certainty of being known by name, capable of self-giving and willing to walk the way of the Cross.

A prophetic heritage

looking towards the future What the founders have handed down is still very relevant today and sustains a constant commitment to inculturation.

The FMA are aware that prevention needs to be viewed in a way that permits the identification of the deepest needs of young people on a worldwide level, together [p. 34] with the phenomena and forces which move society so that its changing aspects and prophetic values can be perceived.

In both the formal and informal sectors of the educational mission the FMA recognise the primary duty of responding to *the need for a more humane society* that is emerging both in wealthy nations and in those that are developing.

In a culture in which the very sources of life, of the person and of the family are being threatened, the FMA discover how relevant the preventive approach is in mission.

based on the plan of God the Creator The frame of reference which guides the educational choices of the FMA is the *anthropological vision* which, in God's plan, recognises the inalienable dignity of the human person, created in God's image, according to the twofold reality of man-woman in reciprocal relationships. Being in the *image of God* is the

foundation of the relational nature of the person, her / his very existence in relationship to the other 'I'. This reflects the mystery of God, one and three: living unity in communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf MD 7). From this flows the vision of *life as gift and as appeal to freedom, love and ethical responsibility*.

in a style of reciprocity From this point of view, the FMA believe that the most suitable way of expressing the charismatic force of the Preventive System today is *the style of reciprocity*, lived in a constant dynamic of giving and receiving, of gratuity and gratitude.

The climate of sincere, unselfish relationships, where the FMA make space for the other, recognising their own limits, makes visible the typical values of their spirituality and allows them to become an efficacious response to the present day need for a more humane society and for communion.

a plan for communion [p. 35] In a world frequently divided and motivated by unfair competition, the educating communities of the FMA can become encouraging witnesses to the *plan for communion* to which every person is called. When faced with families marked by conflict and hardship, they can be prophetic signs in so far as they offer them valid support and show them that together it is possible to give their children an education adapted to the needs of today's world. This charismatic richness appears today to be deeply prophetic. The ecumenical and interfaith journey, respect for difference, and the need for interaction with other cultures, challenge the FMA to travel, within the Church, along paths of dialogue, solidarity and peace.

with feminine resources In the cultural shift in favour of life, *it is especially up to the woman* to carry out the task of ensuring the moral dimension of culture i.e. the dimension of a culture worthy of the human person, of one's personal and social life (cf *ChL* 51). Through networking with many lay and religious women the FMA seek to witness, in everyday society, to a *new evangelically inspired feminism* (cf *EV* 99) and to educate women to build, in reciprocity with men, a culture of life and of solidarity.

With Mary our help

Marian identity of the FMA Mary illumines and guides the formative journey of the FMA, inspiring their unique vocation to care for young people.
The name *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, chosen for them by Don Bosco and joyfully accepted by Maria Domenica Mazzarello, expresses the Marian identity of the Institute and contains the synthesis of a spirituality which should permeate their personal and community experience.

[p. 36] The Marian dimension is essential to Christian life (cf. Jn 19:26-27), but presents a particular affinity to the woman and her mission. "Femininity has a unique relationship with the Mother of the Redeemer... by the very fact that God, in the sublime event of the Incarnation of His Son, entrusted himself to the ministry, the free and active ministry of a woman" (RM 46).

living image of Mary This gift of grace, lived by the ecclesial community and by many religious Institutes, is particularly present in the life of the FMA as educators, and nourishes their missionary ardour. Each FMA is a *living image of Mary*, the Virgin of the Magnificat, in fidelity to the charismatic plan of Don Bosco who wanted the Institute to be "... the living monument of his gratitude to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Help of Christians" (Cron 1 296) and a sign and witness to the love of God for young people.

On Calvary, Mary accepted the disciple whom Jesus entrusted to her. As mother she is called to educate, to bring to light in each of her children the deepest identity that has been communicated by the Father, in Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit. As an educator she contributes to forming in each person the image of Christ (cf Gal 4: 19) imprinted on them from the time of creation.

As mother and teacher, the Virgin inspires in the FMA a style of religious life suited to the present day. She helps them to find the ways that are best suited for them to become a sign and expression of the foreseeing love of God for young people (cf CI).

educators like her Through the charism of the founders the FMA are called, not only to turn to Mary with filial love, but to become, like her, through the Holy Spirit, helpers and formative guides fostering the life of Jesus in those entrusted to them.

caring [p. 37] With her, missionary, educator and companion on the journey, the FMA live the *pedagogy of caring* which is expressed in solicitude for others, in reciprocal accompaniment and in undertaking the defence and advancement of life on the educational and social levels. Their educational methodology, therefore, finds in Mary the synthesis of its various components. In solidarity with the history of her people, she inspires the pastoral action of the FMA and encourages them to share the lot of the poor, especially that of the woman.

to express today the newness of Mary Being *daughters* makes the FMA part of that genealogy of women who carry forward the mission of Mary into the third millennium. Many words and events of her life have not yet been written, that they might be discovered and carried out in time. The life of Mary is not, in fact, something static realised once and for all, but is a reality that still flows through and is realised in the life of the FMA.

REQUIREMENTS OF FORMATION

*I pray...that you may really clothe yourselves
in the Spirit of our good Jesus.*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello L 26,4)

The quality of formation has always been of major importance in the Institute. It sees *new formation requirements* emerging from the changing situations and the cultural challenges of the contemporary world. These guide the *choices* of the Institute and invite it to identify adequate *perspectives*.

New formation requirements

challenges of the new requirements *New formation requirements* concern both the person and the community, especially the younger generations of FMA, as well as those among whom they work. Such needs do not refer merely to problematic nodes in today's world, but also express hopes and concerns and constitute authentic “signs of the times.” They are the *challenges* of the Spirit to the life of the Church and to the ever new *demands* within the constantly developing Body of Christ.

identity Within the framework of a greater feminine self awareness, there emerges the need for a continual redefining of the *identity of FMA as women called to be Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* in diverse cultural contexts. This implies that the **FMA** stand by [p. 39] the woman and feel in their own flesh the violence to which she is subjected today. For the same reason the Institute feels the need to know more deeply the *Marian dimension* of the charism, so as to be able to express it, especially in caring for life, that it may grow and mature.

Gospel freedom One need which can find fulfilment in consecrated life is that *freedom spoken of in the Gospel*. Only those persons whose hearts are free from idols can follow Jesus in the totality of their person and be capable of undertaking a stable, lasting commitment. This presupposes the exercise of freedom and autonomy, a particularly evident need in a post-modern culture.

centring Another strongly felt need is the *primacy of centring*. It is in the depth of the heart that the life of God shines forth, making the FMA capable of becoming gift for their brothers and sisters. In a world which is frequently apathetic, where spiritual needs are suffocated by the obsession for efficiency, it is important that each Sister make of her own heart the house of God and know how to dwell therein.

- critical awareness** Today the FMA are also invited to know *how to give reason for their hope* i.e. to manifest publicly who they are, their beliefs, their prayer, their self-giving and to evangelise by using responsibly the opportunities which technology offers. For this reason it is urgent that they develop a critical awareness which facilitates a mentality of change and which also enlightens intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
- family-like atmosphere** Given the disintegration of affective bonds and the lack of tolerance for diversity, the educating communities are called to create a *family-like atmosphere* where, together with young people and the laity, the FMA may become more humane and capable of a vocational guidance that appreciates difference.
- intergenerational dialogue** [p. 40] The need to communicate, especially on an *intergenerational* level, requires the recalling of the historical remembering of tradition and knowing how to narrate one's personal life experience, by using understandable language and symbols suitable for different ages.
For a generation that is disenchanted with and oblivious to the past, it is important to cultivate the remembering of what God has done from generation to generation in the Salesian Family and in the life of every FMA, both of yesterday and today.
- reciprocal appreciation** Establishing *relationships of reciprocal appreciation* between persons and institutions is important to the commitment of the FMA in the educational mission, especially those in favour of the disadvantaged and marginalised. This also applies to every interpersonal relationship.
- style of animation** This need is also expressed in the search for a *style of animation* that requires the participation and *co-* responsibility of all in the implementation of the shared plan.
- accompaniment** A new requirement for formation is a shift from uniformity to communion and to the offering of forms of *differentiated accompaniment* which respect the uniqueness of each person.
- new professionalism** The socio-cultural context and fidelity to the charism call for the acquisition of *new educational competencies*, a *professionalism that is continually updated and inculturated*, and the development of a deeper *intercultural and interfaith awareness*.
- affective integration** In a climate of the widespread trivialising of sexuality, the rediscovery of its value as a language that expresses reciprocal love, calls for the *integration of affective energies* in the choice of Jesus and in the commitment [p. 41] to be women capable of expressing themselves through loving kindness.
- choice of solidarity** It is also necessary to recapture the formative value of the *economic dimension of religious life*. This finds practical expression in the choice to live evangelical poverty in the sharing of goods, in order to promote solidarity with the poor. It is important, therefore, to study the social doctrine of the Church, in order to translate it into a plan for the mission.

collaboration with the laity The present day processes of globalisation highlight the need to *collaborate in the realisation of shared projects with the laity*, in particular with members of the Salesian Family and with other ecclesial and civil institutions, on both national and international levels.

Priority choices

formative responses Seeking for practical ways of responding to the new needs frequently poses problems. The Institute is aware of the limitations of its response in the face of the challenges of history and of the mission. It knows, however, that it can situate itself on a broad theological anthropological horizon, where God's plan is the fulness, of humanity and the happiness of each person. It also feels that it can count on being together as a community, open and on a journey, a place of communion, of reconciliation and of evangelical witness.

In this perspective, a few *choices* that correspond globally to the needs described above are indicated.

- To cultivate a life *according to the Spirit* within the great design of the Covenant, in a process of *conversion and conformity* to Christ at all stages of life in order to be signs of the love of God in everyday living, in the style of *Salesian loving kindness*.
- [p. 42]To develop the *Marian dimension* of the spirituality of the FMA and to appreciate the resources present in each person, especially in young women, in order to offer a significant contribution to a more humane society.
- To cultivate in a particular way *the vocational dimension of education*, convinced that the goal to which all the educational actions of the Institute tend, is to accompany the young people to discern God's plan for their own lives so that they may assume it as a mission.
- To update the *academic and professional formation* of the FMA, to take into account the great horizons of socio-political and planetary awareness, to enable the FMA to participate in formative processes which start from the situation of marginalised young people, valuing' their contribution to the healing of the social fabric.
- To choose *moderation as a style of life*, as an alternative to the idea of consumerism and competitiveness, in order to educate self and others to the *ethics of limits*. This choice is a condition for facing the challenges that derive from the new technologies dealing with information, communication and biogenetics.
- To promote the *culture of reciprocity* through dialogue among generations and among cultures, in the Church and in the Salesian Family, in order to *stimulate and bring together the resources* of persons and institutions at the service of the mission.

- To appreciate the *international aspect of the Institute* as one of the ways to promote *unity in diversity* and to facilitate inculturation.

[p. 43]

Formation perspectives

The choices highlighted call for the identification of *formation perspectives* that lead to formulate practical ways of responding to the needs that challenge the FMA.

It will be necessary to adapt these perspectives to each local reality, to live them in the educating community and to implement them in ways suited to the various stages of life.

formation perspectives

The present Plan clarifies and assumes three fundamental perspectives.

- To plan the whole process of formation *starting from ongoing formation*.

The Institute is convinced that formation cannot be reduced to the initial phase of a plan. It is a journey that never ends, one in which the person puts on Christ through a process of continual conversion.

For a long time attention was centred on initial formation. Now the Institute considers it better to take into account the whole span of life, and to value the different stages in which the maturing of the person takes place.

It is not a question of mere occasional updating.

Ongoing formation requires a positive attitude on the part of the person and of the community, who allow themselves to be constantly challenged and moulded by God through the events of history.

Hence the importance of listening to the Word, prayer and sacramental encounter, community life, work and apostolic efforts and all those ordinary means which nourish growth.

- Another perspective is that which highlights *the vocational dimension of the educational mission*. Considering life as a gift and as a response to a call is characteristic of Salesian Spirituality. The new [p. 44] evangelisation to which the whole Church is committed, starts from the proclamation of life as vocation.

In this sense, youth pastoral is vocational by nature. It guides young people towards the discernment of their life plan.

The Institute holds as important, therefore, this perspective which leads the Sisters to operate in such a way that they always keep in mind God's plan for each person

- To carry out *co-ordination for communion*. This perspective encourages a circular manner of relationships among people and promotes the sharing of resources. The Institute believes that by implementing a good coordination, the guidelines contained in this Plan will prove to be meaningful and feasible.

at the school of the Word

Formation requirements, priority choices and perspectives are set within the great frame of reference that is the **Word of God**. Daily meeting with the Word is the school that moulds life according to the Spirit. It is the source of missionary daring and sustains the commitment to work out "... new answers to

the new problems of today's world" (VC 73).

The Word allows the FMA to enter into the depths of their being, so necessary for those who lead intensely active lives of relationships and of apostolic commitment. It is well-known what energy characterised the life of Don Bosco and yet he was defined *union with God*.

Maria Domenica invited her Sisters to preserve the spirit of union with God as far as possible and she herself succeeded in finding, even in a simple stitch, the ecstasy of love.

By allowing themselves to be transformed by the Word made prayer, the FMA learn the art of *discernment* as wisdom which enables them to seek the signs of God in the reality of the world and in their lives.

THE FORMATION MODEL OF THE FMA

*Christ wanted to make Himself our model,
our way, our example in everything,
but especially in the education of youth.
I want my dear children to be formed
on this divine example.*

(cf Bosco G., Circular Jan 24, 1883)

***centrality
of the
vocational
experience*** The vocational experience of the FMA is the root and synthesis of the entire formative process, in both the initial and the successive stages. Formation takes place within the educational experience. This is an ongoing process of vocational unity carried out in the lives of individuals and in the communities. It requires an availability to assume responsibility for personal vocational growth and always involves a journey of freeing self from all that impedes a response of total love.

***the path
of the
charism*** The formative model of the FMA is characterised by constant vitality, the guidance of the Spirit and the presence of Mary, mother and teacher, who indicated to John Bosco the path to walk and the attitudes to assume. The specific mission to young people entrusted to him, was fully implemented in the feminine context by Maria Domenica Mazzarello and by the early FMA communities.

FMA formation is for the mission and for this reason it is carried out in the formative style proper to the Salesian educational mission.

[p. 46] The framework within which this takes place is: community, multiple educational agencies, dialogue in the Church with its socio-cultural dimensions, time as an essential variable of growth and the different formative experiences of life.

In the community

***the
community
place of
vocational
growth*** *The community* is the privileged place of the formative journey that the FMA undertake together with the young people and the laity. In it they live their vocation in the Family Spirit, dedicating themselves to the educational mission.

Within a community designated as an *educating community*, the FMA help each other to own the educational mission as a theological place in which God is manifest, calling them and entrusting young people to them, so that they may guide them to an encounter with God.

Education becomes a shared mission of all in their different roles. It is carried out in complementary ways according to the religious or lay identity of each person.

The *FMA community*, in the measure in which it transforms itself into the light and salt of the Gospel (cf Mt 5:13-16), can animate the educating community and make it a place of formation for the laity and young people, while living and carrying out the Preventive System. Thus it expresses and communicates Salesian Spirituality, involving other educators and all those who are interested in the work of education.

reciprocal empowering As an alternative to a social system based on competition, the community is invited to travel the road of reciprocal empowering, of respect for the rhythm of each person, of trust, appreciation of difference, of collaboration within the Salesian Family, the local Church and the area.

[p. 47] Communion requires authentic, mature, interpersonal relationships and trust in the action of the Spirit, which helps to overcome the conflicts that are part of daily life.

It is a question of a community that is continually being built through love and reconciliation, in which the “.. .freely do all that charity requires” (L 35,3) becomes the *humus* where life may flower.

nourished by prayer *Listening to the Word and community witness* both help to realise a new way of communicating, one which constitutes a sign even for those of other faiths.

Education to silence becomes an indispensable condition for learning to think and for allowing oneself to be met by God, for learning to dialogue in a climate of love and for keeping one's heart in peace. In this way, tensions and anxieties can be overcome in the continual entrustment to the Father “... who knows what we need” (Mt 6:32).

Prayer nourishes and sustains community life and, while introducing the Sisters to a mystical experience, opens them to solidarity. The more they become persons of prayer, the more the Sisters are capable of responsibility and openness to others. Liturgical prayer and the celebration of the Hours, marking the rhythm of the day, allow the community to enter into the depth of the mystery from which every truly fruitful activity springs.

an atmosphere of positive relationships *An atmosphere of positive relationships* that comes fundamentally from the daily encounter with the Word is the key to growing in co-responsibility, developing flexibility, discerning together the *signs of the times*, owning the perspectives of preventive education and integrating the contribution of each person. The presence of different age groups within the community encourages and enriches intergenerational dialogue.

intercultural dialogue *Intercultural openness* educates people to think and to act in a global dimension, nourishes reciprocal trust and [p. 48] the spirit of solidarity that liberates them from being closed, prejudiced and excessively nationalistic.

The community, therefore, is the place where all become the one heart and one soul (cf Acts 4:32) for which Jesus prayed to the Father. Here the vocational experience is lived, the reciprocal formative accompaniment is carried out and the invitation *come and see* resounds more through life than through words.

In dialogue with people and events

dialogue with people and events Formation is a reality of relationships and is carried out in the company of *many people and events* through which the Holy Spirit, who is at the heart of formation, can act efficaciously.

The community, the young people and the laity with whom the FMA share the mission, *the poor* from whom they learn the art of loving and of serving, *the events and situations* which challenge them; all of these constitute *formative mediations*.

Every human growth takes place within interpersonal relationships. Human interaction helps one to define oneself by clarifying values. Thus each person becomes co-responsible for the growth of the other, and even those who carry out the formative ministry are constantly challenged to give and to receive in the one journey towards conversion.

The community animators and formators at different levels, exercise specific roles of responsibility. They have the delicate task of accompanying and animating persons and communities towards creative fidelity to the Salesian charism. It is also their task to co-ordinate the energies and resources of all in a shared plan.

The figure of Maria Domenica Mazzarello remains indicative for the FMA. In wisdom, she lived her service as animator and guide of the first community of Mornese.

specific task of the animator [p. 49] Following her example, the person called to be *animator* and formator in the Salesian style, is invited to develop a way of being which renders her a *companion along the journey and a meaningful presence* in the community

As a woman rooted in and docile to God's plan, the animator seeks to live serenely her Salesian vocation and her belonging to the Institute, actively assimilating its history and spirituality. She knows how to place herself at the side of and in service to others in a flexible, proactive and respectful way, aware that she, too, is on a journey of continual formation.

She is aware of the struggle involved in the gradual process of maturing, both in herself and in others. Thus she commits herself to live the educational relationship in trust and in a realistic manner, profoundly believing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

She learns discernment in her daily encounter with the Word, never hesitating to dedicate quality time to it.

She makes good use of experience and the knowledge that comes from the human and theological sciences. Each day she places herself at the service of formative accompaniment, avoiding in her leadership the danger of personalism, becoming more and more a collaborator in the joy of each and every person (cf 2 Cor 1: 24). The mediation of the guide, like other educational mediations, requires an adequate co-ordination that promotes the resources within each person.

In the Church in dialogue with culture

a journey of dialogue

Today's formative process, as in times past, is situated within a socio-cultural framework. The present, with its contradictions and ambivalence, contains precious elements that could enrich experience and challenge the FMA in the mission entrusted to them.

[p. 50] The Church, committed to an open dialogue with contemporary culture, recognises that the "... split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time" (EN 20) and desires that there be a journey of courageous, proactive dialogue with the women and men of today.

inculturation

The process of inculturation profoundly challenges formation at its source and in its implementation, and at the same time enriches it through those positive elements present in different cultures and in the seeds of truth and of goodness contained in other religions.

Imbued with the ecclesial spirit and being people of their time, Don Bosco and Maria Mazzarello knew how to read their historical reality with intelligence and with the heart. They offered the vital contribution of a inculturated Gospel response.

Choosing to stand with the women and men of today, especially the young and the poor and to walk with them, certainly involves risks and does not exempt the FMA from problems and perplexities. They believe, however, that this standing with is the way to educate themselves and others to dialogue and to be able to discern, within the contradictions in which many live today, those deeper questions to which only the Gospel can respond.

In the heart of time

time as the place of salvation Time is a decisive factor in the maturing and development of the person. It is in time that God breaks into one's personal and community story. It is in time that the Spirit works and transforms.

One of the tasks of formation is that of helping to live time not only as *chrónos* which moves inevitably towards death, but also as *kairós*, that is, a time of salvation.

lived in the feminine [p. 51] Each person, therefore, needs to live her/his own story within the flow of history i.e. to live time in a personal manner.

A feminine capacity for appreciating every moment knows how to find time to be re-energised in silence, in nature, in prayer and in celebration. It is in daily living that the Covenant with God is expressed in the Salesian charism, which is characterised by the reality and the appreciation of every moment. Good use of time saves one from activism and stress, allowing for that productive calm which is the foundation of intelligent work.

Throughout the formative process it is important to take into account the various ways of living time in different cultures, with the aim of accepting their rhythm and not compelling people to take steps for which they are not yet ready.

Every *journey of growth* is like a path marked out by a beginning and a goal, and also by changes, possibilities and risks, difficulties or crises in relation to certain events, and especially by a successive, gradual maturing.

within a spiral movement The realisation and fulfilment of the call of the FMA is carried out precisely in this continual movement of discernment and of conversion. It is comparable not so much to an ascending journey as to a *spiral movement* which, while it advances towards a higher goal, retraces its steps and finds again on a higher level of maturity, those values and problems which it had previously encountered and perhaps overcome.

The process of vocational maturing coincides with the journey that makes the FMA become ever more unified women, in harmony with the plan of life to which they are called and with the demands, problems and changes characteristic of age, and of biological, psycho-social and spiritual growth.

[p. 52] In the formative process, then, it is necessary to take into consideration the possibilities for maturing and the [p. 52] developmental tasks specific to every stage of life. Living each experience in an attitude of surrender to God's design, entails accepting responsibility for one's own journey of growth, respecting its rhythm, with its lack of continuity, inconsistencies, slowing down, being at standstill or declining.

In different experiences

formative experience Formation is carried out in *the many and varied experiences that characterise life*. Experience enable the person to assimilate vocational values and to mature in attitudes and in her/his style of living.

Don Bosco and Maria Mazzarello, in that realistic outlook characteristic of Salesian education, have taught the life generates life and that actions speak louder than words, influencing hearts more deeply.

Experience is the most efficacious and direct way through which the person attains *knowledge of a reality* i.e. understanding and enjoying it and allowing one's self *to be shaped by it*. *Experiencing* something - reality, values, God's call - means meeting, accepting, allowing the self to be challenged, being ready to change and *to place one's self at risk*. Through experience, the person sets in motion a process of unification between knowledge and love, contemplation and action, theory and praxis.

Everything can become an occasion of growth if the person is open to the Spirit, allowing oneself to be challenged by the demands of community life, the mission, and the environment and if, living in solidarity with today's world, the person knows how to accept God's call in it.

[p. 53] However, not every experience is automatically formative in itself. There are experiences that affect a person and lead one in a specific direction, some gradually transform others could possibly halt the journey of fidelity and still [p.

53] others challenge to a more demanding expression of one's vocation. From this arises the importance of a deeply spiritual journey in order to experience God at the core of one's being, in prayer, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in the Eucharist and with constant reference to the *centre of the heart* where God abides. This helps the person to read the different situations of life in the light of the Gospel.

characteristic experiences There are experiences that mark the different stages of life. Some are characteristic of a particular age, others are linked to the demands of a specific formative stage.

developmental tasks To these experiences are linked the *developmental tasks* that each person is called to face. They mark the vocational growth towards those significant changes that give fulness to life.

formative guidelines The Institute offers a variety of *formative guidelines* for the accompaniment of persons and communities. These call for processes of growth that facilitate the re-evaluation of experiences, help to regain motivation and the joy of living and giving, making wisdom the unifying element in day to day life.

Learning to appreciate experiences, one's own and those of others, as a positive resource, becomes a criterion which characterises the FMA as Salesian educators. It is also a task that commits them to believe that every person has her /his own experiences, which are to be appreciated in order to develop communion, co-operation and a formation which looks to the future.

A never-ending journey

a continual growth process The gift of the Salesian vocation is realised in a *journey of growth* that continues in time, through progressive transformation, following an authentic journey of [p. 54] conversion. The stages of this journey do not occur in a linear manner, but imply gradual levels of maturity which lead to a full configuration to Christ, in order to take part in His mission of salvation through the education of young people.

living in dynamic fidelity Living in dynamic fidelity the person gradually enters into a deeper awareness of the baptismal vocation made fruitful by the action of the Spirit. It is a journey which develops through a process of *ownership*, which consists in assuming the content of faith through a free and personal conviction; of *centring*, in which action flows from being in and of God; of *purification* through the experience of trial, suffering, aridity and crisis. All of the above help the person to reach fulness of life in the Spirit.

