

Canada and Eastern USA



Salesian Family Snippets



News of the Salesian Family Near and Far

▶ A YEAR OF DREAMS FROM ON HIGH

We are at the threshold of a new year, 2024, a truly special year.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE SALESIAN FAMILY

Registration is now open for the Province Virtual Gathering of the Salesian Family.





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IMPORTANT DATES

Jan. 1: Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God

Jan. 8: Bl. Titus Zeman, SDB

Jan. 15: Bl. Luigi Variara, SDB

Jan. 18-21: Salesian Family (SF) Spirituality Days

Jan. 22 (23 in USA): Bl. Laura Vicuña
Don Bosco Novena begins
Day of Prayer for Legal Protection of Unborn Children (USA)

Jan. 24: St. Francis de Sales

Jan. 30: Bl. Bronisław Markiewicz, SDB

Jan. 31: St. John Bosco

Visit

<https://donboscosalesianportal.org/sf-snippets-archives/>
to read and download this issue and previous editions.

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*Don Bosco's dream of nine years old
Courtesy of Sr. Denise Sickinger, FMA*

A Year of Dreams From On High

Dear friends: we are at the threshold of a new year, 2024, a truly special year because we remember the bicentennial of Don Bosco's dream at age nine. This dream was much more than a pleasant episode in the life of a nine-year-old boy; it was like a dream-vision and a premonition of what he was to do in the course of his life.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR CARDINAL ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME, SDB

Sixty-two years later, while celebrating his first and last Mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which had been consecrated two days earlier, Don Bosco burst into tears more than fifteen times because he saw all the scenes of his life unfold, in quick succession as though as in a movie. He understood that he had always been guided by Divine Providence and, in particular, led by the hand of Her, the Help of Christians, to the point that he said, "It is She who has done everything."

That New Year's Day of 1862

This commemoration leads me to think of a significant New Year in Don Bosco's life. It is the first of January, 1862. *The Biographical Memoirs* tell us that Don Bosco, who had been ill until that first day of the year, announced that he had important news to give to everyone living at the Oratory, both big and small. "The excitement caused by Don Bosco's promise [of a personal strenna] defies description. How slowly the hours dragged that night of December 31 and all the next day. How eagerly the youngsters awaited evening to hear what their good father had to tell them," Fr. Lemoyne writes. "At last, night prayers were over and the boys, perfectly silent, stood waiting

for Don Bosco. He mounted the little platform and unveiled the mystery, saying, "The strenna I am about to give you is not my own. What would you say if the Madonna herself were to come in person and say something to each one of you — if she herself had prepared a little note for each of you to tell you what you most need or what she desires from you? Well, that's exactly what has happened. The Madonna gives a strenna to each of you.... I foresee that some will want to know more and will ask, 'How did this happen?' 'Did the Madonna write the notes herself?' 'Did she speak to Don Bosco in person?' 'Is Don Bosco our Lady's secretary?' I shall not add anything to what I have already said. I wrote the notes myself, but I am not free to disclose how it all came about. Nor should anyone take it upon himself to question me, for this would place me in a very awkward position. Be satisfied with the assurance that each note comes from our Lady.... It's an amazing thing! For several years I have been praying for this grace and have at last obtained it. Let each of you, then, take this advice as coming from our Lady's very lips. Come, therefore, to my room, and I shall give each of you your note." Don Bosco could say this because he himself had received from our

Lady, at the age of nine, the message that would mark the entire course of his life.

Then, continuing the narrative of that same evening, “Those mentioned [the Salesians] followed Don Bosco to his room and that evening or the next received the first of those precious New Year’s messages. John Bonetti’s read as follows: ‘Increase the number of my sons.’ He at once recorded it in his chronicle, adding: ‘My loving Mother, along with this dear advice, give me also the means to carry it out. Grant me grace to succeed in this and to be included among your sons.’”

Fr. Rua’s said, “In your spiritual needs put your trust in Me.” (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, VII, 1-7.)

Beginning on the following morning, the young men crowded to the door of Don Bosco’s room to receive their notes. I can easily imagine how Don Bosco knew how to reach the heart of every Salesian and every boy in the Oratory, not by means of some invention of his, but with the deep conviction of what our Lady wanted for each of them. At the same time, he managed to do so in the way characteristic of Don Bosco: always as a true teacher and a true genius. Here, I am referring to the art of personal encounter, of dialogue, and of the gaze that reaches the depths of the heart.

