

## Salesian Family – The Personal Perspective

“Il futuro è la Famiglia Salesiana!” (The future is the Salesian Family!) proclaimed *La Madre*, Mother Yvonne Reungoat, FMA, in a meeting with the 35 FMA present for the Salesian Family Spirituality Days. This declaration was resounding in our hearts as we departed from the Pisana at the end of the Days. We left with the conviction that it was of the utmost importance that we bring this experience back to our Provinces. In fact, we had been confirmed in this conviction by the wholehearted encouragement we had received in conversations with La Madre herself, Sr. Maria Luisa Miranda (the FMA General Councilor for the Salesian Family and member of the Secretariat for the Salesian Family), and Don Eusebio Muñoz, SDB (the Delegate of the Rector Major for the Salesian Family and head of the Secretariat).

Looking over the vast crowd of 370 members of the Salesian Family gathered in the Salesianum for the Salesian Family Spirituality Days from January 19-22, 2017, it hit home and gave us great joy to think that this is Don Bosco’s dream being realized. The participants at this Salesian Family gathering represented 21 of the 31 Official Groups - Religious Congregations, Public Associations of the Faithful, Secular Institutes, Spiritual Movements, and Private Associations of the Faithful – from around the world! People of all ages, from numerous countries, and from different cultures are bonding together to grow in their knowledge of each other and their desire to spread the Faith in the Salesian way, doing good to all, especially poor and abandoned youth. These living members of the Church are faithful to Don Bosco’s vision. They seek to answer the Rector Major’s call in the 2017 Strenna to take up the mission entrusted to the Church in Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* to be active apostles concerned about, reaching out to, and accompanying families and the young along the path of human and Christian maturity and vocation.



At the beginning of the Days, our Rector Major Don Angel pointed out that a family was the Father's choice for His Son to take on human nature in its fullness, growing and becoming strong, being filled with wisdom, and having God's favor upon Him. He went through the stages of human growth just as we do, knowing our joys and sorrows, and being tempted in every way we are but without sinning. Jesus' life with Mary and Joseph, the Holy Family, mirrors the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity. From these two notions, the Rector Major drew the conclusion that growing up in a family, even if imperfect, is essential for the growth and development of every human person. It impressed us how Don Angel was emphatic in calling the Salesian Family today to a ministry to help families become schools of life and love.

These prophetic calls from leaders of our Family were instructive and the sharing from Cooperators, ADMA, Alumni and Alumnae moved our hearts. Most of the schedule was organized around testimonies from five couples who, with their families, are already engaged in direct ministry to families and to poor and abandoned youth, including unaccompanied refugee minors, and have been so for quite some time. It was moving to hear the stories of how they have been reaching out to families in dire need and on the margins and/or to those families that seek to grow more as schools of life and love. They are already living the dream that *La Madre* made to us during her welcome address: "I also dream that our Salesian Family may grow ever more precisely in its family love so that being so many united together will render us able to be 'Don Bosco' in the world of today... I am sure that this dream will become a reality and that we can put ourselves to it with courage and creativity at the service of families... so that the educational journey may be truly efficacious because we ally ourselves with families, offering them support and encouragement."

Two Cooperators, a married couple from Slovakia, Kamil and Katarina Bagin, shared with us their spiritual and apostolic journey. As a young couple, they sought a strong foundation for their marriage by deciding to put God at the center and that they chose the Catholic Faith for their own. Tied in with that, they sought a way to share their mutual love for Slovakian traditional folk music and dance by beginning a studio, Kremeniok, to teach these to young people in need. This went beyond being a beloved business for them, indeed, a second business for they have other "day jobs", and became a ministry to the young and eventually outreach to the parents of their young pupils. The impetus to help the families of these youngsters came when one of the boys in their class shared with them how grateful he was - beyond the folk traditions he learned - for the example they gave of being a caring couple who knew how to respect and work with each other in all mutuality and love. He added that he hoped to be part of such a family of his own someday.



Kamil and Katarina Bagin

This one statement made them realize that a good number of the young people they worked with did not come from families that were strong and based on a solid foundation or that had the relationship skills that were needed to make them “work”. With this realization in mind, they began the “Family Garden Counseling Center,” opening its doors to families in need in January 2014. The Center is staffed by Salesian Cooperators from their community, with Katarina as its head coordinator. Its main activities are:

- Testimonials of married couples and lectures from experts
- Marriage preparation classes
- Counseling for married couples or individuals
- Training course “Christian Coach”
- Experts involved in specific form of cooperation: gynecologists, psychologists, priests, lawyers, education specialists, and financial advisers.

They feel it their duty as a Christian married couple to be a witness to young couples who need mentoring and to be present to them so that they can come for help in hard times. They seek to put into effect Pope Francis’ words: “Dear families you are also a part of God’s people. Walk with joy together with these people, stay united with Jesus and bring it to the masses through your testimonial.”

Drafting this article in Miami at Immaculata-La Salle High School (ILS) while waiting to celebrate Don Bosco at Holy Mass twice [first together with the young and their teachers from both FMA High Schools - St. John Neumann and ILS - and then later that night at Immaculate Conception Parish in Hialeah, at] just augmented the joy and hope we feel for the future of the Salesian Family in our eastern United States and Canada. In front of their students and colleagues at Mass, ten teachers and a married couple, parents of an alumna, made their Promises as Salesian Cooperators, establishing the St. Francis de Sales Cooperator Center at ILS. In Hialeah more than 200 Past Pupils, ADMA members, and Cooperators were present for the Mass and the reception following. In addition, although we were unable to be there, we rejoice because of three Aspirants to the Salesian Cooperators who made their life-long Promise at their Mass honoring Don Bosco on Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, at Mary Help of Christians Church in Tampa. (see last week’s e-Service)



Immaculata-La Salle



Hialeah

Don Bosco's Family is alive and well here in our homelands, too! We hope to make our Salesian Family even stronger, more united, larger, more visible, and more efficacious in collaborative ministry going forward with our work on developing the various consultative bodies within the Salesian Family in our Provinces.

This is the first of a series of articles highlighting the individual presentations made during the Spirituality Days from the personal perspective of the Delegates to the Salesian Family, representing North America, who were present at them.

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