From the perspective of process, it is not so much the result that counts as the readiness to journey and the courage to face those negative aspects which are present in the desires of the heart, inhibiting growth and preventing a true experience of God.

Many centuries of Christian wisdom have taught the importance of detachment and purity of heart. Is this not the profound wisdom of *coetera tolle*?

At the school of the Spirit one learns the art of *discernment*, so as to be able to read the signs of God in every person and in the challenges that come from reality.

Part Two

JOURNEY OF LIFE AND OF VOCATIONAL GROWTH

The vocational journey to which the FMA are called in order to seek God and to respond to the call each day, is the subject of the second part of the Plan of Formation.

*Particular emphasis is given to **ongoing formation** during the different stages of life. For the FMA, this is a choice that is necessary to ensure both the quality and credibility of the Salesian vocation and the renewal of the educational mission. Adults are living models for young people. They are like "letters" which God writes, not on tablets of stone, but in the heart (cf 2 Cor 3: 2-3).*

*The **educational mission**, lived by all in joy and looking towards the future, renders the FMA communities capable of vocational orientation and of the formative accompaniment of young people, so that they will know how to discern God's plan for their lives.*

*During the period of **initial formation**, the young women called to follow God more closely in the Institute, are offered specific experiences of vocational discernment and accompaniment which constitute their first steps towards acquiring the identity of an FMA (cf C 83).*

ONGOING FORMATION

*...the One who began this good work in you
will see that it is finished
when the day of Christ Jesus comes.*

(Phil 1:6)

An indispensable priority

reasons for the choice Taking ongoing formation as the starting point of the whole formative process is a fundamental perspective of this Plan. The *reasons* for this choice come, first of all, from the intrinsic demands of religious consecration, that commits the person to a continual process of conformity to Christ (cf VC 69).

Furthermore, the idea of a *formation continuing throughout life*, widely shared by a new cultural awareness, flows from the very nature of the person always open to continuing development.

Ongoing formation, as a dimension of life and a continual process, is directed towards responsible adults committed to self-formation and potentially capable of forming others, especially the younger generations.

As FMA, the Sisters are aware that the secret of the efficacy of the educational mission lies in the experience of a community in continual formation. The community recognises the need to constantly renew the gift received, through a deeper rootedness in Christ and an enthusiastic assimilation of Salesian Spirituality.

[p. 58] The need to consider ongoing formation before initial formation, flows from the awareness that the community [p. 58] in continual formation is the place that generate welcomes and accompanies new vocations. For this reason it is not possible to plan for initial formation without better qualifying and defining ongoing formation (cf VC 69; C 82-83).

Through the transparency of her teaching, Maria Domenica Mazzarello leads the Sisters to consider their whole life as a resolute and persevering journey along the path of the love of God and young people. In order for them to become wise *and holy*, it is necessary to begin anew each day, forming themselves, "... to build a firm foundation of true, solid virtue" (L 49, 6), so that their hearts may be "totally for Jesus" (L. 65, 3).

In the daily life of every community

the community place of formation The FMA Constitutions present the community as "... the subject and the place of ongoing formation" (C 101) Living together with persons with whom they did not choose to live and who, in the obedience of faith, carry out different tasks, the Sisters experience the diversity of ideas, ways of acting and the inevitable limitation and conflicts which, if well-handled, are always opportunities for growth.

While the community is a place for the vocational growth of each person, it also becomes a *vocational stimulus* for the young people if its internal relationships foster an evangelical climate where all can express themselves freely, with a mature sense of belonging.

Accompaniment of the individual, which takes place in the community, helps the Sister in the journey to the full acceptance of self, of her own talents and limitations and to the acceptance of each person, appreciating her diversity. It guides her towards the freedom to be herself in the best possible way, rather than to a forced adaptation to norms and situations.

[p. 59] The community that prays fosters a deep self-realisation through encounter with the *Word of God*, accepted as light which penetrates the deepest recesses of one's being (cf *Heb* 4: 12).

Besides the individual and those more directly involved in formation, the whole FMA *community*, local and province, through its various structures, is responsible for the ongoing formation of each Sister. It commits itself to plan initiatives which, after a careful analysis of formative needs, propose methods and content based on deep reflection, on personal and community experiences and on self-evaluation.

This presupposes, on the part of the community, an awareness not only of the spiritual needs and developmental tasks specific to different ages but, above all, the process of maturing of each Sister, with emphasis on her potential, her resources and her ability to cope with crisis.

Formation takes place and is evaluated in the fabric of community relationships and in the educational mission, where different forms of collaboration converge. Dialogue with the laity makes the Sisters more aware of the impact of formation on the ecclesial and social reality.

At the different stages of life

formative paths Vocational growth, like every developmental process, takes place at every stage of life. It unfolds within the *different cycles* that characterise the course of human life. In every cycle the person is faced with specific developmental tasks, significant changes, possibilities and risks, leading to the discovery of her /his own specific way of being, serving and loving (cf VC 70).

The fulness of the response to the call of God is not reached once and for all. It is built on daily choices, on [p. 60] living the demands of following Jesus and on the carrying out of the educational mission.

Against the background of these considerations, the Institute offers an outline that needs to be reflected on and translated into practical formative programs, both on the personal and community level, taking into account the diverse geographical and socio-cultural contexts. The international reality of the Institute requires appropriate adaptation and implementation in each local plan.

EARLY ADULTHOOD

*I say to the Lord: You are my God.
My happiness lies in you alone.
(Ps 15:2)*

This is a time of life that cannot be set within precise chronological limits. There are differences linked to sociocultural and geographical spheres, to the work and vocational situation of the woman, which make it difficult to set limits to the age span. For the purposes of this Plan it has been placed between 30-45 years of age; at the local level a different time span may need to be considered.

Characteristic aspects

time of awareness This part of the lifecycle is usually described as early adulthood, the time to *settle into a particular lifestyle*. Through fundamental choices, the person has established for herself a particular way of living, thinking and acting.

As adult women, in the fulness of their physical, psychological and spiritual resources, the Sisters now become better aware of the possibilities for growth and involvement in society. They know that they can express their personality, gifts of creativity and spirit of initiative in a gradual self-realisation, coherent with their life choice.

[p. 62] During this period needs, potential and problems emerge which they gradually learn to know, accept and integrate into their journey of vocational growth i.e. intimacy and fruitfulness, self-realisation, creativity and productivity, [p. 62] capacity for radical choices and centredness, initiative and responsibility, control and dependence, motherhood development of potential and commitment in socio educational and ecclesial spheres.

personal integration It is an opportune time to effect *personal integration in the light of the Spirit*; a time to allow faith and charismatic values to penetrate to the depths of their being, to the point of reaching a gradual interior and exterior harmony. The Sisters thus

become capable of discovering more deeply the grace of the Covenant that God has made with them and reach a new and more profound meaning of life. However, they could also overemphasise the ideal, or allow themselves to be held, back by fears, risking the impoverishment of faith and contamination by a worldly mentality.

***In the
educational
mission***

The Sisters live this process of *integration in their educational mission*, following the spiritual experience of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica. Thus, while accompanying young people in building their own identity, in discovering their own vocation and in actively taking their place in society, the Sisters are helped to mature in their affectivity and to integrate sexuality as gift, in a fruitfulness that surpasses and transcends the biological sphere.

[p. 63]

During this stage of life, characterised by a particular attraction towards motherhood, their femininity opens to a wider acceptance of others and consecrated virginity becomes a conscious and spiritually enriching choice.

The commitment to channelling affective energies in the direction of *caring* absorbs much of the physical, psychological and spiritual energies of the Sisters. However, it is not always easy to channel these energies in the direction of the gift of self. This could make *consecrated chastity* more difficult to live. In order to reach freedom of heart a journey of intense personal [p. 63] prayer and of spiritual striving is indispensable. This is not the fruit of their will alone but is God's victory in them. It requires that they allow themselves to be penetrated by the Word and implies the renewed offering of themselves in the daily Eucharist (cf C 12).

At times this may require the assistance of persons competent in the human sciences who can help them to understand and guide themselves. Adequate moments of rest, silence and spiritual re-energising are necessary for the reawakening of their fundamental motivation.

***simplicity
of life***

This is also a time for learning to overcome the dispersion of energies and of an excessive craving for self-affirmation; the Sisters commit themselves to personal unification, to the re-evaluation of their intentions and to the choice of the essential. Living *poverty* as a *return to simplicity of life* is truly liberating when the Sisters know how to look to Christ, who chose not to have a stone on which to rest His head (cf Mt 8:20) and when they allow themselves to be challenged by that poverty which is ever more widespread in today's world, particularly that which affects women and young people.

***assuming
responsibility***

Early adulthood generally coincides with the period that follows final profession and, for some, with the time of temporary vows.

During this extended span of time, the Sisters may find themselves in situations of having to assume new responsibilities, not only in the educational sphere, but also in that of the community, and perhaps in the animation of the community itself. The latter is a delicate responsibility that requires maturity and, in some cases, the capacity to make decisions on their own, even when meeting resistance or rejection within or outside the community. In some circumstances,

Sisters might feel incapable of assuming new tasks for which they do not feel adequately prepared.

[p. 64] At the same time, it is normal to recognise the need for leadership and responsibility in which they can assert themselves and give of their best. It is not always easy to channel these demands into the experience of community life and to harmonise them with *religious* obedience.

experiencing This is a time rich in significance for vocational growth.

crisis These years "...are a *critical stage*, marked by the passage from a supervised life to a situation of full responsibility for one's work" (VC 70). Since their formative journey to this point may not have been sufficient for the Sisters to grasp the richness of the Salesian vocation in all its dimensions, uncertainties and crises could be experienced.

reciprocity The Sisters become aware of the need to be in community founded on faith and open to socio-cultural dialogue; a community that finds in the Family Spirit motive for growth in reciprocal empowering and in missionary enthusiasm. They see the need for learning a new way of relating with younger generations, with Sisters who are more advanced in age and with the laity in the educating community.

in the
community

The relationship models may at times assume tones of conciliation or conflict, of dialogue or of mere compromise. Managing them in a balanced and evangelical way requires that life and mission be rooted in contemplation. It gives impetus to the seeking of new ways of expressing the charismatic intuition of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica in the living of loving kindness.

Developmental tasks

[p. 65] The developmental tasks that the Sisters face are a result of the demands of this stage. They are called, first of all, to continue the journey of personal unification [p. 65] that leads them to channel and integrate their interior resources, to become ever more themselves according to the *dream* that God has for each one of them. This is fundamentally the plan on which they have to evaluate themselves, if they intend to reach that synthesis of Gospel wisdom which makes them capable of being Salesian educators, totally committed to God for young people. Some *specific developmental tasks* emerge from the experiences and events that characterise this age.

new heart • *To integrate affective energies* through the serene acceptance of personal history, limitation and sin, constantly entrusting them to the Father who purifies and renews. God's mercy prevents the Sisters from becoming saddened by a sense of guilt, restores to them the joy of living and thus renders them merciful towards others.

To be aware of the negative movements of the heart: envy, jealousy, seeking for gratification, affective dominance or dependence, the desire to shine - so that the gift may be gratuitous, without any pretext of wanting anything in return from

the Sisters or the young people. The love of this *new heart* demands a journey of asceticism which does not consist so much in denying affectivity as in empowering it, investing it in dedication to young people and in authentic friendship (et C 15).

from idealism to realism • *To move from idealism*, often the result of inexperience, to *realism* in the choices to which the Sisters are called each day, learning to accept serenely the conflicts inherent in relationships and in the exercise of the mission. It is important to face the inevitable crises of life as normal events along the journey and as opportunities for growth, through constant meeting with the Word of God and with the help of an experienced guide.

[p. 66] *process of centring* • *To reawaken the heart to a conscious process of centring* stimulated by the basic question: Am I truly seeking God? In this way the Sisters re-motivate themselves, by examining once more the reasons for their vocational choice and committing themselves to overcoming inconsistencies. It is, in fact, in centring that they consciously choose the essential values of the Salesian vocation, translating them into daily life. This journey renders them capable of autonomous choices and judgement, critically facing the many options and values present, not only in society, but also in the educating community.

the experience of God • *To have a personal, deep and transforming experience of God* in the situation in which the Sisters find themselves, even when community reality may appear to be disappointing, educational service not very productive or tasks and responsibilities in diverse sectors dispersive. There is an undeniable bond between the experience of a relationship with God and the Salesian mission, between commitment to professional formation and vocational response, between the requirements of an intense community life and involvement in the educating community and in the locality. This bond needs to be built anew each day by overcoming conflicts and by an authentic encounter with God who is the ultimate meaning of all things. Availability for this encounter allows them to overcome activism and haste.

passion for education • *To cultivate the identity of the Salesian educator* and continually reorganise their lives around *the centrality of Christ* and the *passion for the education of young people*, are fundamental ways of overcoming fragmentation and dispersion. They enable the Sisters to live time well, safeguarding moments of silence and contemplation. They learn from Maria Domenica that the particular charism for the education of girls and young women is nourished by contemplation, which gives a sure foundation to the missionary enthusiasm.

[p. 67] *assuming responsibility* • *To take responsibility* for themselves and their life experiences, to be able to assume *tasks of responsibility* and to care for others in an attitude of service, without becoming individualistic and competitive, through continual personal and community discernment.

academic professional or technical • *To assume responsibility for the academic, professional or technical preparation* required, in order to face the challenges of their mission among young people. A process of self-formation is necessary to render them capable of

preparation finding space for personal updating, and for *understanding* the socio-cultural context, making use of the formative opportunities offered by the Institute, the local area and the *media*, in order to better qualify themselves as educators.

collaboration in the mission • *To learn the art of collaborating* in the shared mission with the members of the Salesian Family, in particular with the Salesians, the Co-operators and with other groups. To recognise and appreciate in a special way the specific contribution of those Past Pupils, who are co-responsible with the Sisters in the educational mission and are intermediaries in the social sector, especially in upholding the rights of women.

Formative guidelines

Formative guidelines should be structured within the framework of a plan. They need to be spelt out in formative strategies by the local and province community and by the Institute at the central level.

In the measure in which each of the Sisters, docile to the Spirit, is attentive to discern and to appreciate every occasion for vocational growth, the programs will lead to renewal.

experience of community life The **community, both local and province**, to which the task of caring for ongoing formation belongs in a [p. 68] special way, will commit itself to translate the formative programs into strategies that correspond to the needs of the Sisters and of their activities.

On this level, the *continual updating* and *formation of persons for diverse roles* are ensured: animators, those more directly involved in household activities and those involved in educational and pastoral work.

In addition, the local and province communities should be attentive to fostering an adequate *accompaniment*, which may also take the form of *spiritual direction*, to help the person to take her own life in hand and to proceed towards new frontiers of maturity.

The **local community**, in particular, offers a significant contribution, in the measure in which it fosters reciprocal accompaniment, expressed as responsibility for one! another and as mutual empowering with a view to the fulfilment of a common task.

The *Family Spirit* which "... must characterise all our communities" (C 50) constitutes the most favourable *humus* for the growth of the person. In it the Sisters share joys and preoccupations, hopes and difficulties" not only of a personal nature, but also of those linked, to the mission. A community capable of inspiring a profound faith and of regenerating trust and hope, can! contribute efficaciously to an authentic growth rooted in, the Gospel and the real needs of the human heart, making it better disposed towards self-giving in the mission (cf C 49).

[p. 69] It is important that the community offer the opportunity of *simple, essential life experiences*, centred on the Word, prayed, lived and shared, and nurtured by contemplative silence in contact with nature and with art. All of this must be aimed at the recharging of physical and spiritual energies, frequently undermined by the whirlpool of activity and by the conditioning of today's society. In the community, each Sister is invited to responsibly appreciate the various formative moments (developing [p. 69] the community plan, good nights, various meetings for discussion and evaluation) and the moments of relaxation and celebration, living them as opportunities for fruitful sharing and gratitude.

task of the guide For this reason it is necessary that the **guide** (on the local level the community animator) and whoever is responsible for formation, be capable of respectful and sincere friendship in accompanying each Sister along the path to God (cf *PI* 30) through a personal and liberating relationship. A specific means in this regard is the *personal meeting* "... an especially valuable occasion for strengthening sisterly union and discovering God's will" (C 34).

Aware of the limitations of every person, the Institute suggests some qualities necessary in a guide: to be a woman of God, familiar with prayer and discernment in the light of the Gospel, imbued with theological hope, strong in that trust which enables people to build their house on the solid rock, Christ (cf 1 Cor 10:4).

choices at province level Looking to the future, the **province** will commit itself to investing energies, resources and persons for the development of competencies in specific professional areas. In this way it will provide for new specialisations within the traditional paths of formation. Particular care is to be devoted to preparation in educational communication so much in demand in today's socio-cultural context and in the Salesian mission. Special attention should also be given to updating with regard to aspects of the economy linked to globalisation and to the vow of poverty in relation to the educational task.

guidelines at central level **At the central level, the Institute** will give preference to some specific choices with the intention of:

- [p. 70]
- fostering an in-depth study of *Salesian Spirituality*. To offer, in this regard, the Course of Salesian Spirituality [p 70] as an aid to reflection on the educational charism, for a more conscious assimilation and a responsible inculturation in the diverse contexts in which the FM work;
 - nurturing the vocational gift through *contact with the* sources and the guided encounter with Don Bosco and Maria Domenica in the places of their origins;
 - encouraging *specialisation in the diverse spheres of education* in the human, biblical-theological, catechetical and pastoral sciences, in communications media and in formation. The Faculty of the Sciences of Education, *Auxilium*, offers a specific, qualified and competent service in this regard;

- promoting initiatives and offering guidelines to ensure formation for the *tasks of accompaniment and vocational discernment* of young people and Sisters and for the *responsibilities of leadership and animation*;
- organising courses *and pastoral meetings* also at national and international levels, in collaboration with various regions;
- offering prospective missionaries the possibility of a period of specific formation at the centre of the Institute, which has access to specialised universities, or at the local level, preferring, where possible, institutions with an international outlook; planning encounters, courses and seminars, which facilitate the necessary updating and contact with the centre of the Institute, for those working in the missions.

MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

... they walk with ever growing strength ...
(Ps 84:7)

This stage extends from approximately 45-65 years of age. It is a period of great opportunity for maturing, for vocational and human fruitfulness, but at the same time, one of crisis and of revision.

The experience of the preceding years enables the person to look at life more realistically and to move more decisively towards the essential.

Characteristic aspects

personal stability If the preceding stages have been lived in a balanced way, during this stage of life the Sisters experience a certain *personal stability*, a more marked tendency towards self-fulfilment through self-giving, a broader outlook on life and relationships and a serene and meaningful involvement with society. They utilise their gifts in a co-responsible manner, through service to the community, in tasks of animation, teaching and accompaniment at various levels.

new possibilities for maturing The *vocational* experience, lived in fidelity to the Covenant in the spirit of the *da mihi animas*, helps them to mature as consecrated women in openness to God, to the Sisters, to the young people and to the laity who are committed, with them, to the educational mission.

In the measure in which they have grown in self-esteem the Sisters become capable of accepting others, listening to them and understanding their needs.

[p. 72] A greater capacity to handle emotions fosters reciprocity and peaceful management of conflict. It allows the Sisters to avoid intransigence and to remain open to the mystery of each person and her story. Friendships can become deeper and can focus on sincerely seeking the good of the other. Then they will be able to appreciate the richness of difference in age, mentality and formation, in a world that is becoming ever more international and multicultural.

Limitations, too, will be considered as an appeal to patience, understanding and pardon.

As the Sisters gradually allow themselves to be touched by grace and to mature in their experience of Salesian life, they can become a point of reference in the community and mission, experiencing a greater capacity to generate life.

awareness of limitations The Sisters become more *aware of the limitations of life*, of their own fragility and that of others. Their perception of time changes and evolves. The time left is less than that which has already been lived and therefore, the possibility of carrying out all their plans is curtailed. They become more realistic, strengthen their critical awareness, their ability to be proactive and to be patient with the slowness of change.

crisis of middle age During this stage the Sisters may feel the need to question the meaning of life. Their enthusiasm may wane and they become conscious of a physical weakening, frequently due to changes connected to menopause.

Among the most common signs of the *middle age crisis* is a feeling of the monotony of life, which in some cases could lead to depression and a general feeling of tiredness and fatigue. The Sisters could experience feelings of regret for what they have renounced as a consequence of assuming the vows and a resistance to what is new. They may tend towards a secure, comfortable style of life, reliving the crises of earlier [p. 73] stages, especially In the affective field, with an excessive desire for intimacy and emotionally gratifying relationships.

In addition, this stage, "... while it brings personal growth can also bring the danger of a *certain individualism*, accompanied either by a fear of not being in line with the times, or by forms of inflexibility, self-centredness or diminished enthusiasm" (VC 70). Especially during the last period of this stage, the feeling of being by passed by the younger generations may lead the Sisters to live contradictory experiences such as an exasperated activism, accompanied by the desire to succeed at any cost, triggering competitive mechanisms or they may withdraw.

exodus experience From the point of view of faith, this is a time of *maturing, but also one of trial*. The Sisters could live the experience of a conscious conversion to God within a vision of life inspired by wisdom but also through moments of crisis in the form of questioning faith and vocation, of spiritual aridity, even to *the* point of feeling that life is meaningless.

However, this transition prepares the *experience*, of the characteristic attitudes of the *exodus experience* of the characteristic attitudes of the exodus experience, of passing through the desert, in the certainty of the presence of God who remains faithful, notwithstanding their poverty. It strengthens their need for the essential, for rebuilding life on God, living evangelical discipleship in a more radical manner. All of this offers the Sisters the opportunity to accept their own story of death and rebirth, which finds its meaning in the death-resurrection of Christ and re-motivates their Salesian vocation.

renewed awareness of the Middle age is one of the most fruitful stages of life. It allows the Sisters to discover the prophetic relevance of *the charism* in a new way. Certain

charism fascinating aspects of the Institute are no longer sufficient. They feel the need to deepen the essential elements of the educational [p. 74] charism and of making loving kindness the path to a practical solidarity with the poorest, in a style of communion and reciprocity. In the educational sphere they feel a new awareness of the need to assume the commitment to link their expertise in education to the Gospel witness and proclamation of Jesus.

They feel more confident and competent in the fulfilment of the tasks entrusted to them and they experience the joy of being personally involved in the mission of the Institute. They now see more clearly *the ecclesial and social impact of their activity* and, wherever they work, they feel challenged to follow new and courageous ways of helping those who suffer or are marginalised.

Developmental tasks

The Sisters are called to create a new evangelical and charismatic synthesis capable of giving meaning to life and guiding it towards a greater spiritual fruitfulness based on the radical following of Jesus and on reciprocal relationships in the style of Salesian loving kindness.

In line with this the Institute identifies some specific developmental tasks.

- positive self-acceptance*** • *To manage the resources of this age*, positively accepting their own reality of being women with the psycho-physical phenomena that accompany this time of transition. To realistically admit personal limitations, overcoming the waning of enthusiasm, recognising their own worth and peacefully accepting diminishing energies, in order to find true life in Christ and in His Paschal Mystery.
- centring themselves in God*** • *To move from possible forms of activism to deeper encounter with self*, allowing time and space to centring themselves in God. To overcome dispersion a superficiality with trustful openness to God's plan in their lives and a more mature gift of self. [p. 75] This also involves being able to rest, to live the joy of relaxing and celebrating together, overcoming the perception of being either useless or irreplaceable.
- discernment*** • *To make themselves capable of personal and community discernment* in the light of the Word, to hear the continual calls of God to bring about the Kingdom. To be open to changing their plans and structures in an attitude of flexibility, a sign of humble love.
- hope-filled outlook*** • *To look kindly upon the younger generations*, rejoicing in their success and progress. To make space for others, overcoming bitterness and regrets and developing attitudes of encouragement and optimism in dealing with those called to continue the mission.
- quality relationships*** • *To give quality to relationships* through an enriching reciprocity and the gift of self to the Sisters and the young people. To limit what they expect of the community, recognising it as an imperfect reality, where it is necessary to

pardon and ask pardon continually.

To develop a spirit of sharing and dialogue with the educating community, the local Church and area, to show trust in assigning tasks and in recognising the competence of the laity.

***evangelical
style of life***

To live chastity as an expression of a mature love style of life which helps to form authentic relationships with the Sisters, the young people and the laity, fosters the ability for listening, develops the capacity for generating life and renders them capable of educational loving kindness. To choose with determination a *simple style of life*, in harmony with the conditions of the place in which they live, sensitive to the call of poverty and personally limiting their demands, as a journey towards practical solidarity. To integrate the need for autonomy that may become stronger during this period, with the taking on of responsibility, lived in the *search for communion*, [p. 76] avoiding the risk of individualism and isolation.