As I read this, I wondered whether it would not be possible for this to happen also to us. We have sent greeting cards to many people. If Mary Most Holy had sent a greeting card to the Salesian Congregation, to each one of us, and to

the beautiful and great Salesian Family, the family of Don Bosco, what would She have written?

Walking the way of Don Bosco

It is beautiful to imagine this. I assure you that in my imagination there are many beautiful things that our Lady would ask of us, both personally and as Don Bosco’s Family, which was raised up to accompany the boys and girls of the world – especially the poorest and neediest – in their process of growth, maturation, and transformation.

The mystery of the new year, which ultimately develops the mystery of Christmas, tells us: “You are not conditioned by the past. Today you can start anew because there is something new in you. Take into your arms the Divine Child, who brings you into contact with all the newness that is available there, genuine and intact, in your soul. Start over again with the little ones, the teens, and the young adults. Trust the newness in you! Each day is the first day.”

Perhaps it would suffice to make our own the words that Mary says to John Bosco in his dream: “‘This is your field; this is where you must work,’ the Lady told me. ‘Make yourself humble, steadfast, and strong.’” Perhaps advice that was a little more “spiritual” was expected, but only those who are humble can be kind because they are able to enjoy the presence of others. Humility is the gate of love to those who are little, defenseless, and wounded by life.

Only one who is steadfast and strong can follow Jesus today, in spite of everything, because we want to see the prisoners free and the oppressed no longer oppressed, and to know what message the poor can still believe in. This is listening to the voice of the burning bush that will never be consumed: “I will break your chains and make you walk with your heads held high.” Mary wants the Salesians, and all her Family, the beautiful family of Don Bosco in every age, to walk the way of Don Bosco. The best guarantee of this will always be to have her as the true Teacher who is first and foremost a Mother. This is a true grace for our Family.

This is how the Rectors Major have expressed it throughout our history, as my predecessor, Fr. Renato Ziggotti, did: “I will give you a Teacher, under whose guidance you can become wise and without whom all wisdom becomes foolishness.” These are the fateful words of that first dream pronounced by the mysterious personage, “the Son of Her whom your mother has taught you to greet three times a day.” (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, I, 95) It is, therefore, Jesus who gives Don Bosco His Mother as his Teacher and infallible guide along the demanding path of his entire life. How can we give enough thanks for this extraordinary gift that was given by Heaven to our Family?”

Happy New Year 2024, with my best wishes for each of you and your families. May it be a beautiful year for all of us and a year of peace for this humanity that is still suffering so much.

Don Ángel

In, With, and For the Church



*A Salesian Sister takes a photo or video during last year's SF Spirituality Days in Valdocco.
Photo by Agenzia Info Salesiana (ANS)*

An Open Letter to the Salesian Family Concerning the SF Spirituality Days and Strenna 2024

GATHERED BY SR. DENISE SICKINGER, FMA,
AND FR. TOM DUNNE, SDB

Dear Salesian Family (SF) brothers and sisters,

The plans have been made for our province-level hybrid sharing on the Strenna and the Spirituality Days.

- **Who:** Everyone in the Salesian Family and guests whom they invite from outside the Family
- **What:** Hybrid Province-wide gathering and sharing via a virtual meeting platform & local gatherings
- **Activities:** Prayer, opening activities, local and virtually-grouped sharing, global group virtual sharing
- **When:** Sunday, January 21, 2024 from 2:00-4:00pm ET
- **Where:** Province-wide - In local gatherings, or from home as individuals or as a family
- **Why:** To join our Salesian Family worldwide to deepen our charism and spirituality; to form a true Family by getting to know members from all over the Province and create family bonds; to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Don Bosco's Dream at Age Nine and all that it meant to him and means to us today as we seek to serve poor youth and families in

this time and place, as Don Bosco would if he were here

- **How:** Organize locally; join the rest of the province virtually – you will receive the link nearer the day

Registration is now open! [Register here.](#)

Here is a sample planning memo for those gathering as Salesian Family in various spots throughout the province:

- **For NY/NJ:** The Marian Shrine will host our area sharing
- We will gather in the Paul VI room at the Marian Shrine. Salesian Cooperator (SC) Ann Cenname will be our contact with the Marian Shrine for this program.
- In setting up the projector, screen, and laptop(s) last year, it proved to be a good choice to arrive early to work out the kinks for running a combined in-person and virtual session with individual and grouped participants in various locations.
- Jerry and Megan Rodriguez will be conducting the session both for those gathered at the Shrine and those

attending virtually from around the province. They will take care of dividing our participants into smaller groupings and language groupings.

- The Marian Shrine will provide the coffee, we the cookies and some pastries.
- We are grateful to the Marian Shrine's administrative team and Community for welcoming the Salesian Family members and devotees of Don Bosco's charism. We will leave a donation in gratitude for the use of their facility.



Live performance during last year's SF Spirituality Days in Valdocco.
Photo by Agenzia Info Salesiana (ANS)



The audience applauds at last year's SF Spirituality Days in Valdocco.
Photo by Agenzia Info Salesiana (ANS)

The schedule and the details of the program from Torino have not yet been published. As soon as they are, they will be placed on our *dedicated page* on the [Don Bosco Salesian Portal](#). We will also send a **MailChimp** with the complete Strenna and as many resources and information as we can obtain as soon as we have them. **Look for a MailChimp in the last week of December/first week of January. Check out the dedicated page frequently.**

Come one, come all.

Merry Christmas!

Fr. Tom Dunne and Sr. Denise Sickinger for the team



Opening of this year's Nativity scene at the Vatican
Screenshot taken from Vatican News' YouTube

The 800th Anniversary of the Nativity Scene at Greccio

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INTRODUCTION BY SR. DENISE SICKINGER, FMA

Dearest Friends,

How much need there is for our world to turn to Bethlehem to contemplate the love, peace, and joy in the midst of wonder, suffering, and the truly miraculous event of the birth of the Incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, Our Lord and only Savior of the world! This Christmas and every day may we give witness to our faith in Christ, in the beauty of true family life as modeled by Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Let us join together in prayer for the conversion of our world to the family values, the profession of the sanctity of all life, and the safeguarding of the right to life and the innocence of our children. May we have no fear in professing the truths of Christ regarding marriage, family, and sexual matters to others. Family love, lived as the Holy Family in the grace of God the Father, will heal all ills.

May we also take advantage of the plenary indulgence granted by Pope Francis on this anniversary, for the remission of all punishment for our sins. Please see below for the requirements for proper reception. The indulgence may be obtained once per day from the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 2023) through the Feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple (February 2, 2024) in any church run by Franciscan friars, of any branch. You may also obtain it for the sake of someone who is deceased.

Blessed Christmas!

After visiting Bethlehem, Francis wanted to imitate the humble setting of Christ's birth.

In 1221, St. Francis had a novel idea. To celebrate the birth of Jesus, Francis wanted to recreate the experience of the first Christmas. He did this not with statues inside a church, but with animals in a humble hilltop grove [in Greccio, Italy]. Francis' inspiration came after traveling to the Holy Land and seeing the exact site of Christ's birth. The poverty of it all deeply impacted Francis and was a particular element that he wanted to celebrate on Christmas.

Franciscan friar Thomas of Celano narrates the rest of the story.

[A]bout 15 days before the Nativity of the Lord, [Francis] said to [a friend in Greccio], "... For I would make memorial of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, and in some sort behold with bodily eyes His infant hardships; how He lay in a manger on the hay, with the ox and the ass standing by."

There Simplicity was honored, Poverty exalted, Humility commended; and of Greccio there was made as it were a new Bethlehem. The night was lit up as the day, and was delightful to men and beasts ... [Francis] stood before the manger, full of sighs, overcome with tenderness and filled with wondrous joy. The solemnities of Mass were celebrated over the manger, and the priest enjoyed a new consolation.

According to St. Bonaventure, a miracle also occurred on that night and someone noticed St. Francis holding the Christ Child.



*Promotional image for the 800th anniversary of the Nativity scene at Greccio
Courtesy of <https://ofm.org/>*

A certain valiant and veracious soldier ... affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvellously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep.

The scene was powerful for all present and emphasized the poverty into which Christ was born. It was truly "Franciscan" in every sense of the word.

The idea caught on quickly and in 1291 the first Franciscan pope (Nicholas IV) commissioned statues to create the first permanent Nativity scene in the Roman Basilica of St. Mary Major. Ever since, Nativity scenes in all shapes and sizes have been created throughout the world and they are one of the most popular Christmas traditions.



Read the original article by Philip Kosloski.