[p. 76]

To commit themselves to nourish the Family Spirit, with the confidence that comes from experience, thus fostering the creation of an environment where the little ones, the marginalised and the weak are at the centre of their educative attention, where all feel at home.

***following
Mary***

- *To assume the attitudes of Mary*, teacher of life, and woman of the *Magnificat*, who, while she contemplates and sings of the marvels of God, denounces injustice and assumes the characteristics of an active citizenship, expressing particular attention towards the least and the poor.

***co-
responsible
in the Church
and in the
local area***

- *To feel co-responsible for participating in the life of the Church* and the local area through the contribution of the charism. To be aware that this gift is not individual, but is to be handed on to the younger generations with all the freshness of the original inspiration and the enrichment which its progressive interpretation has brought about in time and in daily living. This small contribution can be influential on a world-wide level, particularly by promoting and collaborating in practical ways of nurturing life.

***in the
Institute***

- *To implement the guidelines proposed by the Institute* and to carry on a dialogue with Don Bosco and Maria Domenica, seeking not only to guard, but also to enrich their heritage. To make their own the passion of the *da mihi animas coetera tolle* and to rediscover their own identity in the educational charism of the Institute, reinterpreting the Preventive System with creative fidelity.

***in the
Salesian
Family***

[p. 77]

- *To live with renewed enthusiasm the gift of communion* in the Salesian Family, welcoming and promoting positive experiences of a reciprocal empowering for the shared mission. Working in synergy in pastoral projects, in new presences and in other [p. 77] situations, increases joy, involvement and educational efficacy.

In addition to collaboration with the Salesians and the Co-operators, to appreciate in a special way the Past Pupils' Association, as a characteristic work promoted by the Institute from the time of its origins and present in every context where the FMA live.

Formative guidelines

Aware that all formation is self-education and that these formative guidelines are being addressed to adults, it is important to give preference to methods that maximise the involvement of the person, even though the Institute is convinced that authentic evangelical renewal does not depend so much on the efficiency of methods as on personal conversion.

The Institute indicates some formative guidelines for this stage of life. They may be carried out for the most part at community or province level, but at times they will involve interprovince conferences or the central structures of the Institute.

The community at local and province level

a more profound experience of God offers the Sisters opportunities for a deeper *experience of God*, allowing for, or planning adequate times which help to re-read their personal story in the light of faith, helping them to relish the Word and encouraging them to silent, profound prayer;

in fidelity to the charism fosters a renewed *fidelity to the charism* promoting a deeper discovery and appreciation of Salesian Spirituality. This means that each Sister should "... study diligently the spirit, history and mission of the Institute" (VC 71). In dialogue with contemporary culture they will gain a new understanding of the important values of the charism of the founders;

for a new competency [p. 78] encourages *professional updating*. After many years of apostolic activity it becomes indispensable to have further qualification on a theoretical and formative level, one which comprises biblical, theological, pastoral and professional updating in general, a more accurate study of the documents of the universal and local Church and a greater awareness of the culture in which they work. If this updating is lacking, they may easily experience forms of intellectual uncertainty and the feeling of not being in tune with the times.

provides opportunities to enable the Sisters to acquire competence in communication and educational relationships and to assume roles of animation and management, offering them an adequate preparation and accompanying them in the process.

Such opportunities will help them understand the needs of intercultural education, enabling them to respond to the growing phenomenon of the migration of peoples.

organisation of the community *The organisation of community life* is of fundamental importance for personal renewal. At times it may need to be restructured in the light of the Gospel and of the style of relationships characteristic of Salesian Spirituality lived in the feminine.

It is necessary to ensure specific times to express the *Family Spirit*: to pray together, to live moments of relaxation and celebration, to be with the people, to reflect on and share the requirements of the mission, just as they did in Mornese, where the spiritual climate fostered the growth of persons, balancing attention to

their needs with making them responsible for the mission. In this context Maria Domenica asked the opinion of even the youngest in the community as well as that of the lay teachers and took them into account in making decisions.

The local community is the most suitable place for *discernment*, in the light of the Word, of the evangelical [p. 79] style of life and mission to which the Sisters are called. It is here that, based on the needs identified, they, together with the educating community, can plan projects in favour of women and children who live in situations of risk. Thus, the plan assumes a missionary dimension.

Living as a *community in mission* makes them attentive to the conditions in which young people find themselves. Consequently, the Sisters can be proactive and critical intermediaries even in places where decisions regarding social and political life are taken. This dialogue with the people of the local area in which they live and the experience of active citizenship already exists in some of the Institute's works.

in the face of difficult situations The age span being considered does not present only positive aspects. At times, in every day life, *difficult personal and community situations* need to be faced. There are cases of persons with difficulties or communities where the atmosphere is heavy and the spiritual tone has been weakened. This requires good co-ordinated action, capable of healing the wounds of those Sisters who live in difficult situations and of helping them renew their trust in God who never abandons them. If this is not enough, it is necessary to have recourse to professional help.

task of the guide The formative programs offered by the province or the local community, require the presence of a **guide** who bases her authority on the wisdom of the cross drawn from the Gospel and from the richness of the charism. At this school she learns to appreciate the different contributions of the Sisters and to create that climate of trust which fosters a circular style of relationships and reciprocal empowerment.

The ability to recognise her own limitations, doubts and errors allows her to develop a serene sense of judgement which distinguishes the essential from the relative, that which is sporadic from that which is habitual, and to be [p. 80] open to accept and offer pardon through gestures of reconciliation which renew communion.

Dealing with adults who have already developed a sense of belonging and responsibility, it is important that this *accompaniment* be respectful, fostering participation in a climate of communion.

This will be accomplished through the animation of and in the community with a view to supporting the Sisters of this age in facing the task of renewing themselves in an attitude of continual conversion. The action of the guide, who knows the individual Sisters and the needs of the community, focuses on the appreciation of resources and the sharing of gifts, guiding and involving, in order to promote reciprocal trust and a sense of belonging (cf C 113).

formation of animators **The province or inter-province conferences** will assume the task of:

- organising *formation programs for community animators* and other formators, in order to prepare them for the vocational accompaniment of the Sisters and young people and for discernment in the light of the Gospel, particularly developing their ability to relate and to educate;

sabbaticals • offering suitable time *for a sabbatical* as an opportunity to be physically and spiritually renewed. This is all the more necessary in our time where people can become burnt-out by the pace of life and work, with its often excessive burden of responsibility and stress.

The duration of the sabbatical can vary according to need. This will depend, however, on what is possible for the province and local community. The place in which this time will be spent is agreed on with the provincial and other people in the Institute who, eventually, will take on the responsibility for hospitality and formative programs.

[p. 81] This time can be dedicated to prayer, to biblical-theological, charismatic-pastoral reflection and/or professional updating. It can also provide an opportunity for activities other than the usual ones. It is good, however, to give first place to contemplation;

courses for updating • valuing and offering the possibility to participate in courses of theological-spiritual and educational-professional updating.

On the central level the Institute

offers the opportunities already noted on pages 69-70, adapting them to the specific needs of this age.

LATER ADULTHOOD

*Make us know the shortness of our life
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
(Ps 90:12)*

The term *later adulthood* takes in a span of time that varies from culture to culture. For the sake of continuity with the preceding sections, the document will consider this stage as beginning at approximately 65 years, while making some necessary distinctions within this period. Attention to this stage has become a strongly felt need in those societies in which the median age has risen notably in recent decades. This is also true for the Institute that is experiencing this same phenomenon in some geographic areas.

Independent of these considerations, the fact that the individual continually learns throughout life, implies that development should take place in conditions that foster learning through continual interaction with all aspects of life.

Characteristic aspects

a time rich in opportunities It is not easy to characterise this stage, both because of its time span which is destined to increase and because of the different ways in which persons live it. The widespread idea that later adulthood is a period of decline, due to the lessening of physical energies and influence, does not always correspond to reality. There are Sisters who live it not only in serenity, but as a stage of life which offers new opportunities for growth and commitment.

[p. 83]In effect, there are as many faces of later adulthood as there are people living it.

In a certain sense, this stage draws its *quality* from all that has been lived before. In the measure in which the Sisters have integrated the characteristic experiences of the earlier stages of development, they can face the reality of this new period as a stage of further spiritual growth. They will succeed in finding its meaning and value on the human and faith level, discovering in it the design of a loving God, considering it as gift and task and, therefore, as a meaningful and integral stage of the journey.

The secret of being young in spirit, which for the FMA is a family characteristic, lies in this positive, hope-filled outlook.

young in spirit In the Institute the Sisters joyfully celebrate the vitality of so many who are no longer young, and who, though having passed the age of retirement, continue to give of themselves in the educational mission, as far as their strength allows. Wisely and responsibly they carry out tasks of animation, mediation and guidance, and various other services, offering an active contribution to community life and mission.

value of suffering It is true that, especially during the later stages of this period, the person may experience diminished physical or psychological well-being with the obvious effects on a social and spiritual level.

It can happen that having to reduce, or even relinquish, the work done for many years may lead to a sense of uselessness and at times even a feeling of being a burden. Retiring from roles and tasks, especially when one has identified herself with them, could lead to the perception of not knowing how to do anything else. This could make one take refuge in a past which cannot return, or hide from present commitments, due to the difficulties of coping with an ever-changing world.

[p. 84]Faced with such a sense of *loss*, the person might be subject to isolation and self-exclusion, seeking compensation in egoistic and aggressive behaviour. One may experience mood swings, withdrawal, depression and a tendency to blame others.

These considerations must not make the person lose sight of the reality of later adulthood, which can also be a stage of unexpected opportunity.

Entering into it is basically a privilege because of the real possibility for "... better evaluating the past, for knowing and living more deeply the Paschal Mystery, for becoming an example in the Church for the whole People of God" (*ChL* 48; cf also *Letter of the Holy Father to the elderly* 10-13).

contemplative disposition This is *harvest time*. A contemplative disposition helps the Sisters to delve more deeply into the mystery of life and history, including their own personal story. If they carry out a service of animation, as in other activities, they become ever more aware that God acts through their poverty and that fidelity itself is a consequence and an expression of God's fidelity.

They have a greater appreciation of sacramental life and an awareness of the need to make the Gospel values their own, living the specific aspects of the Salesian charism more fervently. During this stage of life expressions such as: "If I were to be born again, I would become a Salesian Sister again", are frequently heard.

wealth of experience The presence of God and contemplative needs are more strongly felt and the call to the essential helps the Sisters to direct their energies towards the one thing necessary. Signs that express this tension are: a greater intimacy in prayer, marked by frequent expressions of gratitude to God for the gifts which have been bestowed on them, owning the needs of the Institute, the Church and the world, a deeper love for Mary, help and [p. 85] companion on the journey, the experience of placing their energies at the service of the community and the Church, handing on to the younger generations the rich heritage acquired by personal and charismatic experience, a greater freedom coming from a progressive detachment and being less affected by the desire for success and the judgement of others.

To the above can be added solidarity as an expression of poverty, manifested in the limiting of personal demands in order to make practical gestures of sharing in community and with those in need and in the capacity of loving deeply and freely, expressing loving kindness in reciprocal relationships and in contact with young people.

The experience of being young in spirit has no age and renders the Sisters capable of feeling, with Don Bosco and Maria Domenica, that as long as there are young people to be saved and loved they should remain lovingly vigilant.

wisdom of the cross Even when the Paschal Mystery shows itself more profoundly in the form of the cross - various kinds of suffering, illness, death itself - the Sisters can still experience that sense of fulfilment and joy which comes from having entrusted their life to the hands of a provident and faithful God and from having carried out the mission entrusted to them. The Sisters are aware that "... the Father is now bringing to completion the mysterious process of formation which began many years before. Death will then be awaited and prepared for as the supreme act of love and self-offering" (VC 70).

Developmental tasks

new ways of self-giving The awareness that vocation and ecclesial mission embrace the whole span of life commits the Sisters to finding ever-new ways of generating life. Taking health [p. 86] into consideration, they may continue to live the experience of giving, in community and among the young people, carrying out a specific role of responsibility in the community, in education or in the Church.

When, due to advanced age or illness, the Sisters can no longer continue to carry out previously held roles, because of diminishing physical, psychological and professional energies, they can dedicate more quality time to the development of a spiritual life that opens *new ways of giving*.

The greater availability of time allows them to engage in interesting and/or culturally enriching reading, or in other activities that lead to a variety of interests, and to constructive and serene relationships with others. Through their sensitivity, they may also carry out acts of thoughtfulness and be able to help in ways which the stress of work in the past did not allow. During this stage of life the Salesian *vado io* is still valid!

Since deadlines are no longer pressing the Sisters can take time to converse and share their story with greater calm, and allow themselves those little joys that can make their lives and those of others happy.

During this journey they are sustained by the certainty that the fulfilment of God's plan for their lives is guiding them towards the final meeting with the Father. It is important at this stage that the thought of death, in its deep sense of *rebirth* i. e. the desired fulfilment of their earthly pilgrimage, emerge ever more clearly on the horizon of life.

In the first period of this stage, taking into account physical and psychological well-being, the developmental tasks are the same as those pointed out in the preceding stage.

Gradually, however, as activity decreases, they continue to mature in a love that is expressed through the community and in ecclesial service that is still possible.

[p. 87] The journey of progressive unification prepares them to transmit wisdom, through the gift of a life centred ever more firmly in Christ and in the mystery of His death and resurrection.

Living later adulthood in this way, the Sisters become a prophetic sign, a promise of joyful fulfilment to young people, and an unspoken but efficacious invitation: come *and* see!

The following are *specific developmental tasks*:

towards the essential • to decisively *redirect* their lives *towards the centre*, to rediscover in depth the God who lives within. At this point, the first step to be taken in order to open themselves unconditionally to Jesus, their Spouse, is to look within and to be present to themselves, in order to decide how to live this stage;

believing in new possibilities to look *realistically at crisis* that may occur at this stage of life. While psycho-physical conditions may necessitate a lessening or retiring from active commitments, they trustingly make themselves available for *new possibilities*.

This means:

- to accept the *new situation of weakness and limitation*, in the light of the Paschal Mystery, seeing its redemptive richness; to continue to take an interest

in the lives of the Sisters and young people, making themselves useful in whatever way they can;

- *to work through and serenely grieve losses* (detachment from responsibility and roles, people and places) without losing themselves in regret and nostalgia, being conscious, rather, of their unique and irreplaceable contribution within the fabric of the community;

- *to cultivate a sense of humour and the enjoyment of little things*, fruit of a simplicity of life that gives [p. 88] them a balanced view of themselves and the world. In this way they become a presence of peace in the community and keep alive the Family Spirit, through the gift of that "... endless patience and unlimited gentleness" recommended by Maria Domenica.

- *to look kindly on young people*, making themselves capable of *telling stories and telling their own story in a pleasant way*, passing on to them the wisdom of life they have gained, to live the passion for education through commitment to prayer and offering and where, possible, through different forms of pastoral presence.

- *to entrust themselves gratefully to the God of life*. Especially when their strength and activities diminish, they can take longer pauses for prayer, as a personal contribution to the work of the Sisters and fill their days with missionary intentions: "being Moses on the mountain." They thus trustingly and vigilantly prepare for their encounter with the God of life.

***human and
evangelical
fullness***

• *to express the joy and richness of a fulfilled life* in: the service of God, for young people, living the *full human and evangelical meaning of the vows*. From this perspective it is necessary:

- *to live consecrated chastity*, witnessing to an undivided love which is seen in the transparency of their being, the joy of gratuitous giving, centred on the other's need for life and growth, an altruism which overcomes the newly emerging need for attention, dedication to the mission in the measure in which this is possible, reciprocally enriching friendship and encouragement for those who are still active in mission;

- *to be particularly attentive and sensitive to the requests for solidarity in the world and in the Institute*, limiting personal demands, being grateful for what the community offers and committing themselves to collaborate in [p. 89] initiatives for the creation of a mentality of solidarity.

To appreciate time in its dimension of gratuity through attentive listening, especially to the young people, through the availability for community requests, to the mission and the local Church and through the continual giving of new meaning to their consecrated life in the light of the one *thing necessary*;

- *to live obedience to the Father* in a new life situation, choosing each day to surrender themselves trustingly to God's will for them and seeing their story as a drawing closer to God. During this stage, there is a particular readiness to listen

to the Word and ponder on it to the point of permeating their day with the prayer of the heart.

To accept the responsibilities that may be assigned to them, trusting in the fidelity of God who sustains and guides them.

To recognise the role of the community in helping them to encounter God and to facilitate the task of animation in those called to carry out the service of authority, through the gift of prayer, cordiality, respect and moral support.

To accept with renewed awareness, the guidelines of the Magisterium of the Church and of the Institute and to open in love to the new perspectives of today, seeing the present time, also, as their time.

To offer the contribution of their advice and discernment on the evaluation of reality, in a discreet and proactive way.

To be available, as far as possible, for works of charity, volunteering and assistance, both in the community and in the ecclesial sphere.

- with Mary
mother of
life*
- to deepen their *love for Mary*, who promotes, sustains and accompanies life to its fulfilment and to help the community and the young people to discover her presence in the reality of each day. Like Mary, to live the spirituality of joy and gratitude to God for the gifts [p. 90] bestowed on the Sisters and the young people, and, like Elizabeth, to become capable of appreciation and praise for them (cf *Lk 1:39-55*).

Formative guidelines

*charisms
proper to
this stage* Considering the time span and flexibility of this stage of life, and consequently, the diversity of physical and psychological conditions, it is difficult to plan generalised formative programs.

For many Sisters those guidelines given for the preceding stage are still valid.

In what follows, the Institute takes into consideration some valid points for those who are more advanced in years.

These points are put into practice principally in *the community to which the Sisters belong* through *accompaniment by the guide* and through the provision of *adequate living arrangements*.

At the basis of possible formative programs and the creation of a holistic environment, lies the recognition by the community of the *charisms* proper to this stage. Some of these are: *gratuitousness*, in a society in which the dominant culture measures the value of human actions by their efficiency; *remembering*, in a context in which the younger generations are losing the sense of history and along with it their own identity; *experience*, where technology seems to render it useless; *interdependence*, where individualism and the desire to be the centre of attention are widespread; a *more complete vision of life*, in a society dominated by haste, agitation and forgetfulness of the fundamental questions regarding the vocation, dignity and destiny of the human person (cf *La dignità dell'anziano 15-16*).

[p. 91] **The community to which the Sisters belong**

a climate of acceptance and appreciation recognises the presence of *these charisms and appreciates the gift of the elderly Sisters*, who are witnesses to a life lived in an evangelical manner and to a significant charismatic experience. It appreciates the contribution that they can give to making life more humane, to the understanding of the charism, through the spiritual synthesis accomplished in their lives.

offers opportunities to develop an awareness and understanding of self and the potential that may still come to light, while appreciating competencies already acquired. It helps to discover the gifts of personal creativity which, perhaps, could not be expressed earlier and creates space to cultivate interests, which not only confirm the self-worth and the potential of these Sisters, but are also useful for the community itself;

supports the elderly Sisters, *both spiritually and materially*, providing for them in such a way that they feel fully accepted and loved in the community; appreciates their experience by consulting them, dedicating time to listen to them, being with them and keeping alive in them the spirit of love and wise reflection.

appreciates the wisdom, resources and competencies of these Sisters, directing their potential towards the mission of the Institute and the Church.

Possible activities are: offering assistance in the different fields of education; commitments in the area of evangelisation (catechesis, liturgy, being Eucharistic ministers, animation of the elderly, visits to families and to the sick, animation of small counselling centres and prayer groups); participation in cultural initiatives based on their interests; drafting of the house chronicles, according to the criteria of historic remembering to be handed on to the younger generations; service in the kitchen, laundry, administration, garden, music, painting, etc;

[p. 92] *draws on the treasury of their hidden offering and their prayer*, entrusting to them intentions for young people, the Church and the world. It supports them during illness, helping them to discover its salvific value in completing the Paschal Mystery of Christ to the point of accompanying them, in love and faith, on the final part of their journey to the Father.

sharing of gifts Particularly during this stage of life, the accompaniment by the **guide** should be characterised by genuine affection, respect and attention. Dialogue and encouragement and the sharing of experiences constitute a richness, not only for the animator, but also for the community itself. In the community the animator creates a climate of attention and involvement so that all may share in the care of the elderly Sisters, treat them with concern and love and live reciprocity in the sharing of spiritual goods and knowledge and keep them informed. This sharing is a gift for the community and contributes towards keeping alive a sense of remembering and maintaining continuity between generations.

In an attitude of sharing gifts, one irreplaceable resource and a precious contribution that the elderly Sisters can offer is the ministry of listening, encouragement, together with spiritual and moral support.

The province community

care and support

- *offers opportunities for renewal*, awareness of and appreciation for this stage, which continues to be productive even in the face of reduced physical and apostolic activity. Where necessary, it will organise retreats suited to their particular needs, arrange courses in theological-charismatic updating, etc.
- *supports the local communities* in the commitment i to offer similar opportunities to those Sisters who may be prevented from participating in encounters outside the house;
- [p. 93]*makes itself responsible for providing an accommodation* that facilitates a quality of life and participation in community moments;
- *fosters access to the network of communications*, also in view of service to the community and the educative mission.

VOCA TIONAL DIMENSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION

*It is to the glory of my Father, that you should bear
much fruit and then you will be my disciples.*

(Jn 15:8)

***relationship
between
formation
and
mission*** There is an intimate and indissoluble bond between the commitment to ongoing formation and the educational mission. In the measure in which the FMA live in Christ, with and for young people, they fulfil their Salesian vocation and, in the mystery of fruitfulness in the Spirit, they in turn, become *guides and educators of other vocations*.

Together with the laity who share with them in the educational mission, they welcome the young people's questions on the meaning of life and become their companions on the journey (cf C 63-76).

It is in the everyday that they express the Salesian Spirituality which characterises them. It is on this reality that they base *vocational guidance* that opens up a range of possibilities to young people in which they can invest their resources, by choosing the direction for their own lives according to God's plan.

Focusing on the *journey of vocational guidance* does not imply a specific, exclusive orientation to consecrated life among the FMA and is not directed towards baptised young people only. In the context in which the Sisters work, they find young people who live different experiences of reality, belong to different faiths and, sometimes, to no particular faith. These notably different starting points could make any vocational guidance [p. 95] difficult. It is necessary to approach all with respect and discretion, without, however, shying away from offering educational programs that aim at discovering a personal life plan.

The Institute places particular emphasis on *vocational accompaniment* as a means of growth and discernment. While providing a basic framework, it is diversified according to the reality of each person, suited to her/ his situation and God's call.

For those young women who express a clear desire to journey towards the choice of consecrated life in the Institute, accompaniment takes the form of *specific vocational guidance*.

Accepting a mandate

charismatic remembering The educational mission characterises the life of the FMA and gives it a direction that focuses and centres all resources on one objective: to reawaken a thirst for God in the hearts of young people and to walk with them on the ways that lead to God.

This focus was the root of the charismatic choice of the founders. Don Bosco expressed it in this way: "I study for you, I work for you, I live for you and I am also ready to give my life for you" {[translated from] Ruffino D., *Cronache dell'oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* in the *Salesian Central Archives*, quad.5, 10).

In the same manner, Maria Domenica lived, in wisdom of mind and heart, the mandate "I entrust them to you" (*Cron I 90*), given to her in the vision of Borgoalto.

Their caring for young people in the style of the Preventive System was directed at helping them to discover God's plan in their lives and to realise it as the road to their happiness and holiness in everyday life.

[p. 96]The FMA communities have gradually become convinced that *the vocational dimension is intrinsic to every educational journey, be it formal (strictly academic) or informal (group activity and other initiatives in which the educational mission is carried out)*. This dimension is spelt out in the *vocational discernment* as an *integral part* of the journey of growth.

the attraction of evangelical witness Every educating community, as an icon of different vocations in the Church, through transparent evangelical relationships and notwithstanding its limitations, presents itself as the visible image of God's call and the response of the community. It thus offers young people the experience of persons who have met and journeyed with Jesus, dedicating themselves to the cause of the Kingdom. This experience, like those of Valdocco and Mornese, can almost spontaneously attract and fascinate young people in any cultural context.

educational mission and culture of life The *Salesian educational* mission in its plan and in its realisation, is set against the background of a *culture of life* that is clearly expressed in the biblical category of vocation. It is God the Father, the source of life, who calls and in whom every vocation finds its meaning and fulfilment. Born of love, each person is called to love. Life thus becomes a *gift received*, which tends, in turn, to become a *gift freely given*. As with Jesus, this journey of acceptance and of gift demands a fidelity even unto the cross, the greatest expression of love.

Salesian Spirituality Founded on the Incarnation, *Salesian Spirituality* recognises that everyday life is the place where God is present and close to each person, as the good Father who saves and fills with life. In revealing the mystery of the Father's love, Christ fully manifests the dignity of the person, created in the image of God, inhabited by [p. 97] the Spirit and called to communion in the great human family. Living the freedom of the children of God, as *good Christians and honest citizens*, means walking in joy, trust and the readiness to assume commitments and responsibilities on the social, political and ecclesial levels. These tasks imply the presence of educators who, like Don Bosco and Maria Domenica, are capable of standing with the young people, accompanying them in the difficult art of maturing in holiness.

Life itself has many facets that need a unified vision in order to make sense. The support and presence of educators can set young people on the path to unity, and respond to their questions, especially those regarding the meaning and direction of their lives.

From this point of view, the charismatic remembering, the journey of the Church in today's culture, the preferential love for young people "that they may have life in abundance," encourages the FMA to give *greater quality to their youth pastoral*, so that the vocational dimension, which characterises it, can be clearly spelt out.

A challenge to education

yeaming for God Living life as a vocation is the fundamental task of every person. A quick look at the diverse and pluralistic realities in which the FMA live, however, persuades them that this fact cannot be taken for granted.

In many contexts the complexity of a culture without precise reference points leaves young people uncertain, weak and confused regarding their identity. This leads to chronic indecision in the face of life choices. Yet, these same young people yearn for spirituality and search for truth and freedom. They aspire to rediscover their own personal uniqueness, desire transparency in relationships and seek friendship and companionship.

[p. 98]They want to build a new society founded on values of peace, justice, respect for the environment, acceptance of diversity, solidarity, volunteering and equality between man and woman.

This is a reality that calls for a new evangelisation, in order to bring the continual newness of the Christian message to every culture. The FMA are challenged as educators and called, not only to renew methods, but also to enliven and to make clear the reasons for their vocational choice.

Young people today are attracted more by *witness* than by words and demand clear signs of coherency.

They expect the FMA to be persons who are authentic, really in love with Jesus, who know *how to be with Him* and are capable of proclaiming Him openly.

They need educators who are ready to listen, capable of guiding and accompanying them towards that experience of the God for whom they yearn, even though they may be unaware of, or struggle against it.

They seek an environment in which the love of God is joyfully and trustingly expressed; where the experience of *friendship* and the *mission* towards which the efforts of all converge, are capable of enthusing and helping them find answers to life's questions.

different contexts The educational action of the FMA has to deal with different contexts in which the Christian message has not yet been proclaimed or established, and at times meets with traditions and mentalities that differ from those of the Gospel. This urges the FMA to review their formative plan and to network with persons and institutions involved in the education of young people. In these contexts their evangelising action becomes more sensitive to intercultural and interfaith needs.

favourable educational environments Carrying out Don Bosco's aspiration to educate young people so that they may become *good Christians and honest citizens*, then, commits the FMA to create [p. 99] *educational environments* which promote a favourable climate for the development of different vocations. Aware that this climate is characterised especially by the moral and spiritual quality of the educators, they seek to qualify it by giving life to a network of relationships that are rich in friendship and enthusiasm for the mission.

individualised educational programs Parents are the primary collaborators in the educational mission. Attention to the *family* has always been important in the Institute. This sensitivity is much more relevant today, because the family unit seems to be losing the points of reference which make it the first nucleus of social life and the natural place for preventive education and vocational orientation. In addition to the family, traditional educational environments, such as, oratory, parish, school and associations together with other places where it is possible to meet young people, offer favourable opportunities to carry out *different and individualised educational programs*, to inspire and give direction to their search for meaning.

Educational process

Vocational guidance is not simply a moment in the education of the person, but is a constant process that accompanies unified, harmonious development.

growth in faith The *path of vocational growth* is like a pilgrimage towards maturing in faith and towards becoming adult believers called to make free and responsible decisions regarding their life according to God's plan. This journey proceeds through *gradual stages*, and is lived within the ecclesial community, in contact with women and men who are already living their vocation and in the company of educators who are open to the Spirit.

Helping young people to grow in faith, to find in Jesus [p. 100] the meaning of life and to live it as a response to His call, is the goal of Christian education and therefore is at the heart of every vocational discernment.

A personal meeting with Jesus opens one's mind to a recognition and acceptance of specific vocations such as marriage, consecrated life, priesthood, missionary life, among others, as an expression of the diversity of gifts and ministries in communion with the one Spirit.

vocational discernment in interfaith contexts Vocational orientation is possible also in interfaith contexts. It takes the form of a proposal within a journey of discovering the unique call of each person in society and of preparing them to give an adequate response. The credible witness of an educating community which lives the Gospel values integrally allows young people of other faiths to grow in human maturity and to discover their own life plan.

An essential condition for a mature vocational journey is the *discovery of one's own identity*, because it is within this self-awareness that the person makes a life choice.

To accomplish this through education, the Institute indicates *some ways* that could be decisive in building a life plan.

discovery of personal identity *Educating to self-awareness.* Standing with young people, the FMA help them especially to accept themselves, to serenely identify the gifts and limitations of their own personality, to become aware of the ambivalence of some of their motivations, to discover aptitudes, interests, aspirations and values, in order to grow in authentic freedom. Furthermore, the FMA accompany them in learning to read their own life experiences, be they positive or negative, helping them to integrate these and to accept their own story in gratitude and hope.

In all developmental stages, but especially during *the* period of adolescence and young adulthood, the FMA [p. 101] focus their attention on the processes of forming an identity of self-definition, of psychosexual integration, of growth in personal autonomy, in the capacity for relationships and in the ability to create a life plan.

The FMA take particular interest in the development of the potential of the woman, of a professional and socio-political preparation that will enable her to take her place in the world of work, culture, communication and ecclesial participation, in reciprocal partnership with man.

beyond fragmentation *Educating to centring.* The person cannot grow in faith without developing the capacity for awe and wonder at the mystery of life. This prepares one for an encounter with the God of salvation and becomes prayer, gratitude and serenity. The loss of this sense of mystery could be at the root of today's vocation crisis. To restore unity to the diversified and often fragmentary experiences of young people a climate of silence and contemplation is necessary. Every vocation has its origin in prayer, supported by the certainty of the Father's love for each person.

This commits the FMA, both personally and as community, to centre their lives in God and to offer young people *paths of education to prayer*, that help them grasp the profound meaning of life and discover their vocation, in a personal encounter with God and the gift of themselves.

towards responsible choice *Educating to choice.* Deciding the direction of one's life is the result of a continual exercise in freedom. For this reason, it is necessary to accompany in a way that helps young people to discern what is good and what is evil. In particular, it is necessary to be critical of the opinions expressed by the mass media, fashion and the various situations with which they come in contact. The FMA, therefore, walk with them, to help them to overcome the fear of making choices and to deal with indecision when faced with life-long commitments and [p. 102] especially to guide them to making choices within the context of the meaning of life.

In making a vocational choice the person experiences moments of disorientation and crisis and needs to be accompanied respectfully, so as to be able to take responsibility for her /his own future, being docile in discerning God's plan and open to continual conversion to God's ways.

educating to love *Educating to love.* Taking one's life into one's own hands, directing it in an autonomous and responsible way, means confronting one's own capacity to love on a daily basis.

Educating to love, a fundamental aspect of life, is a basic component in the Salesian educational tradition. For this reason the FMA hold it as a priority to help young people recognise that they are personally loved by God and, consequently, are called to give love and not just expect to receive it.

The creation of an *educational environment*, where one feels loved, where one learns to meet the other in her /his difference and to accept the person with respect, is an indispensable condition for the harmonious integration of love and sexuality in the maturing of the individual.

In this sense, starting from the new anthropological key of reciprocity that leads to a balanced interaction between the sexes, it is decisive that there be a positive experience of *co-education* that will influence relationships in social and institutional circles. This can foster vocations capable of generating life and solidarity.

life as gift and responsibility *Educating to living life as gift and responsibility.* Life may be looked at as gift or as possession. Educating others and one's self to perceive life as a gift means, first of all, becoming aware of one's condition as creature, incapable of finding in the self the full meaning of life. Existence itself challenges each person to discover *the* meaning and unique mission entrusted to her/him.

[p. 103]God has given each person the responsibility of reaching fullness of life and happiness. The experience of God's unconditional love urges one to overcome self-interest and the desire for recompense and to be ready to give one's life freely, as it has been freely given (cf Mt 10: 8). Gratuitousness is at the heart of every authentic vocational response that in turn is rooted in gratitude. This involves a journey of maturing in self-giving, through experiences of sharing and solidarity, of service and commitment in social life, in passing from a mere altruism to a real availability of the gift of self.

towards the discovery of one's own vocation *Educating to the discovery of one's own vocation.* This means fostering some important elements of growth. Le. from the search for meaning and the awareness of being called to life, to the need to carry out a specific mission in society and in the Church; from the identification of one's life plan to the decision of carrying it out with determination and without *too* much delay. A personal encounter with Jesus is decisive on this journey. The story of each person takes the form of a "...tale of friendship with the Lord" (VC 64).

The personal encounter with Jesus, however, remains a mystery; it is an adventure of faith. It is cultivated through the frequent encounter with the Word, sacramental life, experience of prayer and service to others, and the sense of belonging to the Church.

journey of maturity Every educational process should be progressively more specific and challenging. For this reason, it is necessary to offer a *program of vocational growth* to young people. Through adequate accompaniment the FMA help them to plan their lives and to realise their own dreams; committing themselves to

share the educational mission of the FMA and to progress in the integration of faith-life.

Choosing a direction in life may bring moments of clarity, but also of uncertainty. For this reason, the FMA offer young people significant experiences which will facilitate [p. 104] their vocational decision: the commitment to serious discernment, knowledge of different vocations in the Church and, specifically, in the Salesian Family.

A significant point is reached when the young people make the decision to *follow* a particular vocational plan.

The ways that lead to the discovery of one's own life plan and vocational decision require *people* capable of educational accompaniment.

Educational accompaniment

Accompaniment constitutes an important experience in the journey of maturing, an *event* in which one marvels at the action of the Spirit and the free and loving response of the person. It takes place in an educational context in which personal dialogue with adults, group experience and contact with the life and mission of the FMA community, facilitate encounter and discernment.

requirements of an educational relationship *Personal accompaniment* is a place of discernment, a time in which listening to the person, together with explicit vocational programs, creates conditions for a mature decision. It is a point of arrival on the journey of growth, a time for evaluation and planning towards new goals of maturity.

Through accompaniment the FMA help the young people to discover life as a free gift and invite those who share the Christian faith to deepen their relationship with Jesus, as the unifying centre of life.

Accompaniment is carried out within an *educational relationship* i.e. it assumes all the characteristics of an experience of communion-communication between two persons who help each other to correspond to God's gift at the school of the one true teacher, the *Holy Spirit*.

[p. 105]It is a *relationship of mediation* in which whatever happens between persons always goes beyond them i.e. it refers to that intimate and personal reality present in the heart of both, and involves them in a communion that is beyond them: the mysterious presence of Jesus that transforms life.

The relationship established in accompaniment can foster reciprocity. In it people are deeply involved, not only on the spiritual level, but also in their affectivity. As in every genuine relationship, they are called to undertake a progressive journey of authentic freedom, overcoming every form of possessiveness, dependence and control of others.

For the young people of other faiths, accompaniment can lead to discover the meaning of life and discern their call to the service of others in truth and in love, opening up the possibility of integrating Gospel values into their own lives.

The point of departure for any process of accompaniment is to *know young people* as they are, in order to identify their search for meaning. This knowledge comes especially from sharing their life, listening to their story with its positive facets, but also with what is problematic or ambiguous, in an attitude of docility to the Spirit.

The relationship of accompaniment requires from the *young people*, openness, trust in themselves and in others, transparency and authenticity in facing themselves and their own story, the readiness to change and attitudes of faith and prayer.

Educators need to continually seek both God and a conversion that gives credibility to their presence.

Sharing the same vocational journey implies maturing in the capacity for listening and for patient, respectful waiting for the different rhythms of growth. It requires trust in the positive resources of the young people and [p. 106] the courage to propose the demanding way of the Gospel, as is shown in the educational experience of the founders.

Accompaniment is not a neutral process. It can facilitate, but could also block openness to the vocational gift. It is necessary, therefore, that those called to this delicate task be adequately prepared, through learning to relate in addition to theological and psycho-pedagogical competence.

context and forms of group accompaniment In the formative tradition of the FMA, in addition to personal accompaniment, **group accompaniment** is particularly relevant. This is accomplished through youth groups within the educating community and in the broader ecclesial context.

The *group* is a place in which the young people may mature in their own faith option at the school of the Word of God and assume an attitude that is more attentive to the needs of others. In the group they learn to accept difference, face conflict, live pardon, friendship and solidarity and help one another to respond to their call creatively.

Every *community*, where the love of Christ is lived, where there is a family-like atmosphere and everyone expresses the best of herself and the joy of her own vocation, becomes a *vocational proposal*. The living communication of the experience of meeting Jesus can inspire in young people the question: "What does God want from me?"

The ecclesial community is the place in which, through the experience of the Church as mystery and the study of different vocations, young people learn to go beyond the frequently congenial relationships found within the group to which they belong, in order to open themselves to the universality of the Christian vocation.

[p. 107] Group accompaniment responds to the demands of communication and of sharing and complements personal accompaniment. It requires, on the part of those who carry it out, specific relational skills in addition to a particular educational and spiritual awareness, in order to discern the signs of the Spirit in individuals and in the group.

Formative guidelines

in the fabric of daily life The vocational journey that we offer to young people is realised in everyday life and is linked to the commitment of each person to study and work, is lived in joy and with a sense of responsibility. It is a journey that needs to be incarnated in today's context. It challenges young people in different ways. It is realised in the educating community, in different educational contexts, including those of other faiths, through the ordinary formative process.

Every place and every activity becomes *vocational* in a broad sense, because it is transformed into an experience of belonging, of an active participation in the life of society and of the Salesian mission and, for Christians, in the life of their Church.

It is important to keep in mind the diversified face of today's world and the urgency of forming people capable of placing themselves, competently, at the service of the common good. It is essential for the FMA to clarify for themselves, first of all, the ethical framework that must be promoted within the emerging needs of a society in rapid transition. One need only think, for example, of bioethics in a society that promotes genetic manipulation, not only of animal and vegetable life, but also of human life.

Responding to one's own vocation also means becoming responsible for God's plan for creation and humanity, caring for life in all of its forms and respecting the ecological balance of creation.

formative guidelines [p. 108] The *formative guidelines and programs* that may be offered to young people are multiple and undoubtedly different in the various parts of the world, but the following seem to be particularly relevant:

- a *gradual experience of initiation to personal and community prayer* and, for Catholics, particular attention to fostering an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and in Reconciliation.

Where the FMA are in contact with young people of other faiths, these experiences of prayer assume the characteristics of interfaith dialogue and, in fact, become important times in the search for meaning and the unification of life;

- a *service of vocational guidance* which especially encourages self-direction and helps to discern one's place in society and to discover the most appropriate way to invest one's resources and skills, so that they may respond to God's plan;

- a *spiritual guide*, true educational gift for the young people in search of their own vocation, on which their whole life direction depends (cf *IP* 19). Such a guide, as the experience of the founders and the rich ecclesial and Salesian tradition have shown, is an irreplaceable mediation for vocational discernment and for growth in life according to the Spirit;

- *times and opportunities for active participation* in the life of the local and diocesan community through groups, associations and movements;

- *experiences of long-term voluntary service*, such as that of social and missionary volunteers, animation of educational works (schools, oratory-youth centres, centres for human advancement, cultural and recreational centres. etc.) or of other groups and activities. The experience of service freely given leads to growth on the human and [p. 109] evangelical level, helps young people to know themselves and others better, and to experience the beauty of giving themselves, especially to the poor and needy;
- *opportunity for sharing the life of the FMA*: participation in moments of prayer and togetherness, including meetings at the province level and involvement in the educational mission.

On the journey of vocational growth, *Mary*, the mother of God, is companion and guide. She who listened to the word of the angel, meditated on it in prayer and accepted it entrusting herself to God (cf MC 17-20), who followed Jesus to Calvary, sharing with Him the journey of suffering and the cross, is the model of that pilgrimage of faith that every believer is called to undertake in order to discover her/his vocation and to accept God's call.

Specific vocational guidance

With regard to those young women who show themselves to be particularly drawn to the values and mission proper to the Institute, *vocational guidance* takes the form of specific accompaniment.

vocational discernment The Institute offers to these young women a journey of discernment, that will lead them to re-evaluate their lives in the light of God's plan that they have just begun to understand, guiding them to the point of being sure of their vocational choice. It is a process in which the young women are guided to ask themselves if the call to the Salesian life truly responds to the design of God and to their life plan, and to verify if they have the aptitudes and dispositions required to live it (cf C 73).

[p. 110] The FMA invite them to reflect on the motivations on which their vocational choice is based and to begin a [p. 110] journey of gradual clarification of motives, dynamics or desires that are less than mature or authentic.

They must ascertain that the young women, in addition to having the required aptitudes and dispositions also have, even if only in an initial form, a clear and sincere intention of giving themselves to God in the service of young people (cf DA 48) according to the style of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica.

In this regard it is indispensable to know well their family, the environment from which they come, and some essential elements of their personal and vocational story (cf DA 10-11).

The FMA respectfully walk with each young woman, through a progressive journey towards self-knowledge and through a period of initiation which will place before them the demands of the educational mission. They can thus evaluate the authenticity of their option for Christ in the service of young people, characteristic of the Salesian charism.

evaluation of specific vocational identity If at first the educational accompaniment offered to all young people sought primarily to build an identity, to become aware of one's life plan and to develop maturity of choice and decision-making, at this point the focus is on the *discernment and evaluation of vocational suitability* for the Institute.

In the journey of vocational accompaniment a few key points are suggested as a foundation for the future formation journey: providing for what may be lacking in their Christian education; encouraging them to overcome the tendency to postpone their vocational decision; offering knowledge and direct experience of the charism.

[p. 111] To help them make an informed vocational choice, the FMA commit themselves to offer *meaningful programs* [p. 111] through personal and group encounters, and particularly to create an environment in which, taking into account cultural needs, accompaniment and discernment, will be experienced as opportunities for choice and growth.

In this journey, in addition to the interaction and continual dialogue with the community in which young women are living, frequent contact of the young women, of the one accompanying them and of the community itself with the provincial will be encouraged, since she is the person ultimately responsible for acceptance into the Institute.

INITIAL FORMATION

*You did not choose me, no, I chose you
to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last.*

(Jn 15: 16)

Initial formation is of great significance throughout the whole span of life. It "... lays the foundation for the dynamic growth in the identity of the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians that should continue throughout life" (C 83) through personal commitment to openness and docility to the Spirit.

It means taking on God's plan in authentic freedom and entering into harmony with its demands in everyday life.

The various moments of formation constitute an open-ended process; passing from one step to another depends on the level of maturity attained and the journey undertaken by each person. For this reason, these steps take place according to flexible criteria, respecting the rhythm of growth of each one.

The vocational experience

the call The vocational experience is fundamental to the formative journey of the young woman. This means leaving the land she has known and loved because she has been called to set out for that still mysterious land, where the *Covenant of love with God* becomes ever more demanding and takes on the form of the Salesian charism.

The vocational experience that she lives during this period involves reorganising her life around the Gospel [p. 113] values of following Christ; from her relationships with self and others, to a broader vision of the world and of history.

Through a process of growing awareness of the call to follow Jesus in Salesian religious life, the young woman matures in her ability to answer God's call, in an ever more free and responsible way.

a community of life Formation takes place in *the reality of a community of life* that lives the joys and difficulties of belonging to Christ and of carrying out an educational project. Here it is possible to realise the living synthesis of every formative journey, since the values of Salesian Spirituality are mediated by individuals in their network of relationships and in their everyday service to the education of young people.

To be faithful to the charism of the founders and rooted in the actual reality of young people, formation must be animated by the passion of the *da mihi animas*, lived in an atmosphere that looks to the essential and leads towards solidarity with the poor.

the demands of inculturation The need to inculturate the Gospel in every area where the Institute works, the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of young women and the international nature of the religious family, require rethinking of the formative journey, especially in its initial stages, so as to relate it to the *needs of time, place and culture*, respecting the richness of each person and her story. For this reason, young women should be introduced to the charisma as expressed in the various forms and in the organisation of the Salesian educational mission, present in their own nation and in the Institute.

study During the stages of formation, study is necessary in order to give the young women criteria for judgement, a critical evaluation of reality and a growing competence to enable them to carry out their educational mission. From this point of view, it is essential to see study as [p. 114] a means of growth and a relevant discipline (cf VC 98). In this context, it is important to avoid some possible pitfalls i. e. either making learning and intelligence absolute values or neglecting the commitment to study in favour of immediate apostolic service.

For the FMA, called to be educators of young people, intellectual formation becomes a *requirement for fidelity to their vocation*. For this reason, both the quality of knowledge and the awareness of the need for a *Gospel synthesis between faith and life* are important, so that having a vision of reality based on wisdom, the Sisters may be capable of dealing with both the times and the different environments in which they work, as a competent and qualified presence. They will thus be able to avoid superficiality and a lack of relevance in their work, as well as that sense of inadequacy or inferiority that could develop when faced with the demands of the mission.

within contemporary culture For this reason it is important to encourage an *awareness of contemporary culture*, especially that regarding the situation of young people, educational challenges, various forms of poverty and discrimination and the world of communication.

The young women should have at their disposal suitable means to access information and to read it critically. The media should not be approached merely as a subject to be studied but also from the point of view of enabling the young women to understand the complex dynamics of contemporary culture.

accompaniment and assessment In all the stages of formation it is essential to ensure an adequate *accompaniment* and periodic *assessment* of the vocational experience. This assessment involves the young woman, the guide, the community and the group of young women in formation. Where opportune, professional psychological help may be offered.

[p. 115] This assessment should be carried out in everyday life and at specific moments of the growth journey. It is aimed at helping the young woman to *discern God's plan* for her life. Furthermore it allows the Institute to assess whether the young woman has the aptitude for community life, the educational mission (cf C 78) and, if she feels herself so called, for the mission *ad gentes*.

Relationships to be valued

the family During the period of initial formation it is important to foster relationships with the families of the young women. *Contact with the parents* allows the FMA to acquire better knowledge of the young women's roots, their environment, and the relationships that have favoured their affective, religious and academic growth.

Mutual esteem and trust encourage the involvement of the parents in the vocational choice of their daughter. With discretion and respect, the FMA help them to accept God's plan, especially if they are struggling to come to terms with their daughter's decision.

The formators and the community should show sincere gratitude towards the families of the young women, seeing in them, as Don Bosco taught, the first benefactors of the Institute (cf C 57).

other religious institutes In the present-day situation, particularly in certain geographic and cultural areas, there is an ever-greater need for *collaboration among various institutes*, especially those of apostolic life. This collaboration should include the area of formation. These initiatives require a special assessment of the elements common to the various institutes and, at the same time, respect for the specific charismatic identity of each one (cf *Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation 1999*).

the Church Aware that they are part of the Church, the FMA cultivate in themselves and in the young women starting [p. 116] their formation journey, an intense sense of *belonging to the Church*. As Don Bosco and Maria Domenica Mazzarello taught, they express this in love for and fidelity to the Pope and his teachings and in their commitment to participate actively in the pastoral journey of the local churches.

the Salesian Family While accompanying the young women towards a deeper knowledge of the specific elements of the FMA charism, they utilise every opportunity for *dialogue with the Salesian Family* and with other forms of consecrated life.

Maria Mazzarello formator In the commitment to formation, the FMA *look* especially to *Maria Mazzarello* who responsibly assumed her role as guide, becoming a sister among sisters and a teacher of life, witnessing to the joy of belonging to Jesus and dedicating herself to the education of girls and young women.

Realising that one of the most urgent problems at the beginning of the Institute was that of formation, she said "... we lack trained personnel..." (L 47,5). She planned suitable times and means for the formation of the postulants and novices. She was attentive and understanding in bearing with defects and limitations, but she did not refrain from educating them to clarify their motivations with regard to consecrated life and she supported them in their growth.

the stages of the formative journey The period of initial formation is outlined in the Constitutions, while the criteria for discernment and admission to the various stages are indicated in the text *Discernment and Accompaniment* (cf *Discernment and Accompaniment - guidelines and proposals for vocational discernment. Acceptance into the Institute and admission to the various stages of Formation*, Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Rome, 1995. This text remains valid. Refer to it for specific indications regarding the various stages).

[p. 117] Initial formation includes:

- the period of assessment and guidance
- the postulancy
- the novitiate
- the period of temporary vows

*I thank the Lord that you continue to nourish
your desire to consecrate yourself totally to Him.
Remain faithful to Him, pray and have confidence.
If the Lord calls you to the Daughters of Mary
Help of Christians don't worry, He will
bring you here, as long as you correspond to His grace.*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello L 54,2)

***discernment
and
dialogue*** The period of assessment and guidance is a time in which the foundations of the formative journey are established. This helps the young woman to *assess her vocational choice* and, through experience, to ensure that she possesses the qualities required to live Salesian life.

It is a time of discernment, so that she may be able to respond freely and with greater clarity to her vocation (cf C 86-87).