The Franciscan Family asked the Holy Father to grant the plenary indulgence on April 17, 2023, **"in order to promote the spiritual renewal of the faithful and increase the life of grace,"** as reads the petition sent to the Apostolic Penitentiary. *"By stopping in prayer in front of the nativity scenes,"* the faithful may obtain the Plenary Indulgence under the usual conditions. *(Sacramental Confession, Eucharistic Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff);* it is necessary to participate devoutly in the jubilee rites, or at least to pause before the creche prepared there, spending an appropriate span of time in pious meditation, concluding with the *Our Father, the Profession of Faith, and invocations to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, as well as St. Francis of Assisi.*

Invocation to the Holy Family and Saint Francis of Assisi

Oh Good Jesus, contemplating this Nativity Scene, I ask You for the grace of forgiveness of my sins. You are the dawn from on high made Flesh to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. You made Your home among us and loved us to the point of

giving Your life for us. You did not come to condemn the world but to save it. Give me the grace of sincere repentance and the humility to recognize my frailty. Give me faith in Your mercy and renew in me the joy of Your salvation.

Mary, Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Church, teach us the joy of the humble and of those who believe in the promises of the Lord. Help us to proclaim the greatness of the God who accompanies and saves suffering humanity. You are the dawn of a new creation. You are Virgin made Church, you are Mother of grace and mercy. Listen to our plea with the tenderness of your immaculate heart.

Saint Joseph, just and faithful servant of the Lord, you are a holy and generous custodian. Do not take your care away from us, lost pilgrims in search of the true homeland. Protect the Church from the snares of the Evil One and teach us to trust in the One who gave His only Son to rescue us from sin, evil, and death.

Saint Francis of Assisi, you who loved the poor and humble Christ so much that you wanted to relive in Greccio, with faith and devotion, the night of His birth in Bethlehem, intercede for us so that we can contemplate with a clean heart the beauty of the Incarnation of the Son of God and the kindness of His gaze that calls us to a new life. **Amen.**

Pray the Litany of the Holy Family with us

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, hear us. **Christ, graciously hear us.**

God, the Father of Heaven, **have mercy on us.**

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, **have mercy on us.**

God, the Holy Spirit, **have mercy on us.**

Holy Trinity, one God, **have mercy on us.**

- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, **pray for us.***
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, most worthy of our veneration,*
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, called “the Holy Family” from all time,*
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Son, Mother, and Head of the Holy Family,*

- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Divine Child, pure Spouse, and chaste Spouse,*
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, restorers of fallen families,*
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, image of the Blessed Trinity here on earth,*
- *Holy Family, tested by the greatest of difficulties,*
- *Holy Family, with much suffering on the journey to Bethlehem,*
- *Holy Family, without a welcome in Bethlehem,*
- *Holy Family, visited by the poor shepherds,*
- *Holy Family, obliged to live in a stable,*
- *Holy Family, praised by the angels,*
- *Holy Family, venerated by the wise men from the East,*
- *Holy Family, greeted by the pious Simeon in the temple,*
- *Holy Family, persecuted and exiled to a foreign country,*
- *Holy Family, hidden and unknown in Nazareth,*
- *Holy Family, faithful in the observance of divine laws,*
- *Holy Family, perfect model of the Christian family,*
- *Holy Family, center of peace and concord,*
- *Holy Family, whose Protector is a model of paternal care,*
- *Holy Family, whose Mother is a model of maternal diligence,*
- *Holy Family, whose Divine Child is a model of filial obedience,*
- *Holy Family, poor in material goods, but rich in divine blessings,*
- *Holy Family, as nothing in the eyes of men, but so great in heaven,*
- *Holy Family, our support in life and our hope in death,*
- *Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.

Christ, hear us. Christ, graciously hear us.



Let us pray. O God of infinite goodness and kindness, who has deigned to call us to this Family, give us the grace to venerate Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, so that, imitating them in this life, we may enjoy with them the life to come. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. **Amen.**



Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School students celebrate the joy of Advent and Christmas at convocation.
Courtesy of Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School's Facebook



**Let Us Live the Dream
That Makes Us Dream**



**Maria Auxilium Christianorum,
ora pro nobis!**



**"For you, I study; for you, I work;
for you, I live; for you, I am ready
even to give my life."**



- St. John Bosco



Our email address is:

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**OUR LADY LOVES THOSE WHO
ARE YOUNG, MAKE SURE YOU
CALL UPON HER OFTEN.**

St. John Bosco