The Institute offers the young woman, who has decided to begin her journey in religious life, the possibility of *contact with the Salesian charism* in one of its *communities*.

After dialogue with the *guide* and the *provincial*, who is responsible for acceptance into the Institute, the young woman can begin the journey that will lead her to better clarify her motivations and make a more conscious decision.

***the young
women who
come to the
Institute*** The young women who are at this stage manifest *different characteristics*, according to their age, the environment from which they come, their educational background and their experience of life and of faith. Some have reached a certain level of human maturity through economic independence. Others have filled roles of leadership in youth work; these young women come [p. 119] from groups or associations and have often undertaken a journey of spiritual growth, in listening to the Word and in frequent participation in the Eucharist.

In some cultural contexts, the presence of preadolescents and adolescents among the candidates is fairly common.

These require broader developmental programs in order to begin their journey of specific vocational growth.

On the other hand, there may also be young women, who have reached a sense of their own identity, but need to assess the consistency of their choice in direct contact with a Salesian community.

***personalised
formation*** The young women who come to the Institute differ in character, therefore it is necessary that *formation and accompaniment* should be *personalised*. The point of

departure of each person must be respected, bearing in mind, that even in the most committed young women, it is possible to find signs of fragility, perhaps linked to socio cultural fragmentation or to the lack of a serious journey in human and Christian growth.

Therefore, the period of assessment and guidance is characterised by great *flexibility* in the formative process, in the way in which it is organised and in its duration. Though it will ordinarily last a year, it can be extended according to the needs of each person (cf R 85).

Fundamental experiences

a more intense experience of Christian life During this period, each young woman experiences a deepening of her vocational awareness, through a *more intense Christian life*, beginning with fidelity to her baptism. This requires a progressive entrusting of herself to God, which makes *conversion of heart* possible.

Some young women are only beginning to learn to centre their lives on the following of Jesus, others are continuing a journey already begun.

Everyday life is the place of meeting God, of maturing in relationships with others and of assessing the call.

experiencing the charism [p. 120] During this period the young woman has the possibility of experiencing *Salesian life at first hand* in an FMA community, in which she becomes gradually involved. In it she shares the spirituality that Don Bosco and Maria Domenica entrusted to the first Sisters and which continues even today. Through an adequate initiation, she encounters the heritage of the Institute and assesses her suitability to become an FMA.

in a community in mission The young woman lives what is, in many aspects, a rather new situation. Leaving her family, she becomes part of a group and a community, in which she forms new relationships and makes herself available for the *community and mission*, gradually developing a sense of co-responsibility.

The experience of study, in the case of those who still have to complete their formal education, becomes a precious opportunity for growth in active citizenship that renders them critical and proactive.

If the group to which the young woman belongs is fairly numerous, she will have the opportunity of assessing how she relates to her peers and her aptitude for "...living and working together in the name of the Lord" (C 49).

Developmental tasks

The developmental tasks of this period, while consolidating personal identity, facilitate the learning of some key elements for a vocational choice.

These developmental tasks can be described as follows:

- self-awareness**
- To deepen *self-awareness* in order to accept her life. Learning to be comfortable with her body, developing an affective maturity in keeping with age, being honest with self in re-evaluating her personal and family story and in appreciating her own culture and that of others.

[p. 121] Some indispensable aspects of this process are: autonomy and responsibility, personally taking on the demands of the formation process and the ability to organise her time.

- authenticity**
- To develop a *sincere* and transparent *attitude*, especially with the guide, as an expression of authentic freedom, in the light of the "'yes', if you mean yes, 'no' if you mean no" of the Gospel (*Mt 5:37*), which is an indispensable condition for all human authenticity. To clarify her vocational motivation from this Gospel perspective.

- growth in faith**
- To continue her *journey of growth in faith*, learning to seek and recognise God as the only response to the deep thirst for love and joy that she carries within her. Developing the ability to entrust her whole life to God: thoughts and plans, choices and decisions, work and study, relationships and achievements.

This means becoming aware of the demands of her baptism, in continuity with what may have been lived out in the family, in the Christian community from which she came or in leadership activities where the idea of a vocation may have originated.

For this reason, the deepening of personal prayer, active participation in community prayer, appreciation of the *Eucharist* and of the sacrament of *Reconciliation* are fundamental. It is also important that she gradually accustom herself to read the events of daily life in the light of the Word of God, in a climate of joy and hope. The young woman is called to deepen her *trusting relationship with Mary*, disciple of Christ, and to see in her a companion on the journey. The Virgin of the "yes" becomes her mother and teacher in the discernment of her religious vocation.

- developing her ability to relate**
- To develop the attitudes and behaviour necessary to live an enriching community experience. Gradually to develop the ability to live and to work with others, [p. 122] accepting and *establishing open and serene interpersonal relationships*.

To appreciate differences as a source of wealth. To learn to manage the conflict inherent in every interaction, harmonising independence and dependence and committing herself to grow in loyalty.

- assessment of aptitudes**
- To assess her own aptitudes as an educator through *contact with the charism*, lived in community and through suitable apostolic experiences.

This initial contact with the charism encourages the development of the need to know the history and experience of the founders and the wealth of tradition that has

been passed down from generation to generation.

Formative accompaniment

The young woman, the community and the formator, together assume the developmental tasks proper to this stage of formation and assess them frequently.

formative involvement of the community The young woman experiences Salesian life in **community**. The Sisters who welcome and accompany her at this stage are called to present a life-style with which she can identify, in order to assess her choice, and at the same time, to develop a gradual sense of belonging to the Institute.

[p. 123] The attraction of a life dedicated to God for young people, as seen in the attitudes of the entire community, is the best school of formation for the young women who are searching. The community itself, in contact with the young women, is stimulated and enriched by accepting the challenges to change, that come from the newness that they bring with them. It is characteristic of reciprocity that, when it becomes part of the environment, it acquires a strong formative value. Loving [p 123] kindness gives rise to trust, awakens resources and potential which, when shared, are multiplied and flow back into the whole environment.

The entire community, therefore, is involved in the formation process, though with differing roles and specific tasks. In this sense the following are fundamental: consensus regarding the criteria of discernment and accompaniment, awareness of educational needs, especially the ability to create a family-like, yet challenging environment, one in which the young women can be themselves and feel free to question their choices or motives.

It is also important that the community assume its task responsibly and joyfully, so that its involvement, in the formation and assessment of the growth taking place in the young women, may be effective.

tasks of the formator There are also some *specific tasks* proper to the **formator** who guides the young woman, in communion with the other formators and in constant dialogue with the provincial.

In docility to the Spirit, the formator guides her to make herself available to God and to assess whether she possesses the basic aptitudes required by the Salesian vocation.

To fulfil this delicate task, she

- is careful to develop in herself the *educational and relational competence* required in order to realise individual and group accompaniment. These include knowledge of the problems of young people and the media culture in which they are immersed; a reasonable understanding of the psychological growth, of the processes and changes that the person experiences in Salesian life; the ability to listen and a certain emotional maturity, so as to be able to manage eventual dependency or conflict in the formative relationship; an [p. 124] attitude of dialogue and searching, in the awareness of her own limitations and those of others,

respecting the mystery which each one carries within;

- shares in the life of the young women entrusted to her, through a *loving educational presence* and involves them in practical decisions, both in their personal journey and in the building together of an environment conducive to formation.

In order to have a realistic knowledge of the young women, the formator, in keeping with Salesian practice, makes the most of informal moments such as relaxation, games and celebrations;

- *creates the conditions for a balance between the different formative experiences*: self-awareness, discovering the charism through study, apostolic experiences, times of prayer, personal reflection, group sharing and all other community activities;

- *encourages* openness to and *direct contact with the problems of young people*, and with the Church, society and politics in the local area, including participation in the more significant events and a critical approach to the mass media;

- is sensitive in *developing relationships based on friendship*, respect and freedom between the community and the young women, so as to foster openness and sharing. She welcomes the help that each Sister offers, aware that all are reciprocally responsible for vocational growth;

- *encourages contact with the family* and with the environment from which the young woman comes because, in addition to helping her to know and understand those elements which can assist in vocational discernment, it allows for the possibility of continuing the process of growth in faith and in personal integration, which is necessary for a truly free and mature choice.

POSTULANCY

*So, tell me, are your postulants good?
Do they have a great desire to become holy
and do they want to spend their whole lives for Jesus?*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello L. 24, 2)

The postulancy is a period of preparation for the novitiate. It is a preliminary stage, not merely one of transition. It has its own form and consistency within the formation journey, as a more structured and committed stage than the previous one (cf C 88-89).

The young woman, having lived the period of guidance during which she was able to assess her vocational choice, in direct contact with an FMA community, may now, if she so desires and is judged suitable, make an explicit request to begin the postulancy.

The formative process of this stage aims at ensuring a deeper vocational experience and takes a more explicitly charismatic form.

During postulancy the young woman, while deepening her awareness of God's call, is accompanied in the challenging journey that will bring her to make, gradually but decisively, those indispensable evangelical choices, which will enable her personal encounter with Christ to be more profound and her dedication to the mission among young people more committed.

That the postulancy may initiate the young woman more incisively into the specific formative process, those studies and occupations that might not permit her to concentrate on the formative experiences of this stage, will usually be suspended at least temporarily (cf R 86).

[p.126] ***Fundamental experiences***

The young woman beginning the postulancy has already lived the initial enthusiasm of following God together with the struggle of searching and the experience of clarifying her motivations. She has been able to better assess her vocation, through contact with the lifestyle of a Salesian community and in dialogue with her guide.

internalising her vocational experience The fundamental experiences she is now called to live, aim at internalising and personalising that which she has already experienced.
In the first place she seeks to establish an ever deeper and more authentic, *personal relationship with Christ*. Through initiation to personal and community prayer, serious study and a more challenging spiritual journey, the young woman discovers the centre of her life and the foundation of her vocation in Jesus.

She continues in her commitment to clarify her motivation for giving herself to God in Salesian life and, always in dialogue with her guide, she decides whether or not to apply for admission to the novitiate.

a new way of relating She lives the experience of gradually moving away from her family and the environment with which she is familiar. She learns a new way of relating *with her family, friends and society*, and progressively experiences a sense of *belonging to the community* which she has chosen.

She is open to the mission of the *Church* and to *current events*, developing a capacity for participation and growing in communion.

The frame of reference for this *new lifestyle* is Salesian Spirituality. The young woman deepens her grasp of its values through the witness of the community and commits herself to live them.

[p. 127] ***Developmental tasks***

The developmental tasks that the young woman faces during postulancy are a continuation of those of the preceding stage.

First of all, it is necessary for her to become aware of and responsible for that progressive maturing asked of her and, at the same time, be ready to allow herself to be accompanied.

The characteristic developmental tasks are:

dialogue with self • *To continue* her journey of *self-awareness and acceptance*, identifying her resources and limitations.

In this way the young woman strengthens her ability to assume the tasks entrusted to her and to complete them. She serenely faces the various situations and difficulties that come her way and is not surprised by them.

She deepens the knowledge of her own cultural values, appreciates the culture of others and learns to work in a group.

The step which the young woman is asked to take requires the assimilation of certain basic attitudes: sincerity, solidarity, gratuitousness, availability for service, gradual and serene detachment from affective and economic security, the practice of asceticism in self-discipline and in the fulfilment of her duties, together with the capacity for sacrifice, in view of a more total and generous yes.

integration of affective energies • *To unify and integrate affectivity* with a view to choosing consecrated chastity. This demanding task, which comprises the whole life span, is particularly important at this stage. In fact, while the young woman reviews her personal and family story, becoming aware of her experiences, she learns to value what is positive and to

[p. 128] identify possible conditioning elements and areas of immaturity, in order to assume and integrate them. From this point of view, it is important to learn how to [p, 128] journey from I to we, from egocentricity to free self-giving, from individualism to the recognition of others, from excessive self-importance to co-responsibility.

- personal relationship with Christ*

 - To root her *faith experience* in a life of personal and community prayer. The young woman learns to approach the Word of God and to consider her life in its light, making use of those moments of silence, contemplation and listening, that help her to prolong her sacramental meeting with Christ throughout the day. By reflecting deeply on the *Paschal Mystery* and sacramental experience, the young woman arrives at a deeper personal relationship with Jesus, learns to allow herself to be guided by the Spirit and grows in conversion of heart. Meditating on and assimilating the truths of faith through study and personal reflection, lead her also to a more intimate understanding of the presence of *Mary* as the one who, listening to the Word, welcomes it, meditates on it in prayer and proclaims it with her life (cf *Lk* 1:26-38,2:19). They also lead to the discovery of the *Church*, the mystery of communion in the diversity of charisms.
- openness to the mission*

 - To carry out, enthusiastically and responsibly, those *apostolic experiences* that permit her to assimilate the Salesian Spirit and thus assess her aptitude for being with young people, especially the poorest.
- sense of belonging*

 - To grow in her *sense of belonging* through active participation in the life and mission of the community and the province.
- contact with the sources*

 - To continue to deepen her knowledge of the life of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica and the history of the Institute, through study and *contact with the sources*.
- in dialogue with the guide*

 - [p. 129] *To allow herself to be known and accompanied* by the guide through a sincere and responsible relationship, so as to journey towards a progressive purification of her vocational motivations and to prepare herself to face the formative demands of the novitiate, without excessive uncertainty or doubt.

Formative accompaniment

The growth process that the young woman is undertaking, with awareness and responsibility, is accompanied in a caring and trusting way by the entire community and by the formator, who may also be the community animator.

a community that teaches by its life Formation requires a **community** that is involved in the educational mission, capable of discretion and authenticity, rich in genuine affection and respectful of each one's journey and the stage at which she finds herself. It is a community that teaches by its life, because it is, itself, *constantly searching*, conscious of being a disciple of the divine Teacher. In it every Sister commits herself to live a deep relationship with Jesus, inspired by the example of Mary who listened to the Word, kept it in her heart and was available to serve.

the task of the formator The **formator** walks with the young woman on her journey, therefore she

- *enters into a deep relationship* with her, listening to her personal and family story, her experiences, difficulties, hopes and fears, attentive to every sign of God's will.

She seeks to create conditions of confidentiality, indispensable for a relationship of trust and, starting with the experience of the young woman guides her towards an accurate discernment of vocational motivations;

- [p. 130]
- *is attentive to the dynamics of affective life and relationships*, encouraging openness to others especially the peer group, self-giving, mutual forgiveness, friendship, collaboration and the search for the common good;
 - *knows how to deal with the dynamics of interaction*, the tensions that can exist in the group and the community because of differences of culture, age, mentality and formation;
 - *ensures critical attention to current events*, discussing them with the young women and facilitating discussion with consultants in various fields;
 - *communicates enthusiastically the values of Salesian Spirituality*, especially the passion for education, and accompanies the young women at each stage of their apostolic experiences, thus ensuring their formative value; She clearly expresses the option for poor young people and involves the young women in this preference, motivating them towards choices that may call for sacrifice.

The provincial, who received the young women into the Institute, continues to accompany them in their vocational discernment, maintains frequent contact with the formators and the community and follows the journey of each young woman closely.

NOVITIATE

*Love everyone and all your Sisters.
Love them always in the Lord.
But don't divide your heart with anyone;
let it be totally for Jesus.*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello L 65, 3)

This stage of formation is the object of particular care on the part of the Institute, which recognises its decisive importance.

During the novitiate the young woman learns what it means to live as an FMA in the spirit of the Covenant, following Christ according to the charismatic identity outlined in the Constitutions (cf C 90).

With the help of the community and of the formator, the novice reaches a deeper awareness of the vocational experience of the founders and internalises Gospel and Salesian values, gained especially from the life-witness that she experiences.

Fundamental experiences

following Christ The central experience for the young woman is that of beginning her journey of following Jesus and of understanding its practical implications for her life.

It involves a deep and transforming relationship with God, conforming herself to Christ, to the point of living and acting like Him, in docility to the Spirit.

This implies *making Christ the centre of her life* and devoting herself totally to His love.

from the group to the community The novice experiences community in everyday life, through mutual relationships in the Family Spirit and a more active and responsible involvement in the mission.

assimilation of the charism [p. 132] The novice is guided in the assimilation of the charism through the knowledge and practice of the Constitutions, through being challenged by the lives of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica and through the experience of the educative mission.

Greater internalisation of the *values of Salesian Spirituality* helps her to grow in the joy of her vocation, in her sense of belonging and in her passion for the *da mihi animas*. This leads the novice to care for the young people entrusted to her, gradually enabling her to develop educational aptitude and competence.

Participation in the mission, openness to the situation of young people and to the problems of the world and the Church, lead her to acquire the spirit and method of the Preventive System in the context of a broad, ecclesial and cultural vision.

encounter with the formator Ongoing encounters with the formator are fundamental at this stage of formation. This experience, in the tradition of the Institute, requires sincerity, confidence and responsible collaboration on the part of the novice.

Developmental tasks

The developmental tasks of this stage, while in continuity with those of previous stages, take on the characteristics of an initiation. It is a process of personal growth and knowledge that draws the young woman ever more deeply into the reality of the Covenant with God, through the involvement of her whole self.

From this perspective, the novice commits herself to the following tasks:

unification within the vocational choice To redefine her *personal identity* unifying the resources of her femininity *within her vocational choice*. The young woman commits herself to directing her [p. 133] affective energy into self-giving and into authentic and serene relationships.

Aware of being called to care for poor young people, she moves away from self-centredness and learns to limit her demands.

She grows gradually in the assumption of her commitments and enables herself to move from responsibility to co-responsibility, as she develops the sense of *we* and the awareness of a common mission.

the value of silence and of listening • To educate herself to live *silence*, as an indispensable condition for *being* open to *God's presence*, listening to the Word and learning to integrate her life with what really matters.

Learning how to create moments of silence, in the midst of apostolic activity and daily work, is an important task that fosters personal unification amidst the fragmentation typical of today.

personal meeting with Jesus • To deepen her *relationship with Jesus through knowledge and love*. Through the life-giving study of Sacred Scripture, accompanied by the experience of *lectio divina*, participation in the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation, the Liturgy of the Hours and other forms of personal and community prayer, she becomes ever more attracted to the mystery of the Incarnate Word, who reveals the infinite mercy of the Father and the fire of Love that Jesus came to bring. In her personal meeting with Christ, seen as the friend and spouse whom she can trust, the young woman gradually learns to entrust her life to Him, to accept the mystery of the cross and to form a Gospel mentality with which to judge events and experiences.

the evangelical counsels [p. 134] • To centre her life within the *choice of Christ, chaste, poor and obedient*. The novice practices the living of the evangelical counsels as a way of growing in freedom and above all as a response of faithful love. She reflects deeply on their meaning and formative value. Paying [p. 134] particular attention to the relational dimension of the vows, she is encouraged to develop new resources that will make her more mature, more capable of rich human relationships in community and in mission.

She learns to follow the path of chastity freely chosen for the Kingdom, of solidarity with the world of the poor and of responsible obedience in sharing the mission.

entrustment to Mary • To entrust herself to *Mary* and rediscover her as *mother and help* on the journey of initiation to consecrated life as an FMA. The young woman seeks to deepen her knowledge of *Mary* through meditation on the Gospel and the study of theology. Challenged by her in prayer, she learns to keep and live the Word, allows herself to learn from everyday events, rejoices in *Mary's* all-encompassing love and emulates her attitudes, especially her yes to the Father. Those who choose to follow Jesus find themselves in special harmony with *Mary*, since she was the first to follow Him as a woman and a disciple. Her companionship on the journey of responding to God inspires confidence and helps the novice to be open to the mission.

community life • To be open to community life and service in the characteristic Salesian Family Spirit. For the novice, the commitment to accept the normal struggle involved in building community is transformed into a form of asceticism, which helps to make her motivation stronger. She thus overcomes the discouragement that comes from the recognition of her own limitations and those of others. Responsible participation in the formulation and implementation of the community plan is another formative opportunity that helps her to grow in her sense of *belonging* and in *communion* and also to experience obedience as co-responsibility for common choices.

educational commitment • [p. 135] To approach her educational mission with the growing awareness that it constitutes both a way of evangelising and a means of formation. This is not simply a question of having a specifically prepared apostolic experience outside the novitiate house, which usually takes place during the second year. It is necessary that the novice develop a mentality and internalise a *spirituality* capable of being expressed *in the mission*. The young woman is called to consider the Preventive System as the Salesian style of community and educative relationships. Thus she learns that this is the way to holiness to be followed, together with young people and that the mission is a place of formation and an occasion for growth. Varied and adequately guided experiences offer the young woman the possibility of assessing her aptitude for the Salesian mission.

knowledge of the world of young people • To acquire the elements of a *deeper knowledge of the world of young people*, both through direct contact with them and through an understanding of the languages and the philosophy of the world of communication, in order to make the educative mission more effective.

Formative accompaniment

The novitiate experience is significant, not only in its content and aims, but also in its form of accompaniment and organisation. Because of its character as a period of initiation, every aspect of this stage should have formative value.

the responsibility of the young woman It is important that the novice be *aware of her own responsibility* in this process and that she decide to make a radical choice for Christ by living the values of Salesian Spirituality.

The novice allows herself to be guided on her journey, accepting in faith the various persons and events through which education takes place, especially the community and the Sister who is directly responsible for her formation.

the tasks of the community The whole community is involved in the formative process, each Sister with her specific and complementary tasks and roles. In it the novices learn to internalise and live the evangelical counsels.

The community that receives the young women in hope, with a view to the future of the Institute, allows itself to be challenged by their presence and seeks to grow in fidelity and communion, not only in order to become a credible example, but also for mutual enrichment. In fact, while the community commits itself to accompany these young women, it is constantly challenged to renew itself.

the structure of the community The novitiate community, if specifically established for this purpose, has a plan that outlines its structure, identifying the various roles and tasks with a view to the formation of the novices.

When it is involved in other activities or runs a specific educational work, the plan and organisation will, of course, be more varied in structure. It should, however, take into account the specific program of the novitiate and provide space for prayer, dialogue, study and the particular interests and areas of the mission in which the novices are directly or indirectly involved.

It is important that relationships with the novices be characterised by respect, freedom, love and simplicity. In this way the whole environment, persons and structures, facilitates the process of initiation and internalisation of the values of the charism.

the responsibilities of the formator **The formator** is responsible for the formation of the novices in agreement with the provincial, in communion with her direct collaborators and the whole community. Docile to the Holy Spirit, she assumes discernment as a style of life and guides the novices, with wisdom and [p. 137] respect, to accept the challenges of God's plan and to fulfil it generously (cf C 92).

In line with the Gospel and following Salesian tradition, the formator:

- draws on the personal resources of the young women, helping them to meet their deepest self where God abides. Inspiring confidence, she helps each one become responsible for unifying her own life around this centre. She encourages and supports them in their decisive process of conversion.

She is attentive to *the different formative journeys*, starting from where each novice is and from her level of maturity.

In a special way, through the frequent *personal meeting*, which takes place in the Family Spirit, and as a search for the will of God for each person, she accompanies the novice in living a deeper relationship with God, with herself and with others and supports her as she reflects on her own story and growth process in the light of faith;

- helps the young women to *understand religious life and make it their own*, starting from personal experience.

She expresses her affective richness and human gifts by her ability to wait patiently for the right moment to act and by her intuitiveness.

She allows herself to be formed by the Word and accepts suffering in the conviction that the experience of the cross enables her to immerse herself in the depths of the love of Christ.

Looking at the world from the point of view of the poor, she chooses a style of life that is simple and sensitive to the difficulties and problems of people.

Together with the community, she studies possible ways of intervening and helping.

The first to practise co-responsibility and to live autonomy [p. 138] in dependence, she encourages trust and mutual appreciation in those around her;

- guides the novices to a sense of *Church*, to an in depth study of the *Constitutions*, to an understanding of the *evangelical counsels* in their theological, relational and educational aspects, as an expression of vocational unity. She accompanies them particularly on their journey of free adhesion to Christ who has called them to give their lives for the young. She supports them in the gradual acceptance of Gospel radicality;

- enables the young women, with the help of the formation team and the whole community, to *experience the mission*, co-ordinating and accompanying the various apostolic experiences in which they are involved, guiding them to plan and evaluate what they do.

She helps them to integrate work and apostolic activity through love of prayer, reflection, meditation, union with God in the everyday, study and the various demands of community life;

- supports the journey of the community, *involving both Sisters and novices*, avoiding both rigidity and permissiveness in her service of animation;

- creates the conditions through which the novices can experience the charismatic richness of the *Salesian Family* and be open to the *needs of the ecclesial community*, to interaction with *other religious institutes*, to the *socio-cultural reality* and to new languages of social communications.

The formator maintains *contact with the formators of the previous stages*, in order to foster gradual and unified vocational growth in the young women. In the agreement with *the provincial or provincials*, If the novitiate is interprovince, she collaborates in the sharing and evaluating of the journey of each novice.

interprovince novitiates [p. 139] Interprovince novitiates provide a valid opportunity for reciprocal intercultural or international enrichment. They open broader horizons for the young women, and allow them to experience the unity of the charism in the plurality of its expressions.

PERIOD OF TEMPORARY VOWS

*You are really fortunate since you can do so much good
and win so many souls for our dear Jesus.*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello

L 59,4)

The period of temporary vows can last from six to nine years and has as its aim "...to prepare people for the total consecration of themselves to God in the following of Christ, at the service of the Church's mission" (VC 65; cf C 96).

Temporary profession, while maintaining its *ad tempus* character, has within itself that fulness of intention which finds its roots in the pact of love with God (cf PI 55).

towards the total gift of self The years between first profession and the definitive *yes* to God are characterised by a new kind of life-plan. The temporary professed, now more directly involved in the educative mission, are called to be more autonomous and responsible. They develop a deeper conviction that consecrated life is characterised by the total gift of self to the God of the Covenant, in whom fidelity to the call is rooted.

The young FMA is called to take her life in hand and go beyond what is easy and familiar, to take the risk of an autonomy that can be frightening at first; she gradually learns to *entrust herself* to the God who continues to accompany her through people and events.

The experience of being drawn by Christ and the discovery of an ever deeper and more decisive relationship with Him, responds to the affective need for fulfilment as a woman, so strong in this stage of life. The temporary professed deepen the experience of giving themselves to God for the education of young [p. 141] people and internalise the values of Salesian Spirituality. Thus they experience the reality of being women educators, in the style of loving kindness which embraces all relationships.

The developmental character of the person and the society of today, characterised by rapid change, demand continual formation that encourages attention to the Spirit and knows how to welcome the new ways in which God speaks, the expectations of young people and the requirements of the mission.

Fundamental experiences

active participation in the community The temporary professed live the experience of being actively involved in a community. In this situation, with the help of the guide and by making use of daily experiences, they learn to face the difficulties inherent in growing and in *searching for their own place*, in dialogue with different ages, mentalities and ways of doing things.

Encounters with young people of the same age who live other life choices and with Sisters of different ages, culture and formation, help to strengthen their human maturity. In this way they move from certain forms of idealism,

characteristic of the inexperienced, to concrete reality, learning to have patience with the gradual process of change.

Thus they journey towards a lived assimilation of the commitments of their religious profession.

assuming the evangelical counsels They assume the evangelical counsels as *roads leading to greater solidarity* with people and with the cosmic reality.

They become ever more aware that the mystery of suffering accompanies their journey and that the cross is a sweet yoke and a light burden because it is carried with and for Jesus (cf *Mt* 11:30). In this way problems [p. 142] in community, failures in the educational mission and even temptations can become opportunities for growth in the light of the Paschal Mystery.

in the style of the Preventive System In everyday experiences the temporary professed evaluate themselves as educators according to the Preventive System. They deepen their sense of belonging to the Institute, within the Salesian Family and in the broader ecclesial reality. They seek to integrate their pastoral and community commitments with those of study, which has as its aim the acquisition of the professional qualifications needed for the mission.

Their *educational experience* brings them into contact with the educating community and the local area and becomes an opportunity for learning to collaborate with the laity and with those who are involved in the formal and informal education of young people. The temporary professed have, in this way, an opportunity to be open to dialogue and to come to terms with their responsibility for *living the Salesian charism*.

with Mary In docility to the Spirit, they seek to renew their response to the call and to be attentive to the daily messages they perceive in listening to the Word, to people and to events. In this way they make their own the attitudes of Mary who, in *the richness of her womanhood and motherhood*, lives in an attitude of caring and service so that nothing may be lacking to the joy of her people.

Developmental tasks

Aware of the need to respond to the love of God in an adult way, the temporary professed are called to assume personal responsibility for their own formation, committing themselves to certain specific developmental tasks.

self-acceptance

- To deepen their *experience of self*, in order to grow in acceptance of self and others and in their sense of [p. 143] belonging to the Institute; to clarify their vocational motivations leading to that progressive unification which will prepare them to say *yes* forever.

resources of womanhood

- To value the richness of being women by giving primacy to centring .their lives and by the art of building relationships based on reciprocity, integrating affectivity and sexuality in their relationships with the Sisters, young people and laity.

To accept their own limitations, entrusting them to the Lord, in the certainty that it is when we are weak that the power of God triumphs. At the same time to make

themselves ever more available, prepared to give their contribution courageously and in a proactive manner, in the various fields of work.

***the
centrality
of Christ***

- To develop an ever greater awareness of the *centrality of Christ* in their lives, which encourages them to integrate all the dimensions of their being and to develop the ability to synthesise affectivity and consecrated virginity, freedom in the use of goods and religious poverty, the capacity for initiative and responsible obedience.

- To make the experience of *prayer* more meaningful, valuing community moments and finding personal space in which to meet Jesus, who knows the joys and difficulties of every day and associates the offering of moments of suffering, solitude and misunderstanding with His Paschal Mystery.

***Salesian
Spirituality***

- To put the *values of Salesian Spirituality* into practice in the Preventive System, strongly characterised by Eucharistic and Marian dimensions.

To live the Family Spirit, cultivating mutual trust and a sense of belonging. To share, within the Salesian Family and the educating community, the commitment to assistance lived as a friendly and proactive presence, expressed in the ability to be with young people and to [p. 144] involve them in the experience of joy and service, which may take the form of social commitment and missionary volunteering.

***community
in mission***

- To love the *community as a place of growth and personal fulfilment through educational service*. Here the temporary professed commit themselves to the effective use of dialogue, to respect for and appreciation of difference, to the acceptance of people and events and to dialogue with the guide as a help in discernment. They learn to grow in patience, in simplicity and in the ability to be proactive, aiming at the realisation of the "not-yet" of the charism and, at the same time, accepting the understandable delays of their journey.

They further develop their capacity to research, plan and evaluate, by collaborating in the common mission and discovering the limitations and richness of their own potential. They live the gift of self, putting into practice the Salesian attitude of *vado io*.

- To offer their contribution, aware that the *community is a reality that is constantly being formed*, where they accept and respect each other as adults, live the spirituality of loving kindness and the joy of *dreaming of a better future for young people*. They formulate specific projects for the development and educational advancement of young people, especially the poorest.

- To assume a sense of *shared mission*. Together to commit themselves to know the reality of young people and the socio-cultural context and to involve themselves in the pastoral plan of the local Church. To practise co-responsibility that leads to convergence on a common plan, gradually overcoming attitudes of excessive self-importance and allowing themselves to live the educational passion of the *da mihi animas*.

educational competence • To dedicate themselves responsibly to attaining *educational and professional qualifications* in order [p. 145] to respond competently to the challenges of the mission. To prepare themselves to take on roles of responsibility and to work as a team, by establishing relationships based on collaboration.

responsible participation in evaluation • To appreciate apostolic experiences as significant *formative opportunities*, when they are shared, evaluated and reviewed (*et R 96*). They also value the period of intensive preparation for final vows, as proposed by the province or interprovince conference.

Formative accompaniment

During the period of temporary vows, daily sharing with the community and with the guide, who is normally the animator, becomes particularly important.

When there are temporary professed Sisters in the community, it is good that all the Sisters know the aims of this period and take them into account when planning.

the tasks of the community The **community** to which the young FMA belong has the same characteristics as every other community, with the resources, potential and limitations of persons and the environment. It is formative, not because the Sisters are perfect but because, in their commitment to live in communion and in convergence on a *shared plan*, at *the service of the young people* they, at the same time, experience their fragility. However, as Maria Domenica teaches, they do not make peace with their defects.

The community is capable of renewing itself daily in the certainty of God's fidelity and in the conviction of the primacy of love, as Maria Mazzarello writes: "... freely do all that charity requires" (L 35,3). In this way it creates the conditions in which people can grow in the assimilation of the specific charism.

[p. 146] There are conditions that characterise a *community that is journeying*: its care for spiritual life nourished by personal and community prayer, its style of interpersonal relationships and educational rapport with young people, its ability to involve others in the mission, its recognition and acceptance of difference, including the generation gap, as a richness, its respect for different rhythms of growth and its concern with the need for educational and professional qualification.

It is important that each one in the community demonstrate the ability to encourage, listen and appreciate and that she be ready to learn, convinced that the Salesian charism continues to be *enriched by the contributions of younger generations*. This implies that the community learn to respect the originality, mentality and formation of the temporary professed, without demanding conformity to standardised models or patterns, but rather facilitating new experiences of participation and openness to what is different.

The community also needs to live the *missionary spirit*, to commit itself to live the values of Salesian Spirituality and to help the Sisters to experience, in practice, the Family Spirit, characterised by relationships based on loving-kindness. Living in

the awareness of one's own limitations, each Sister feels the need to forgive and receive forgiveness every day and to restore esteem and trust.

role of the animator The guide or community *animator* has an indispensable role during this period, in which the greater involvement of the temporary professed Sisters in mission demands increased personal responsibility. The guide helps them to discover how to live the *sequela Christi* in a practical way in their new life context. It is important that she possess the capacity for intuition and acceptance, a spirit of faith and of prayer, serenity and balance, affective maturity, competence in spiritual direction and pastoral sensitivity .

In the accompaniment of the temporary professed, the animator, together with the other Sisters:

- takes into account the point of departure, *the journey already undertaken*, the difficulties met, making use of dialogue with the previous guides;
- dedicates quality time to *listening* to the temporary professed, so as to help them to consciously take their place in the community that receives them, assisting them in overcoming excessive expectations that could come from comparison with their previous experience of formation;
- helps them to experience the *personal meeting* as an important moment of discernment, of sharing experiences and as an opportunity for growth in their lives. Even when the guide may foresee a different path to fulfilment, this meeting can encourage the temporary professed Sister to accept God's plan without fear or a sense of guilt;
- accompanies the temporary professed in their journey towards authentic freedom, which comes from daily familiarity with the Word and from the certainty of the Spirit's guidance in their lives. She encourages them to develop a listening attitude, respecting their rhythm of growth, helping them to evaluate the consequences of the choices they have made, without herself assuming their responsibilities, but establishing an adult to adult relationship so as to *encourage autonomy and co-responsibility*;
- guides them in their commitment to *put on Christ*, to deepen their attitude of prayer and faith in order to view reality from God's perspective. She assesses whether the temporary professed have the characteristics required for a definitive commitment to life in the Institute.
- she educates them to accept the seeds of newness that the Spirit sows in the furrows of history and makes them sensitive to the service that the Church and the local area expect of them;
- facilitates and guides their *apostolic experience*, whether in the school, oratory, boarding school or in new forms of presence, often found in marginalised areas. This accompaniment includes assessments that are *practical* and encouraging and, at the same time, offer clear guidelines.

In all this, the animator acts *together with the provincial and the other people* who share the apostolic experiences with the temporary professed Sisters. She sees to it that they have the help of priests who are rich in spirituality, balanced, and capable of offering valid assistance, especially through the sacrament of Reconciliation and through spiritual direction.

The provincial, on her part, maintains constant contact with the temporary professed Sisters and plans frequent *specific, formative moments* with them on topics of Salesian Spirituality.

the experience of the second novitiate The formative experience of the second novitiate, generally planned by the interprovince conferences, constitutes a more significant time of assessment, as an *immediate preparation for final profession*.

The temporary professed Sisters, who have explicitly requested admission and who show solid motivation and a growing internalisation of the commitments proper to Salesian religious life, will be admitted to final vows.

CO-ORDINATION FOR COMMUNION

*If the guidelines contained in the Plan of Formation are to be put into practice, they require a form of **co-ordination** that encourages vocational unity and guarantees the quality of our educational presence in various contexts.*

*The **reasons for adopting this particular style** are to focus on the person and the need to develop a planning mentality which encourages convergence in the mission and ensures effectiveness and flexibility of structures.*

*Co-ordination is **realised** at different levels following a circular model of animation which links convergence regarding charismatic choices to plurality of forms, decentralisation and the responsible involvement of people.*

A CHOICE FOR COMMUNION

*Courage, and like good Sisters,
help each other to work for the Lord:
encourage one another.*

(Maria Domenica Mazzarello L 35, 8)

a style of animation The Institute sees co-ordination as the *style of animation* which focuses on the belief that the resources of every person need to be reawakened and appreciated in order to be fully utilised for the glory of God and placed at the service of the shared educational mission.

It is a *way of leading* that tends to involve people in a circular manner, so as to encourage an exchange of resources and the expression of creativity in communion. It is a *relational strategy* aimed at energising all, so that each one can express, in time, the prophetic fruitfulness of the charism.

The phrase, *prophecy of togetherness*, clearly expresses this strategy, overcoming the more technical connotation of the term *co-ordination* and demonstrating the profound link between spirituality and life.

This style of animation, which fosters involvement, sees as indispensable the presence and tasks of the persons indicated in the Constitutions as being responsible for the service of leadership.

The need for co-ordination is felt, not only within religious institutes, but also in the Church and in every social reality.

In society and in the Church

need for a new organisational model The rapidity of change, the growing interdependence between nations and cultures and the ever more powerful technologies determine what has been called *the process of globalisation*, that influences everyone and everything. It is not simply that distant events become closer, but also that ways of thinking and acting often become common to peoples of vastly different cultures. An example of particular interest to the Institute regards those educational methods that reach beyond specific cultures and are becoming more homogeneous throughout the world.

Institutions at all levels are aware of the need to review their organisation, caught between two demands: respect and appreciation for their own characteristics and the need to work towards common goals.

Despite the disillusionment resulting from previous efforts, attempts are being made to rewrite the Charter of Human Rights, searching for criteria that will recognise the right to hold different views of the person and of history and encourage all to live unity in diversity.

co-ordination in the Church In the Church co-ordination comes from its deepest nature, from its mystery of communion, its configuration to the image of the Trinity, rather than from the need for efficacy and efficiency.

The whole Gospel is a call to value people and to be in interdependence of relationships, by means of which every member who is lifted up raises the whole body.

Gradually and not without difficulty, the Church is learning the art of dialogue and discovering its foundations in God's own educational action.

Vatican II stressed this line of thought, emphasising the equality of all persons in the Church, the plurality of charisms and of vocations, their reciprocal relationships and the convergence of different roles and ministries in the same evangelising mission.

[p. 153] The journey of the Church in this direction encourages and promotes interfaith and intercultural dialogue and sharing. This reinforces Christian identity and opens it to welcome the values of other faiths and cultures.

In the Institute past and present

The historic remembering of the Institute is rich in facts that show a spirituality characterised by a family style involving everyone, starting with the most disadvantaged.

Don Bosco communicator Don Bosco has always been considered the great communicator of an educational project that was realised through the involvement of a wide range of people and institutions.

Mornese an open and co-ordinated community Mornese, too, was an open and co-ordinated community, where young people, religious and lay educators and spiritual directors shared the same project in an attitude of mutual trust and co-responsibility.

In the community co-ordination of resources was evident both in the everyday and when faced with important decisions. No one's contribution was excluded in the daily sharing.

This style of participation did not characterise only the first community. Listening to the witness of older FMA and Salesians, one can see that the trend of togetherness has been a constant motif in the two Institutes.

Throughout the years it has been possible to overcome situations of rigidity and individualism, inspired by the art of communication of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica.

Vatican II Vatican II, with its wealth of reflection on the dignity and vocation of the person in God's plan and on the ecclesiology of communion, inspired the Institute to reflect more deeply on the global and complex nature of education.

evaluating the experience of the Institute [p. 154] This was a particularly rich period for action plans and initiatives that allowed the Institute to spell out the various needs and dimensions of education. However, it often noted a certain fragmentation in the animation of the communities, provinces and at the central level. At times the awareness of the

importance of specific issues led to an emphasis on certain sectors of work with the risk of losing sight of the whole.

The need was felt for greater co-ordination of formative action which took into consideration the unity of the person and her vocation. To this end co-ordinating Structures were proposed, responding not only to the perspective of educational activities, settings and experiences, but also to the unity of the educative process.

the Plan of Formation and the Youth Pastoral Project These were the years of the *Plan of Formation* and of the *Unified Youth Pastoral Project*, based on a synthesis between consecration and mission, in order to facilitate practical initiatives founded on the centrality of the person.

This has fostered the gradual assuming of a mentality of co-ordination, one that allows the Institute today, to plan and put into action a diversified structure, suited to the various contexts, people and situations.

Today communication in the educating communities of the FMA is even more necessary and this has changed both criteria and methods. Everyone feels the need for interaction, not just at a functional level, but especially in a way that can influence the person and her /his vocational experience, through habitual reference to the Word.

For the FMA fidelity to the charism means being capable of living their relationship with Christ radically, in a way that will encourage reciprocity in all other relationships.

towards the future [p. 155] This has been the direction taken by the recent General Chapters of the Institute and is reflected in the programs resulting from them. It is the synthesis of a journey, to [p. 155] which all have been committed, in recent years, through a renewed option for a solidarity among all peoples inspired by the Gospel.

Thus, in the life of the Institute the FMA have gradually consolidated the experience of co-ordination seen as a strategy that orients, guides and makes formation and mission effective.

THE REASON FOR CHOOSING THIS STYLE

the style of co-ordination The choice of a particular style of co-ordination has its roots in the history of the Institute, because it represents the core of an educational charism that is expressed in the power of communication.

Presenting this same choice today takes on a new meaning, given the great changes that are taking place, which allow it to put into practice a form of animation based on co-responsibility.

Co-ordination consists essentially in a way of acting that is directed towards searching together. It facilitates *personal unification* and community consensus. It demands and encourages a *planning mentality*, which requires serious and continual assessment. It is a *relational strategy* that awakens latent energies and allows for *greater flexibility of structures*.

In short, since co-ordination is fundamentally a way of interacting with others, it characterises both personal life and relationships.

Personal unification

the need for unification In a complex society, filled with messages that are enriching but often fragmented and contradictory, educational programs need to be unified and characterised by a critical approach, in order to help the person to select and assess their various experiences.

[p. 156] In the area of formation it is important that everyone understand the meaning of their own person and way of acting, accepting the inevitable contradictions or ambiguities, so as to arrive gradually at personal unification founded on the Word and to journey towards a synthesis of life consecrated to God for young people. This is facilitated by co-ordinated formative programs and by the ability to share and to integrate self with others, in a life of relationships and mission.

Planning mentality

The Preventive System demands a planning mentality that seeks to read and interpret contemporary cultural forces and to study their causes. The pace of life today could lead to the risk of responding only to the most immediate demands in the work of formation.

co-ordinated reflection Co-ordinated reflection, instead, encourages orderly and *reflection* well-thought-out references that help to overcome dispersion, through interventions that are both unified and articulated.

This overview ensures a broad vision of reality and offers a framework of meaning in which to situate different experiences. It allows for the articulation of practical and well-focused programs, in which the various stages and the continuity of formative strategies are clearly defined.

quality formation This leads to: quality formation, involvement of everyone in complementary roles and tasks and community assessment.

[p. 157] Planning involves not only the rational, but also the affective and the spiritual, in which the passion for education and a broad vision of reality are expressed. It follows, therefore, that this type of planning, which aims at involving people and bringing out their potential, [p. 157] is the best suited to the educational method of the Institute.

A relational approach

Co-ordination, as a relational approach, unifies resources with a view to the formation and mission of the FMA in today's context.

a circular model of communication There are various ways of relating. If participation and subsidiarity are to be encouraged, the most suitable form is *circular* or in a *network* where everyone interacts as a person, over and above her/his specific job or role. In a net there are various points linked together by a multiplicity of relationships. Every change to one of the knots of the net modifies the whole.

Going beyond the image, a relationship of networking fosters reciprocity and the overcoming of prejudice with regard to people. Everyone can enter into the process of communication. This does not imply an indiscriminate type of democracy but, rather, provides for the specific and indispensable contribution of those who carry out the service of authority through animation and government.

The essential criterion of this type of relationship is a capillary form of communication which encourages response.

No one wants to participate unless she/he knows what is going on and is involved. This is why it is necessary to discern and assess the situation and plan further action together.

In this context the terms *obedience, dependence, and authority* need to be seriously reflected upon so as to be understood in their correct sense.

towards communion Obedience is realised not by persons blocked at the stage of dependence but by those who are capable of healthy autonomy and decision-making and who, with [p. 158] a sense of responsibility, develop the *parable of communion* in the community.

This way of relating is not limited to the religious community but spreads to the educating community, to Church and lay institutions and to the local area.

All this demands a mentality of change, which sees reciprocal relationships as expressions of a more humane evangelical culture.

Flexibility of structures

the advantages of coordination Through co-ordination it is possible to overcome the slowness and heaviness of bureaucracy more easily. Full participation generates responsibility and makes room for programs that eliminate rigidity and burdensome structures.

In communities where each one knows her place well and works in unison with the whole, life flows more smoothly and harmoniously.

However, this requires people who are autonomous, capable of acting responsibly without needing constant guidance and are able to interact in a collaborative way. It is important to stop and reflect together on the formative journey and then to set out, ready to accept any unforeseen event with flexibility and peace.

Cohesion among the members of the community or working group allows them to harmonise organisational outlines with intuition, insight and imagination, which often bring new and unexpected results.

Co-responsible animation

Participation characterises the formative action of the Institute, and for this reason it fosters a circular and networking model, both in relationships among the Sisters and with the lay people who share their educational mission.

[p. 159] This method of planning requires the presence of an animator who, with her council, co-ordinates and guides the journey of the community, at every level, in a way that values everyone's resources.

animation and government in The Constitutions entrust the Sister responsible for the community with two complementary tasks: animation and government.

the style of reciprocity The choice of reciprocity and the move from a pyramid style of relationships to a circular one, does not detract from government, but presupposes certain conditions, in order to guarantee a service of authority that will encourage participation.

One of these conditions is that, in the first place, the animator herself live a process of conversion to Christ and the Gospel and act in a collegial way.

It also requires that, together with the Sisters, she live in an attitude of discernment in the face of the complexity of reality, in order to see it in the light of the Word of God.

Co-ordination also demands that the animator, with her council, be capable of stimulating co-responsibility and promoting subsidiarity by encouraging and fostering what can be done by other people, without herself assuming their responsibility.

In order to govern well it is important, first of all, to dialogue with the Spirit, who prompts a wise interpretation of history, making the messages and projects to be transmitted more inculturated, authoritative and networked. It is docility to the Spirit that confers on government the style characteristic to animation

IMPLEMENTATION

In fidelity to the charism, to its historical development and to the international character of the Institute, co-ordination is seen as decentralisation, which makes it [p. 160] possible to give more effective responses to the complex reality of today.

The challenge of globalisation urges the FMA to value minorities. In order to hear everyone's voice so that all can give of their best, it is not so much the type of organisation that counts. This can vary according to need. It is, rather, a mentality of communion, which brings about unity in diversity (cf C 112).

Different levels of co-ordination

In the Institute, co-ordination takes place at different levels: *central, interprovince, province and local*. These levels are directly linked by a common thread which, starting from the Leader of the Institute, passes to the provincial and, through the local animator, reaches the Sisters of the various communities.

This ensures the basic direction and the *raison d'être* of the Institute and is constantly put into practice and re-formulated in the varied forms required by culture, environment and the different stages of life. The circular relationship among the various levels allows for the communication of values, sharing of experiences and mutual enrichment, due to the constant flow of many formative and informative stimuli.

The general council

at central level As a response to the requests made at General Chapter XX, the general council as a whole has taken on the guidelines for formation. This means that they try to implement a co-ordinated and convergent form of animation, at the service of unity and the growth of each person.

sectors of animation The councillors in the various *sectors of animation* (formation, youth pastoral, Salesian Family, missions, [p. 161] social communications and administration), together with the Leader of the Institute, the vicar, the visiting councillors and the secretary, work in unity to carry out what has been planned together. Each one, however, takes responsibility for a particular area and brings her specific competence to the council.

The *councillor for formation*, in particular, animates and promotes ongoing and initial formation, in fidelity to the charism and the specific needs of the different contexts. Together with the Leader of the Institute and the council she takes a special interest in formators. She sees that they are chosen according to the criteria demanded by the needs of the charism and that they are accompanied in their growth journey, both by the provincial and through the opportunities for formation offered at the centre of the Institute. Keeping in mind the international character of the Institute, she also encourages them to inculturate the Plan of Formation in their own context.

The other sectors of animation, with their different areas of competence, contribute to formation in the Institute, through the convergence in synergy of the various resources in order to promote vocational unity.

organisational models The organisational structure adopted by the general council is also reflected in the form of the collaboration of *consultants*.

They support the general council through reflection and research. Some of them are more dearly linked to a particular sector; others intervene with their particular competence on certain occasions to perform specific tasks. The commitment of the collaborators who are directly linked to the various sectors takes the form of research-action, aimed at realising the program of the council. This makes it possible to avoid sectionalism or parallel journeys in which there can easily be an overlapping of programs, which can cause confusion and burden the provinces.

[p. 162] To facilitate the exchange of experience and reflection, [p. 162] in addition to informal and planned meetings among the various sectors, there are also meetings of the consultants together with the general council. Sharing and realising common commitments strengthen the bonds of collaboration and create new energy.

The link with the central council of the Confederation of Past Pupils is also important, since it fosters interaction regarding educational policies, which are then expressed in a co-ordinated way in the various contexts throughout the world.

patient research The present method of central co-ordination is the result of patient research over the years, undertaken with the desire to create accessible channels of contact rather than setting limits to programs and initiatives.

It is a result of shared reflection and small gradual steps, decided together by persons ready to review their plans and set limits for themselves, where necessary, in order to promote unity in diversity.

The interprovince conferences

interprovince level Interprovince conferences originated from the desire of groups of provinces in the same region or cultural area to share journeys and programs of formation and mission. They encourage reflection and research on issues of common interest. This offers the advantage of dialogue with different cultures and, consequently, of gaining a broader vision of the situations in which the FMA work. One of the commitments entrusted to the conferences, based on recent experience, is the planning and realisation of formative guidelines for all the Sisters, preparing specific programs for those carrying out roles of animation and government, those responsible for initial formation and for the temporary professed. With regard to initial formation in particular, regular meetings are held in which formators can reflect on, [p. 163] share and evaluate the criteria on which their programs are based so as to ensure continuity and convergence.

The province community

province level The provincial with her council and with the help of the Sisters who collaborate with her in the animation of the province, ensures the co-ordination of ongoing and initial formation especially through reflection on the choices they consider to be important. The goal is to ensure that the formative programs, for animators and for the Sisters at the various stages of life, are suited to the growth of the person and the development of the charism. Times of common reflection and searching are particularly important for this, because it is through them that animation acquires depth and succeeds in influencing life.

co-ordination of formation The provincial and her council promote and accompany, in a special way, the formation process for the various groups of the province community: Sisters, young people and laity.

They identify formative guidelines and programs that encourage the acquisition of competence and organisational ability, in order to enable people to assume ever more complex roles and tasks in leadership and in the animation of the province.

They encourage participation by the Sisters, young people and laity and create opportunities for the effective involvement of the local communities.

This entails the translation of the Institute's Plan of Formation into the local context and the preparation of study programs for formation, taking into account the local culture and the basic knowledge needed by the Sisters.

The provincial and her council should also care for the formation of personnel according to the requirements of the new professional qualifications needed for the [p. 164] mission, in response to the needs of the culture and the local area. They accompany those Sisters who feel called to the mission *ad gentes* in their discernment and journey towards maturity.

The Sisters who collaborate in a particular way with the provincial and her council will do so according to local need.

It would be good, however, to ensure awareness of and attention to what the Institute has identified in recent general chapters in response to the needs of formation for the educational mission today. This is reflected in the structure of the general council: *formation, youth pastoral, Salesian Family, missions, social communications and administration.*

in synergy Over and above the varied structures that exist or are in the process of being established, co-ordination must be ensured in order to create synergy in a common project. The main task of the Sisters who share in the animation of the province is, in fact, to facilitate participation and to encourage consensus regarding proposals aimed at implementing plans. They intervene by sustaining creativity, accompanying individual works and carrying out the various choices made, going beyond that departmental mentality which manifests itself in protecting personal interest, helping them to seek integration in the common task.

In particular, they encourage updating, matching qualifications to needs, and helping local communities to put provincial guidelines into practice.

towards a common project One of the fundamental tasks of province animation is the preparation and implementation of the plan and program, which should be practical and deal with essentials. They should also formulate possible and verifiable objectives, which take into account continuity and new needs in the cultural field and in professional updating. At this level of co-ordination it is important to have unity in programs and initiatives and to connect [p. 165] with the central plan of the Institute, so as to ensure unity of direction in responding to local needs.

In this context it is also helpful to network within the Salesian Family in research and in action, especially with the Past Pupils, who are the first collaborators in the educational work of the Institute.

The local community

local level Daily life is the privileged place for the promotion of vocational growth. The animator, with her council and the whole community, is constantly encouraged to accompany the Sister on her life's journey, to co-ordinate and allow for the interaction of all those who are part of the community i. e. Sisters, young people, families and lay collaborators. This presupposes a positive attitude towards the person that prepares the ground for mature relationships.

Every FMA in her local community is, in turn, coresponsible for the mission and for animation. Seen as a *circle of life* it puts people in a specific relationship of dialogue with one another, with its values and with the surrounding reality.

the educational and community plan Both the educational plan and the community plan, drawn up and worked out together, are supports which should express a unified direction for the Sisters and outline simple, sustainable programs to be realised in communion. They should, above all, facilitate the movement from theory to practice.

To do this it is necessary for the animator and her council, where it exists, to make space for subsidiarity and to promote collaboration, encouraging a balanced

sharing of work, in order to arrive at educational efficacy and practical outcomes. Responsible and well-organised activity is in keeping with the experience of the founders who lived it as a concrete way to holiness.

in a family style [p. 166] The Family Spirit is the practical way of living coordination for communion and is the clearest expression of the Salesian vocation. It is the good soil where every FMA finds companionship and support at any moment of her life.

It is again a question of a positive style of relationships that allows her to value the resources of persons and structures.

It is important, however, to provide time and to dedicate energy towards making this style of communion and constant discernment visible.

The Constitutions and Regulations provide for structures that facilitate understanding. In particular, the reflection carried out by the animator with her council and continued in community meetings, helps to develop a shared vision of the situation in the light of the Gospel and of the charism. It helps to plan, in a spirit of solidarity, both formal and informal education, guidance for young people and formation for the Sisters and the laity, especially the Past Pupils.

Key moments of co-ordination

general and province chapters There are particularly significant moments in which coordination is all the more necessary. These are different in nature. Some belong to the government of the Institute Le. general and province chapters, general, provincial and local councils. Others are moments of dialogue and planning Le. programming or evaluation at general, province and local levels.

planning at central level The general chapter, the representative assembly of the whole Institute, is the most important moment of togetherness where, reflecting and deciding in a collegial manner, the guidelines for formation and mission are formulated.

[p. 167] These guidelines are specified in the program worked out by the general council. This program does not set limits for the provinces but simply guides them. They are called to implement the guidelines of the chapter, in their own cultural reality and in the richness of experience of the educating communities, in a way that best expresses their journey.

translating into the local setting This style of central co-ordination is assumed and creatively adapted by the provincial council, together with the group of Sisters who share in the animation of the province. From here it radiates to the local situation through planning. The active response of the communities brings about reciprocal enrichment and completes circular communication in the Institute.

discernment and evaluation Times of discernment, planning and evaluation at all levels are also seen as key moments of participation, since they facilitate sharing, reflection and finding the most suitable ways of living and working together in fidelity to the charism in the plurality of situations.

Network of communications

The starting point, for the style of co-ordination described, is a network of communications destined for all the Sisters and for the educating communities. In it messages are transmitted in a simple form, using comprehensible language that encourages interaction.

the dynamics of networking The Institute is trying to practice *the dynamics of networking*, in which messages are not merely sent from one source to passive recipients but rather from various sources in the same network. In this way the provinces, interprovince conferences, local communities and the individual Sisters are encouraged to respond and, in turn, enter into the circuit and integrate the initial message with new and specific elements.

[p. 168] In a globalised world, where there is a risk that local cultures will die out, a new awareness of diversity and of minorities is asserting itself. These can find expression only in mutual communication.

towards an open and inculturated formation This holds true also within the Institute, where great differences in local contexts can become a wealth, as long as there are channels and networks of communication that are open to dialogue. Belonging to an international congregation, present in every continent, gives the possibility of understanding different peoples, their mentalities, needs, traditions and customs. This constitutes the foundation for an education to a world vision and for an inculturated formation.

The methodology used in drafting the Plan of Formation in consultation with the provinces and in making the contents known in the province communities, is a small example of networking, which goes beyond simple one way information, creating responsibility and participation. This method was made possible, in large part, by the new communications technology that now exists in almost the whole Institute.

May they continue to be used as instruments for strengthening unity in diversity, facilitating discussion and the exchange of experiences, building solidarity in relationships and making the mission ever more effective.

CONCLUSION

Can there be a conclusion to a journey of formation? The path towards becoming women completely dedicated to God for young people, in active citizenship, is a process that accompanies the FMA all through life.

This Plan of Formation which is being entrusted to the FMA and which the Institute has tried to formulate and live together, is part of a gradual process being undertaken by this same religious family, one that it wants to pass on to other generations. These, in turn, while keeping faith with the past, will continue to develop the Plan in fidelity to the grace of the vocation they have received. The charism, in fact, is not a static reality, but is alive and dynamic.

For this reason the Plan of Formation of the Institute needs to be reflected on and translated at the local level in order to become a real-life journey.

While it is attentive to the international dimension of the Institute, the Plan needs to be put into practice in diverse forms in the various situations of everyday life.

The Gospel and the values of the charism, which constitute the foundations of the Plan, need to be inculturated and become a *proclamation* for many young women who are called to be Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

They will bring to many other young people in various parts of the world the good news that God loves them and wants them to be "... happy in time and in eternity" (Don Bosco, *Letter from Rome*, May 10, 1884).

Appendix

GUIDELINES FOR THE ACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL FORMATION OF THE FMA

Study is an integral part of the formation journey of the FMA, and an intrinsic requirement for the maturing of the person and for the Salesian educational mission.

From its beginning, the Institute has felt the need for a program of studies and it has sought to respond to this need throughout its history. In order to reach its aim of preparing consecrated women educators, it has always provided for their academic, professional and technical preparation at various levels.

Though this formation takes place through many activities and experiences, study contributes in a specific way to the understanding of problems and leads to the search for adequate solutions.

The complex socio-cultural reality of today makes the Institute ever more aware of the need to provide for a well-grounded, constantly updated preparation for all FMA. This calls for a systematic and unified program of studies.

*The indications given here derive from the **underlying perspective** of this Plan of Formation. From this viewpoint some **guidelines** are identified for the preparation of study programs, inculturated into the various contexts in which the communities live and work.*

*The content and approach to **ongoing formation** are outlined in this section and the roles of responsibility are specified. For **initial formation**, the subjects that determine the framework of a program of studies are outlined, along with the principal areas of content.*

*The necessity for a gradual initiation into the heritage of the Institute has led to the drawing up of a **proposed program** for acquiring knowledge of the charism during the period of initial formation.*

[p. 173]

*... there is a need for a renewed and loving commitment
to the intellectual life, for dedication to study,
as a means of integral formation and as a path of asceticism,
which is extraordinarily timely,
in the face of present-day cultural diversity.*

(VC 98)

UNDERLYING PERSPECTIVE

The perspective of ongoing formation, together with general, practical proposals of what can facilitate it, is the underlying choice that permeates this Plan. It is in the local communities that the charism is lived, developed and transmitted to the younger generations. In them, priority should be given to providing time for study programs that require a balance between theory and practice, quality of relationships and pastoral commitments.

As indicated in the Plan, ongoing formation does not come primarily from outside the person, but from her constant commitment to self-formation, to updating her competence and to an enriching dialogue with her Sisters and with the lay people involved in the different social spheres.

Deep reflection on everyday experience, because of its profound formative influence, makes it possible *to learn how to learn*. Both life with the young people in the educative mission and dialogue with exponents of different cultures are a good workshop for this kind of learning, which leads the person to develop a synthesis between faith and culture (cf *FR 48*).

Openness to beauty, which is expressed through the integration of knowledge with the appreciation of nature, art, music and contemplation, is a form of sensitivity that leads the Sisters to the roots of their Christian and charismatic culture, to that integral humanism that sees the person as being open to beauty, truth and goodness.

There are also opportunities for study that the Institute offers, to help the Sisters to assimilate the charism, to grow in their vocation and in their professional qualifications. These are indicated in the general guidelines that are valid for the whole period of formation.

[p. 174] **GUIDELINES FOR THE STUDY PROGRAM**

- *Study*, from the above perspective, is both an *approach to life based on wisdom* and a requirement for vocational fidelity. More than mere assimilation of ideas, it is an experience that touches life, by offering criteria for critical judgement and for the assessment of reality and of situations, in order to make practical choices according to a Gospel mentality.

Study, illumined by the Word of God and undertaken intelligently and systematically within a community in the habit of reflecting and discerning critically, contributes to the formation of a living synthesis that unifies the person and allows her to assume social responsibilities.

- It is necessary to have a clear *charismatic frame of reference* in order to select and assimilate content within a unified framework of values. There are many agencies and various sources of information that can enrich knowledge. The objective is to express their vocation as Salesian educators. Study prepares them to respond to this call in a better way.

- In fidelity to the sense of *Church* that distinguishes the charism of the founders, formation is characterised, not only by commitment to communion and participation in the life of the Church, but also by a deep knowledge of its Magisterium, especially with regard to the themes of life, family, the woman's question, social justice, peace, ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. In the pluralistic climate, which characterises today's culture, this Magisterium is a sure guide for the educative mission.

- From the perspective of an ecclesiology of communion, the contributions developed within religious life and the Salesian Family encourage the Sisters to search together for responses, inspired by the Gospel, to the needs of today's world, in an *attitude of reciprocal empowerment*.

Within this ecclesial context of dialogue and reciprocal enrichment, study helps to formulate and deepen the specific contribution of the charism; *the feminine and Marian dimensions* as gift to the Institute, to the Salesian Family and to the Church.

[p. 175] ● The curriculum of studies, especially for the initial formation period, is permeated by a *culture of communication*, into which the Gospel message should be integrated so that it can be understood by contemporary society. The new communications technologies change the categories of time and space and put at risk, not only social structures and political systems, but convictions, attitudes and behaviour, the very foundations of education. This is why it is

important to know the languages of the modern world so that the Sisters can take their place, in a critical way, in this "new Aeropagus" where faith is awaiting a new inculturation.

- The study programs for the academic, professional and technical competence of the FMA demand that account be taken of personal aptitudes, of the needs of the province and of the educational challenges of time and place. This implies the preparation of a plan that is gradual, coherent, flexible and sensitive to the requirements of *inculturation*.

- As far as possible, but especially during the period of initial formation, it is important to encourage *individualised study programs*, in order to stimulate participation and co-responsibility in the young women and to foster assimilation of content, avoiding repetition, overlapping or gaps.

It would also be good to ensure a *systematic study* of religious sciences, concluding, if possible, with a corresponding diploma. Commitment to the organisation of one's time, to in-depth learning, to joining in discussion on current issues, helps the Sister to mature and to become more responsible.

- The *circular model of learning* is particularly in keeping with Salesian education, in which theoretical reflection and practical experience complement and mutually enrich each other. The balancing of these two aspects motivates study and encourages an encounter with reality and the practice of allowing oneself to be enlightened and guided by theoretical reflection.

This model builds on personal resources, encourages an attitude of research, and stimulates the participation of the individual and the group.

[p. 176] ● For an appropriate structuring and implementation of the program of studies, a *periodic assessment* of content, methods and progress is required. This should involve the young women, teachers, formators and the community, so as to ensure that formation is integral and convergent.

GUIDELINES FOR ONGOING FORMATION

The **in-depth search for knowledge**, to which the FMA commit themselves throughout their adult life, is an indispensable condition for offering adequate responses to today's demanding needs.

The fact of being educators, and therefore of being involved in the care of young people who, by nature, are growing and oriented towards what is new, requires a constant process of discernment and a *planning mentality* at all levels.

In order to ensure the efficacy of formation the Sisters should move from occasional experiences to practical and systematic projects.

The present cultural context, characterised by constant change, by the speed and amount of communication, presents a complex reality. This requires a *critical and selective ability* that allows the Sisters to understand events and to integrate their meaning into their vocational experience and into the expression of their educative mission.

The commitment to **self-formation** remains a priority for the FMA. The Sisters make time and space to *educate themselves* i.e. to nourish their spirit and to provide for their educational and professional competence, in constant dialogue with the socio-cultural reality .

There are, however, formative programs for **obtaining and updating qualifications** that the community, province, interprovince conference or the Institute at central level offers, to meet individual needs in the various contexts of our mission.

The different situations in which they live, the wide range of interests relative to formation and

the fact that the Sisters have undertaken different fields of study, mean that the Institute cannot, here, offer a systematic program in the subject areas, as will be done for initial formation. Therefore, these guidelines limit themselves to indicating some *characteristics* of updating that apply to all stages of life.

[p. 177] This updating:

— is in continuity with initial formation and takes into account the growth of the Sister in the different stages of her life;

— values a multiplicity of experiences interpreted in the light of the Gospel;

— is centred in the vocational experience, where all formative programs are synthesised;

— implies an intelligent organisation of time in which the importance of centring is integrated with attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships and to the significance of the presence of the FMA in the socio-historical reality of the local area.

The *subject matter* of ongoing formation deals with aspects of the identity of the FMA, as outlined in the Constitutions and expressed in the inculturated experience of the charism.

Direct contact with Scripture, as a school of wisdom and a fundamental frame of reference for personal growth and fruitfulness in mission, remains a priority.

Certain biblical-theological themes, characteristic aspects of religious life and Salesian Spirituality, the documents of the universal and local Church and key themes of the social doctrine of the Church, can be studied in depth.

An indispensable subject area, in a time of rapid transformation, is contemporary culture and the challenges it offers to the educating communities, especially those affecting the family, the presence of the woman in today's society, the situation of young people, bioethics and the area of communication in a reality that is ever more deeply characterised by the interdependence of cultures, people and values. The themes of discernment, vocational accompaniment and reciprocal relationships in everyday life, form significant areas of reflection and of dialogue with lay people, in order that the Sisters may be able to face the requirements of formation that have become so complex and demanding at all levels.

The *methods* by which this formation is carried out are many and varied: practical experience, dialogue, relationships and making use of informal opportunities as well as organised courses and specific readings. For this reason, it is important to use a method that provides opportunities for both *personal learning* and for *reflecting* [p. 178] as a *group*. These can become places of learning both at community level and in seminars, courses and meetings.

Attending courses *of study* with a view to ensuring a more systematic updating responds to the needs of the times. In this, universities and other educational centres are privileged places of research, development and the transmission of knowledge.

Today, the sharing of knowledge is also facilitated by the *new technologies* which permit immediate access to information that would otherwise be difficult to obtain and allow for the instantaneous sharing of reflections over distances.

Rapid acceleration in the area of communication leads to the possibility of an ever-wider use of technology as a source of useful information for updating in various professional areas. At all stages of life, according to particular needs, the use of the internet facilitates research and broadens the range of relationships.

Sabbatical periods, suggested in the Plan of Formation, can be opportunities for a more systematic assimilation of the charism and for the updating of qualifications.

Those with special responsibility for academic, professional and technical preparation in the various stages of life are the individual FMA, the community and the local animator, province and central structures of animation with their respective representatives: the provincial, the leader of the Institute, the general councillor for formation and the other formators, who should find suitable ways of implementing it at the various levels.

Each FMA in the process of deepening her feminine self-awareness, constantly clarifies her identity in her journey towards maturity. At the same time she is responsible for her constant educational enrichment and for periodic re-qualification. The time and commitment given to her own formation regenerate the quality of her everyday relationships and prepare her for a more serene and effective educative service.

The community, in response to the formation needed in today's world and conscious of its own *missionary* identity, encourages the educational awareness and constant updating of the Sisters. To this end it programs times for common reflection and for sharing on [p. 179] significant educational themes. It discerns practical strategies to ensure that each Sister has sufficient time for updating in her specific area of work.

It supports and encourages the Sisters in their commitment to study, even when this means substituting for them to allow time for this formation.

The community animator should facilitate a formative and educational climate in the community, in collaboration with all the Sisters and, where it concerns the mission, also with the laity. With them, in a circle of sharing ideas and resources, she discerns the priorities for formative action and prepares suitable programs and resources that foster participation and co-responsibility. In this way, each person is helped to arrive at a cultural synthesis and then, together, the community can reach a certain level of shared knowledge regarding education.

In a climate of open and serene dialogue, the animator offers each Sister the possibility of participating in educational courses or opportunities for updating that might help in her personal growth and for the efficacy of the tasks entrusted to her.

The provincial, together with the Sisters of the council and others who collaborate with her in the animation of the province, develops and co-ordinates a systematic long-term plan for the formation of the Sisters (cf R 98-100). This plan calls for

- identifying formation requirements and the areas in which education and training seem to be most urgently required in order to respond to the educational demands of the area in which they work;
- choosing people to begin specialised study courses, giving them the time they need to study, accompanying them in their formative journey;
- selecting the most suitable study centres, valuing particularly those of the Institute and those of other religious congregations;
- involving Sisters according to their professional competence in order to avoid frustration and the wasting of resources;
- investing the best resources of the province in the area of initial and ongoing formation and plan suitable opportunities for the qualification of formators and community animators, working in collaboration also with other provinces;
- organising, with the help of consultants, courses for vocational renewal and updating for different age-groups or other categories;
- planning courses of formation *with and for the laity* to increase the educational quality of the

Salesian mission, appreciating everyone's gifts and competence, in a spirit of reciprocity;

- fostering participation in formative and educational initiatives organised by the Institute at the central level or by ecclesial or civil institutions;
- encouraging dialogue and the critical revision of formative experiences to reorganise them in an ever more adequate and systematic way.

The *general council*, guided by the Spirit and listening constantly to the local situations, adopting a circular method of interaction between the provinces and the centre, should identify priority areas of content suggested by the Sisters throughout the Institute and offer consequent guidelines that will direct the journey of communities, even in the variety of individual situations. These guidelines will be implemented through the specific contributions of different sectors of the general council.

Particular themes of common interest will be studied in depth and in dialogue with corresponding groups within the Salesian Family, with whom they will also prepare documents that can serve the shared educative mission in the one charism.

The *Leader of the Institute* has the overall responsibility for formation. In collaboration with her council, she gives priority to the ongoing formation of provincials.

In fidelity to the charism, she promotes the vitality of the Institute, constantly seeking to keep it abreast of current educational demands, bearing in mind its world-wide aspect and the need for decentralisation.

[p. 181] The Leader also has direct responsibility for the Faculty of Educational Sciences, "Auxilium", as its vice chancellor. She oversees its progress and academic commitment, carefully chooses personnel, and provides resources and means for the fulfilment of the goal of the Faculty.

The *general councillor for formation*, through the provincials and interprovince conferences, offers guidelines for initial formation, promotes and co-ordinates initiatives for the specific stages and asks the provinces to plan, and carry out, programs for ongoing formation. She accompanies the preparation and updating of new animators, proposing guidelines and offering specific suggestions for their formation.

She facilitates the sharing of reflections and experiences among those responsible for formation, on issues of common interest from an intercultural perspective, at both national and international levels.

SUBJECT AREAS AND CORE CONTENT FOR INITIAL FORMATION

In order to provide each FMA with a systematic and adequate educational formation for her identity as a woman, consecrated for the Christian education of young people in the style of the Preventive System, certain subject areas need to be highlighted in the general study program: the theological, historical and educational sciences. Their mutual connection and, at the same time, specific way of looking at reality, are founded on the many dimensions of the human person and on the complexity of the mission to which all are called.

The purpose of this section is not to present each subject in detail but simply to focus on its aims and significance and some thematic core content relative to the areas identified. Certain questions should be dealt with from an interdisciplinary perspective.

In the formation curriculum the theological subjects aim at contributing to the development of maturity in faith, the promotion of critical self-awareness and the ability to *give reason* to one's convictions in the light of the Gospel. They contribute to opening the person to the mystery of Christ, sent by the Father, centre and culmination of the history of salvation, who continues to act in the Church through the Spirit.

The assimilation of these subjects leads the young woman in formation to deepen her understanding of the meaning and demands of Christian life and of the following of Christ who calls her to continue His mission in the world.

Since a key characteristic of these studies is their importance for living, what is learned on an intellectual level should be harmonised with that which is proposed and lived in the liturgy, in personal prayer, in community experience and in the educative mission.

Sacred Scripture

Awareness that the Word of God is the primary source of Christian spirituality leads the Sister to give fundamental importance to the knowledge of *Sacred Scripture* so that the identity of the FMA may be moulded by biblical wisdom and that it may render her mission fruitful. From the first stages of formation it is necessary to educate to an assiduous reading of and a love and taste for the Word. It is, in fact, important that reference to it gradually becomes "... *a kind of supernatural intuition*" (VC 94).

To arrive at this it is necessary to acquire a global vision of the history of salvation, not so much as a knowledge of historical facts, but especially as an understanding of God's plan and style of interacting with humanity. It is in the Word that she meets the God who first sought her. It is not a question of simply knowing the biblical texts, but of reaching the heart of the Christian experience, that is "...in your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus" (*Phil 2:5*).

Since the Word of God is expressed through human words, in historical and literary texts that belong to a particular context, it is necessary to have a basic knowledge of the biblical texts, especially [p. 183] of those that are proposed in the Lectionary for the Eucharistic celebration and the Liturgy of the Hours and those used in catechesis. In the first stages of formation it is good to give particular importance to the Palms and the New Testament, especially the Gospels. The latter are the heart of all the Scriptures, since they the words and the experience of Christ and Mary, His mother, while showing the form of apostolic life.

It is opportune to study in depth some themes that are particularly relevant to the experience of consecrated life and to the understanding of Salesian Spirituality.

Liturgy

The study of the *liturgy* lays the foundation for a conscious and active participation in the celebration of the mystery of salvation and for giving young people an adequate sacramental education that finds its centre in Eucharistic spirituality.

The ongoing work of salvation in the ecclesial community is realised in the liturgy, summit and source of the life of the Church. A deep liturgical experience is a fundamental dimension of the Salesian charism. Aware of this, the young woman should be guided towards an understanding of the mystery celebrated, to the specific elements of the various sacramental actions and to the uniqueness of the various symbolic languages through which the liturgy is expressed, according to the different Rites used in the countries in which the Institute is called to work.

The mystery of Christ is lived, above all, through the liturgical year and the Liturgy of the Hours. Attention will be devoted to making these understood in their sacramental meaning, so that the young woman may learn to make use of this great wealth of the ecclesial tradition and become an attentive and competent animator of liturgical assemblies.

Living the liturgical cycle of the mystery of Christ, according to the pedagogy of the Lectionary and of the other liturgical books, the young woman will be educated to honour *Mary* with special love, since she is indissolubly linked to the salvific work of her Son and in her she can contemplate the model of unconditional following and total dedication to the life of the Church.

[p. 184] *Systematic Theology*

The study of the essential elements of *systematic theology* aims at introducing the young woman to the treasures of faith and of the Christian experience of the Church. Faithful to the educational project of the founders, and in particular to the ideal expressed by Maria Domenica of wanting to help girls and young women to know and love God, the Salesian educator draws efficacy for her mission from the living sources of the faith. Thus, in an ever more multicultural and multifaith world, she can give reason to the hope that is in her.

In keeping with what was pointed out in Vatican II, the constant reference points of this reflection will be Sacred Scripture, the Tradition of the Church, the Council Documents, the Magisterium of the Church, the documents of the Episcopal Conferences and of the Synods, together with the doctrinal synthesis contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The young woman should be directed to perceive the marvellous unity of the mystery of God, revealed in history, as well as the centrality of Jesus Christ, the supreme norm of Christian life and the permanent presence and action of the Spirit. The Son of God, born of Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit, came into the world to fulfil the mission of salvation that the Father had entrusted to Him. In the proclamation and celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the Trinity is always present in the Church, on its journey through history towards the fulness of the Kingdom. Christ is the foundation of a vision of the world and of the human person that continues to radiate cultural, human and ethical values, on which depend that vision of life and history, which is the basis for interfaith dialogue.

Within the framework of the mystery of the Church as the People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ, the FMA give particular emphasis to the person and mission of Mary, in relation to Jesus and to the Christian community, of which she is the perfect icon, as mother and educator.

[p. 185] *Moral Theology*

In a cultural context marked by a plurality of anthropological and ethical concepts, the study of Christian morality is indispensable for a Salesian educator. It is based on the foundation of biblical ethics, on the vision of the human person, man/woman, created in the image of God and called to communion by their relational nature. From this point of view, moral commitment takes on the specific characteristics of a response to the Father's call to new life in Christ, in docility to the Spirit and by participation in social and ecclesial life. This response is expressed in a journey of fidelity to the law of God and to the newness of the Gospel and is manifested in an upright and authentic way of acting, sustained by grace.

In order to respond to the cultural and educational challenges of the various contexts, themes regarding life, sexuality, married and family life, social justice, solidarity and peace, will be studied.

Pastoral Theology

Aware that “... consecrated persons are *in mission* by virtue of their very consecration...” (VC 72), the young woman should be led to deepen her understanding of the call to dedicate her life to education, as an expression of the care of the Church for the younger generations.

The course should focus on the different forms of pastoral action, the fundamental ministerial functions, the recipients of the mission giving particular attention to the world of the young, to communications, to the woman and to the various forms of poverty and marginalisation.

To help her develop a pastoral awareness in the spirit of the *da mihi animas*, it is advisable to concentrate on the more significant youth pastoral projects at various levels, on those elements of theory that facilitate a critical and constructive approach to pastoral practice, on the situation of young people in a particular context, on educational objectives that respond to present needs and on methodological choices that express a specific *pastoral style*.

[p. 186] ***Theology of Spirituality***

The specific role of the *theology of spirituality* is that of critical and systematic reflection on the Christian experience.

This study helps to overcome a superficial and fragmentary vision of life and leads to the development of a decisive commitment to an apostolic spirituality through constant fidelity. It also offers the elements necessary to become capable of accompanying young people in their search for God and in vocational discernment.

Certain basic areas of spiritual experience should be considered in the formative program from a dynamic perspective, while being careful to overcome dichotomies. These are: God’s plan and growth in conformity to Christ through the action of the Spirit, the developmental stages of spirituality, the specifically Christian characteristics of prayer, the centrality of sacramental experience, which is the summit of the action of the Spirit and the source of all spirituality, participation in the life of the Church, in its richness and diversity of vocations and charisms and the presence of Mary and the saints.

Consecrated life should be presented in its Trinitarian and ecclesial dimensions, in its specific configuration to Christ and in its prophetic witness. It fulfils, in a special way, that *confessio Trinitatis* that characterises the whole of Christian life.

Canon Law

In the universal law of the Church, synthesised in *The Code of Canon Law*, is found the doctrinal basis and the motivations for the norms that regulate the life of religious institutes. For this reason, knowledge of canon law is a necessary condition for a deeper study of the Constitutions of the FMA and their practical application.

This study is a requirement for consecrated life as an ecclesial reality and of the educational-catechetical responsibility of the FMA. Called to participate in an active and qualified manner in the mission of the Church, the young woman, in the development of the mission entrusted to her, should know the fundamental norms that regulate relationships with the different components that make up the Church. This knowledge will allow her to grasp the wisdom of the Church, [p. 187] which is the spirit of these same norms. It will help her to live, at various levels, those relationships that are important for a spirit of communion and responsibility.

An in-depth study is proposed for those sections of the Code of Canon Law that deal with the laity, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life and the teaching role of the Church.

This is especially true for all that which deals with the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments, catechesis, missionary activity, education and Catholic schools. For young women belonging to other Rites, it is important to relate this study to the Code of the Oriental Churches.

HISTORICAL SCIENCES

In a time of rapid change and the weakening of the capacity for remembering, the study of history is more necessary, today, than ever before. Critical and serene awareness of the past nourishes responsibility in the present and provides the necessary foundations for projecting oneself into the future with wisdom and farsightedness. The subjects in this area have the aim of helping the young women in formation to understand the journey of the Church, consecrated life and their own religious family, through time and in different cultures. This study allows for a balanced view of the institutions and the conditioning elements which have influenced them in time and space, and revives their sense of belonging.

In view of the development of an ecumenical sensitivity and of interfaith dialogue, it is indispensable to have a basic knowledge of the history of religions and to discern the challenges these pose for life in multicultural settings and especially for education.

Church History

The *history of the Church* in its development and mission, in various times and cultures, facilitates knowledge of the Church itself as an institution and helps to overcome prejudices and partial interpretations. A balanced view of the history of the universal and local Church also helps to cultivate an ecclesial sense and leads to [p. 188] a sense of belonging to one great family. It teaches the young woman to be realistic regarding her religious experience, helps to develop a community and apostolic dimension and opens the way to collaboration with other institutes and ecclesial communities.

Apart from the study of the *main stages of the history of the Church* and of its evangelising mission, it is also important to present the *development of consecrated life* as a practical and diversified response to socio-cultural and ecclesial contexts. Particular attention should be paid to the knowledge and the development of *women's Institutes* because of their formative importance in relation to the development of the identity as FMA.

This allows for the understanding of the young woman's experience as part of a journey that reaches beyond the subjective dimension and, at the same time, values it. Reflection on *the changes in religious life throughout history* allows for the discernment and better appreciation of the characteristic values of the Institute. This leads the young woman to accept, in serenity, the inevitable changes within the continuity of a specific vocation.

It also allows for a positive view of the challenges which the Spirit presents to the Institute today so that it may give a charismatic response that is always new and relevant.

The History of Christian Spirituality

The *history of Christian Spirituality*, in its key stages, schools of spirituality and significant people, fosters in the young woman in formation an awareness of the development, uniqueness and variety of Christian spiritual experiences, which express the relationship between the human person and God, One and Three, as revealed by Jesus Christ.

It is of particular importance to understand the heritage of the Fathers of the Church and of the saints, who enriched humanity with their experience and spiritual doctrine.

The presentation of the different periods in the history of spirituality can be integrated with an approach to some of the authors and schools of spirituality: St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Angela Merici, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis of Sales, [p. 189] St. Alphonsus Maria of Liguori, leading to the Salesian synthesis made by Don Bosco and Maria Mazzarello.

Inspiration and stimuli can come from the experience of these teachers of spirituality for their journey of maturing in faith and apostolic life and can place Salesian Spirituality within a wider and richer horizon.

EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

The educational sciences are particularly important in the formative journey of the FMA. They offer the young woman a vision of education in its various dimensions: philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, sociological and communicative.

The subjects in this area help her to become critically aware of the basic elements and dynamics involved in the development of the personality and are necessary for a balanced educational approach from the perspective of the Preventive System.

The study of these subjects assists in the personal development of the FMA, especially with regard to her identity as an educator, called to weave relationships of reciprocity and collaboration in her mission. It enables her to develop the ability to analyse, plan, implement and evaluate, all of which are required in the carrying out of her role as educator of the younger generations in today's complex society.

Philosophy

During the period of initial formation, the study of philosophy aims at facilitating reflection on the meaning of life and freedom, on how people act and interact in the world, seen as an *environment* that is gifted with meaning.

The study of *philosophy* allows the young woman to acquire a vision of reality capable of overcoming scepticism and of being sufficiently critical in a society where scientific and technological knowledge tends to pervade all areas of life and learning. It helps her to understand the dangers that come from a single model of rationality and to be open to models capable of integrating theory [p. 190] with praxis in a holistic understanding of reality, especially of the human person. It also leads her to discover the *traces* of transcendence in time through a search inspired by wonder.

Philosophy, seen as the art of thinking for its own sake, can help the young woman to develop a gratuitous approach, to communicate her discovery of the meaning of life in a creative way and can allow her to become involved in the task of building forms of social life worthy of the human person.

In particular, philosophical anthropology helps the young woman to reflect on the mystery of woman and man, to develop an awareness that the human person experiences her /his humanity only in the measure in which the human person is capable of sharing in the humanity of the other, of experiencing her/him as another *I*, or better as a *you*. On the one hand, this vision allows one to see the person as the bearer of a unique, unrepeatable life-plan and, on the other, shows that this life-plan can be realised only in the context of relationship and dialogue with the *you*, within a framework of reciprocity and of openness to the Transcendent. From this perspective the fulness of woman and man is seen in a life freely assumed as a gift and realised gradually as life in solidarity: a life for others.

Pedagogy

Today, learning is seen as taking place in all stages of life, the social demands on formation have become more complex and the number of institutions and people involved in education is increasing. These demand a more varied and profound pedagogical formation.

Formation, in this area, should be integrated with educational theory and practice and with the complex world of communications. It should also deal with a social context that is deeply marked by a multicultural and multifaith reality.

The study of *pedagogy* has as its aim to help the young woman to clarify the reasons for and the requirements of the mission and to be open to value the means and conditions that make it possible; to understand the educational process as an open-ended journey and to acquire a basic competence as educators.

The subject matter, in a constant process of interaction with apostolic [p. 191] experiences, should deal with the educational needs of the young people, the goal of education, the fundamental principles and criteria of educational practice, the interpersonal relationship in which human maturing takes place, the educating community, the ongoing formation of the educators, the educational institutions and the area of informal education.

The growing complexity of the educational reality, in particular, demands an attentive reflection on pedagogical anthropology and on educational methodology, which is capable of providing a vision of the person in the dynamics of her /his development and in the striving for happiness in a context of interactions that are rich in challenges and values.

Reflection on experience and the systematic study of these aspects provide the criteria and elements with which to develop educational projects in keeping with the principles of Christian humanism and with the demands of reality, with the aim of improving the quality of life for all, especially for those who are disadvantaged and/or marginalised.

Building on these fundamental pedagogical elements, it is possible to deal in a more systematic way with the study of the Preventive System.

Catechetics

The in-depth study of the basic principles and methods of *catechetics* provides a frame of reference for understanding the importance of the role of proclaiming the Word in the pastoral mission of the local Church. In it the FMA are actively present through their educative practice, which aims at forming *good Christians and honest citizens*. It takes place within a process that goes from Christian initiation to maturing in faith and is rooted in the Word of God and in the Tradition of the Church, in fidelity to the people to whom the proclamation is made and to contemporary culture.

This awareness helps to highlight those areas of content that need most attention. Above all, the *proclamation of the Word* as the prophetic moment of the pastoral action of the Church, which is expressed in various forms and ways of communication - evangelisation, catechesis, and mystagogy - prepares for the [p. 192] celebration of the Christian mysteries and becomes a witness to love.

The living centre of catechesis is *Jesus Christ* and His message, the fulfilment of the first Covenant, in an eschatological perspective, in the ongoing *today* of salvation, until the fulness of the eternal Easter.

This proclamation is entrusted to the *Church*, the People of God, who travel the roads of the world, that it may inculturate into the various contexts and thus reach every person through a language that speaks to each one in its totality.

Psychology

The study of *psychology* during the period of formation is indispensable for reasons that can be summarised at two levels. The first level is personal growth. The second is the acquisition of the knowledge and the ability to relate which are required for the fulfilment of the educative mission. In relation to personal growth, this study has the aim of providing the basic elements of knowledge that can help to evaluate and consolidate personal identity. It can facilitate the processes of self-awareness and self-acceptance, handling affectivity in a balanced way in interpersonal relationships and especially in educative relationships, integrating sexuality in the direction of the life choice made and in discovering and clarifying vocational motivations.

With regard to the demands of the educative mission, this study should deal with themes relating to the developmental and growth processes throughout life, giving special attention to the building of identity, the dynamics of interpersonal and group relationships, the factors that influence the development of a moral conscience and religious development in childhood and adolescence.

The content can be organised according to themes derived from dynamic psychology, developmental psychology and the psychology of religion, with particular reference to themes relating to the woman and to consecrated life.

[p. 193] ***Sociology***

The study of *sociology* is included in the formation curriculum of the FMA because of the fact that vocational choice is born, develops and matures within an ever more complex and changing socio-cultural reality. It is within specific contexts that the mission proper to the Institute is inculturated and therefore, the educator should know their resources and problems, especially those relating to the world of young people and women, take them into account and, when the need arises, act upon them.

Study should centre on three particular areas of research i.e. the socio-cultural context, the socio-religious context and the context of religious life.

Regarding the *context in which the young woman lives*, study should focus on society and culture, on the agencies of socialisation and of education, on the problems and resources of contemporary society i.e. globalisation, the rediscovery of cultural identities, socio-cultural pluralism, the situation of young people and the interdisciplinary approach to the resources and issues pertaining to women.

The study of today's *socio-religious context* is especially important, because of the co-existence of different religions and the issues which this raises for living together in society, for the Catholic Church and for the religious experience of young people. The study of the *context of religious life* is also very important in its sociological aspects, especially the process of the origin and development of religious Institutes and the dynamics relating to socialisation, formation and community life.

This study is also necessary to provide those elements required for the *knowledge of social and labour legislation* proper to the different nations and for the understanding of the model of an economy of solidarity proposed by the social doctrine of the Church.

Social Communications

In the formation of the Salesian educator, it is essential to include *social communications* as an education to social interaction, to the understanding of *media* and to the use of the *media*. This

means [p. 194] acquiring a body of knowledge and planning an integrated curriculum developed through courses, practical experiences and workshops.

Becoming literate in social communications means developing a critical view of the *media* and the way they construct reality. This implies awareness of the social, cultural, political and economic components behind the messages and values proposed by the *media*. It requires the ability to *create through the media* and to apply this skill in the educational field. This demands the capacity to grasp the meaning and cultural implications of the new technologies, leading the educator to work with greater awareness and efficacy in both formal and informal education.

Adequate formation in this area can be facilitated by reflection on the way the person communicates and relates with others, by learning to use the *media* and the new technologies, by using *forums* with a view to critical assessment, by dialogue with consultants in the area of communications, to help broaden one's horizons and to understand the educational value of the *media*, by participation in media events such as youth concerts, art exhibitions and multimedia conferences.

GUIDELINES FOR ACQUIRING A LIFE-GIVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHARISM

The following guidelines are offered in response to the many requests from FMA working in houses of formation. They have the *aim* of helping to deepen the knowledge of the charism of the Institute in order to assimilate the spirituality of the FMA with greater awareness. Approaching the written sources and the living tradition of the Institute helps the young woman gradually to mature in her sense of belonging and in her active involvement in the mission which she, as an FMA, is called to carry out in today's society.

The wealth of this educational charism requires an *interdisciplinary approach*. In the various stages of the formation process and in the development of the content, however, it is necessary to harmonise the historical, theological-spiritual, pedagogical and social aspects.

Knowledge of the heritage of the Institute, because of its living character, requires *constant integration of theory and praxis*, [p. 195] reflection and experience, study and community life. It is especially in the community, the privileged place of formation, that everyone becomes co-responsible for the growth of others and for putting the educative charism into action.

Regarding *method*, inspired by the criteria of a gradual and systematic approach, the following procedures could be used:

- systematic lessons based on documentation drawn from the sources, using adequate criteria, and on a carefully chosen selection of the most significant works of research in this area;
- introduction to personal guided reading, to individual and group research, to the knowledge of the language of the founders, in order to access Salesian sources directly and to create possibilities for greater communication, given the world-wide expansion of the Institute;
- make use of particularly significant community and apostolic experiences i.e. moments of sharing, study days, monthly Salesian commemorations, preparation and celebration of feasts with the participation of young people and in collaboration with the Salesian Family, pilgrimages to the places of the origins, visits to new forms of educational presence and meetings with people who have a wealth of Salesian experience.

During the *period of assessment and guidance*, a *historical-biographical knowledge of the founders* should be imparted. This requires an introduction to the life and educational work of

Don Bosco and of Maria Domenica Mazzarello, as people who were open to the Spirit and capable of responding to the educational needs of the environment. Their response still continues today in the mission of the Institute and of the Salesian Family.

To be able to understand the richness of the heritage, received from the founders and from their educational experience, an adequate understanding of the *historical, social and ecclesial context* is needed. With regard to the *biographical journey of the founders*, the following aspects should be emphasised: the stages of their vocational growth and the centrality of Christ in their lives, the significant persons who helped in their process of maturing, the difficulties they met, the beginnings of their educational mission, the people who comprised the first communities and the presence of Mary in their experience.

[p. 196] Those young women who have already had the opportunity of reflecting in depth on the life of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica can be gradually guided towards *direct contact with some of the sources*, presented in their overall importance, without too much concentration on critique.

During the *postulancy*, it is advisable to present the *historical development of the Institute*, emphasising the stages of its history, its expansion to various nations, missionary openness, characteristic educational works, some significant people in the different periods and places, the Salesian Family in its various components and a general overview of Salesian holiness.

In particular, the young woman should be given an initial introduction to the *beginnings and development of the Institute in her own nation and province*, with the aim of helping her to grasp the challenges and new possibilities for the mission today.

The journey of the Institute should be viewed in the context of the *historical development of consecrated life*, especially for women, with particular attention to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The introduction of the postulant to the *principal elements of Salesian Spirituality* should help her to discover its characteristics, drawn from the life of Don Bosco and Maria Mazzarello and from the history of the Institute.

The aspects of the charism to be focused on are:

- the theological foundation of the charismatic experience, rooted in the mystery of Christ the Good Shepherd, apostle of the Father, and in the presence of Mary, mother and help of the Church and of all humanity;
- the specific mission of the Institute in the Church and in society i.e. the Christian education of young people in the style of the Preventive System;
- some characteristic values of the Salesian Spirit such as apostolic courage, commitment to duty, spirit of work, simple and profound prayer, joy, simplicity, gratitude, sense of belonging and Family Spirit;
- the special presence of Mary Help of Christians in the lives of the founders and in the history of the Institute, a presence that offers guidance, intercession and preventive love.

[p. 197] During the *novitiate*, the young woman is offered more consistent and systematic opportunities for the study of and a deeper reflection on the journey of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica, through guided access to the sources, knowledge of the traditions of the Institute and of the educational charism of the FMA, beginning with a study of the Constitutions, relating them to life.

It is within the framework of the spirituality of St. Francis of Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Alphonsus of Liguori and Giuseppe Frassinetti that the study of the *journey of Don Bosco and Maria Mazzarello* should be set. The principal stages of their maturing, should be emphasised together with their particular charism as founders of the Institute and the *main aspects of their spirituality*, proposing anew an enterprising spirit, inventiveness and holiness as a response to the signs of the times that are emerging in today's world (cf VC 37). *The study of the sources* will be undertaken using adequate methods and guidelines. During this stage of formation priority should

be given to the guided study of some primary sources, both documentary and narrative, that can provide direct knowledge of the person, the educational style and the spirituality of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica, for example, the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, *The Letters of Don Bosco*, *The Letters of Maria Domenica Mazzarello*.

Regarding the *history of the Institute*, both the written documentation and what has been entrusted to oral tradition must be kept in mind. Some sources of particular interest are the *Cronistoria*, the Constitutions and Regulations, the Acts of the General Chapters and the circular letters of the Leader of the Institute. Literature on history and spirituality published by the Institute, the Salesian Congregation and, in general, by the Salesian Family are very useful.

It is suggested that there be reflection on the formative significance of certain experiences that are characteristic of Salesian life: the personal meeting, the good night, the community plan. The use of ordinary sources of knowledge of the history of the Institute, such as, the chronicles of the house, the general directory and biographies are also proposed.

In this formative period, the study of the *history of the Institute* should be continued, concentrating on the study of various FMA, who have contributed in a particular way to the spiritual and educational development of the charism. Reflecting on the life of [p. 198] educators, including those whose biographies are found in the series *Facciamo memoria*, is for the novice a good introduction to the study of the specific educational charism and the characteristic elements of the Preventive System, seen as both spirituality and method.

In particular, through the *knowledge of and deep reflection on the Constitutions*, the novice will be guided to understand and assume the main elements of Salesian Spirituality. It is the "... pact of our Covenant with God" (C 173), the expression of the demands of following Jesus according to the charism.

During the *period of temporary vows*, which is of great importance for vocational growth and preparation for final profession, the temporary professed should be helped to continue *the study of the founders*, placing them in the context of the history of nineteenth century spirituality. *The basic content and the specific aspects of Salesian Spirituality* should be identified, with special reference to the evangelical counsels, community-apostolic life and the impact of the educative mission on Church and society.

In particular, the temporary professed should be guided to a systematic deepening of the study of the *Preventive System*, as the nucleus that unifies the various aspects of the spirituality of the FMA.

The methods of study and the sharing of content and experiences can vary and be diversified according to each person and her situation. It is suggested that the knowledge of the educational method be situated both in the time of Don Bosco and Maria Domenica and in the present-day situation with its many challenges. This involves knowledge of the historical setting in which the Preventive System was born and developed, in order to understand its fundamental elements. Thus the educational experience of the founders, should be read again using adequate historical and pedagogical criteria. This requires a knowledge of their multifaceted personalities, their formation and their openness to experiential and cultural challenges and the methodological elements by which they expressed their choice for preventive education.

In order to deepen the understanding of the essential characteristics of this method it is useful to have, as a frame of reference, the elements of the *educational plan* i.e. knowledge of the situation of young people, the ideal towards which they should aim in order to [p. 199] become *good Christians and honest citizens*, the objectives and principal content of the Preventive System beginning with the fundamental elements of reason, religion, loving kindness, family spirit, climate of joy, educative presence based on competence and human and Christian maturity, the quality of the environment, the co-responsibility and participation of the family and of other

educational institutions and the necessity of assessment at all levels. In particular, it is necessary to *deepen the awareness of the contribution of the woman to the interpretation of the Preventive System* and to its practical realisation, with her typical feminine resources. In the educational practice of the Institute of the FMA there are, in fact, specific sensitivities, such as attention to weaving reciprocal relationships within the complementarity of roles and of educative agencies, solicitude in seeing that girls and women have access to education and contribute to its development, organisation of community life according to a circular model, care for the environment to ensure order, beauty and harmony, early childhood education with a specific plan to involve the family and institutions, networking with the local area, missionary work seen from the perspective of education and human advancement, the primacy of the proclamation of the Word and of catechesis and the Marian character, which inspire educators in their way of relating and educating.

The study of the Preventive System should constantly be in dialogue with the new anthropological and educational parameters and should keep in mind the *situations of disadvantage and marginalisation*, in which the educational work takes place and not simply use methods and content designed for other environments.

Inculturation and the quality of Salesian life remain the fundamental criteria for putting this style of education into action, while always remaining open to new developments.

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