INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS
Founded by Saint John Bosco
and by Saint Mary Domenica Mazzarello

No. 1058

Mary, faithful Virgen, sustains our fidelity

Dearest Sisters,

I reach out to you during the Easter season, a time when the liturgy particularly illuminates and accompanies our days, calling us back to a personal encounter with the Risen Jesus, just as the women, Mary, and the Apostles experienced it in the wonder of faith. These are the credible witnesses who, having lived through the drama of the Lord's Passion and death, and having felt the fear, sadness, and anguish of having lost Him forever, strengthened their faith and hope in the joy of His Resurrection.

The liturgy, which marks the stages of our Paschal journey, sustains us in the deep motivations of our vocation as consecrated women and as Salesians. We are called, by the grace of Baptism, to share in the life of Jesus, to be renewed in this mystery of death and glory that we celebrated during the Lord's Easter and which continues in every Eucharist, where faith is nourished and sustained (cf. Pope Leo XIV, *Regina Caeli*, 12 April 2026).
Our life has meaning only if each day we are capable of making a renewed choice for Him and remaining faithful to Him. For this reason, in this Circular, I would like to propose that we allow ourselves to be inspired by Mary, her fidelity sustains our own fidelity.

With Mary, first disciple and missionary

Every morning, as an Institute "wholly of Mary," we entrust ourselves to Mary Help of Christians and ask her to sustain our fidelity, especially in the hour of trial. For it was in the hour of trial that she, too, faced the challenge of fidelity, just as the disciples did; yet she, the Mother of Jesus, did not hold back, nor did she flee, as did those who betrayed Him.
She remained by Jesus' side. *She stood by the cross*, as the Gospel tells us (cf. Jn 19:25). The image of "standing" evokes stability, a dignified presence, strong in love. It speaks to us of the ability to "remain" steadfast amidst situations of trial, maintaining a faithful closeness to Jesus as He suffers and gives His life for the salvation of the world.

As you were able to read in Circular 1056, the objective of the 25th General Chapter is to "revive the missionary passion characteristic of our charismatic identity."
This aspect is fundamental for us, because the missionary spirit flows from the very project of salvation for young people, a project that God entrusted to Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, and which He entrusts to us today. The missionary spirit is embodied in welcoming young people and in "being" alongside them, giving life to open communities that joyfully express the desire to live out the Gospel and the charism in the present day, in fidelity to our holy Founders.

In this endeavor, we look to Mary, the faithful Virgin 'par excellence', she who said "yes" with faith to God's plan for her life, even though she did not understand it. Therefore, she is the first believer, the blessed among women by virtue of her faith, the first disciple of Jesus, and the first missionary.
Indeed, she gave her willing "yes" to an unexpected and startling announcement. Immediately after receiving that announcement, Mary set out with haste, going to visit Elizabeth on a mission

of charity, an act that strengthened her in her faith. Elizabeth herself, in the joy of their encounter, recognized her as the Mother of her Lord, as the one who had believed.
Mary and Elizabeth joined together in singing the *Magnificat*, a hymn celebrating the blessedness of those who believe and who are able to recognize, within the fabric of history, the presence of the Lord who works great things in the humble and the poor. It is within His greatness that littleness acquires value. Precisely because she is small before God, Mary can say "yes" with total openness, without reservation. Her poverty renders her pleasing to Him, so much so that He Himself finds in her heart, even before than in her body, a worthy dwelling place in which to draw near to humanity.

Mary Inspirer and Helper

Don Bosco desired that our Institute bear a strongly Marian imprint. The same holds true for his great Family: the Salesians, the Salesian Cooperators, the Past Pupils, and, etc. To us, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, however, he entrusted the specific task of expressing within the Salesian Family, the motherhood of Mary, and of living out our fidelity by drawing inspiration from her as our Help and as an educator-evangelizer:

"We strive to make her dispositions
of faith, hope, and charity
and her perfect union with Christ our own.
Let us open our hearts to the joyous humility of the Magnificat
to be helpers like her,
especially among young people" (C 4).

We, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are called, by our very vocation, to relive in the present-day Mary's total self-giving to God, acting as Helper and missionary ever on the move. The image of Mary Help of Christians, desired by Don Bosco and painted by Lorenzone in the Basilica in Turin, evokes not stasis, but dynamism. In his book, *Mary Help of Christians: An Account of Certain Graces Obtained During the First Seven Years Following the Consecration of the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin* (written in 1875), Don Bosco describes the painting as follows:
"The Most Holy Mary is depicted there amidst a sea of light and majesty, seated upon a throne of clouds and crowned with stars, as well as with the diadem by which she is proclaimed Queen of Heaven and Earth. A host of angels, forming a crown around her, pay her homage as their Queen. In her right hand, she holds the scepter, the symbol of her power, as if alluding to the words she uttered in the Holy Gospel: *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est*. "He who is mighty has done great things for me." In her left hand, she holds the Child, whose arms are outstretched, thereby offering His graces and mercy to all who turn to His August Mother.

At the top of the painting are depicted God the Father and the Holy Spirit. From them, rays of light rain down all around the Most Holy Mary, almost as if to say to her: *Virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*, "The power of the Most High shall overshadow you."; *Ave Maria gratia plena,* "Hail Mary, full of grace." God saves you, O Mary, you are full of grace.
Further down appear the holy Apostles and the Evangelists, Saint Luke and Saint Mark, rendered in figures somewhat larger than life-size. Transported by a sweet ecstasy and as if exclaiming, *Regina Apostolorum, ora pro nobis*, "Queen of Apostles, pray for us". They gaze in astonishment upon the Holy Virgin, who appears to them majestically above the clouds. [...] In general, the work is well executed, well-proportioned, and naturalistic; yet its enduring merit, a quality it shall never lose, lies in the religious concept it embodies, which evokes a devout impression in the heart of anyone who beholds it.

Mary embodies the dynamic love of an attentive motherhood, one that looks after her children, often anticipating the response to their needs. By looking to Mary, as Pope Francis taught us, "we

return to believing in the revolutionary power of tenderness and affection. In her, we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong, those who do not need to mistreat others to feel important. By looking to her, we discover that she who praised God because He 'has cast down the mighty from their thrones' and 'sent the rich away empty-handed' (Lk 1:52–53) is the very same one who provides a sense of home to our quest for justice" (EG 288).

Mary, a tender and strong Mother, sustains communion in the nascent Church and teaches the first believers fidelity in following Jesus. Precisely at the foot of the Cross, she accepts the task of caring for us. Her motherhood fosters fraternal bonds, safeguards the unity of the family, strengthens fidelity to Jesus, and teaches a relational style founded on gentleness, trust, and the courage and boldness to live out the mission and to look toward the future with faith.

Fidelity to our vocation; fidelity to God, loved above all else.

Fidelity is an important and indispensable dimension of our consecration, yet in this historical moment, it is being put to the test. Indeed, today's culture of the provisional influences life choices and the very vocation to religious life.
Fidelity, despite being a virtue often neglected in our time, is indispensable in human relationships and in the consecrated life. When lived with love and generosity, fidelity enables us to "remain" steadfast in the love of God and responsible in responding to His unique and ever-new call (cf. C 103).
We know that fidelity is not an easy or inexpensive attainment. It requires a profound awareness of the initial motivations behind our response to the Lord, who called us to follow Him, and it commits us to a continuous journey of conversion, one in which there is no room for mediocrity.
In reading Article 8 of our Constitutions, we realize just how true this is, particularly when emphasizing the significance of the words, "above all else":

"Through the grace of the Holy Spirit
we give ourselves to God, whom we love above all else,
by following Christ more closely
in His mission of salvation."

Giving ourselves to God, "loved above all else" constantly propels us beyond ourselves. It helps us savor the beauty of fraternal life, which becomes a sharing and a source of mutual support. It safeguards personal fidelity and brings fruitfulness to our common mission.
It seems important to me to frequently reread and meditate upon the passage from the Gospel of Mark: "This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" *(Mk 7:6).*
The diagnosis Jesus offers highlights the dichotomy between what is uttered with the lips and what is lived out in the heart, and in the consistency of fidelity.

Faced with forms of distress and malaise that affect even our own communities and tarnish the credibility of our consecration, I ask myself, what are we lacking to live out joyful fidelity?
Why is it that, at times, even after so many years of consecrated life and fruitful apostolic experiences, we lose the enthusiasm and freshness of our response to the Lord?
Let us try to ask ourselves, *whom* does our heart seek? *What thoughts and desires* occupy the depths of our heart, and upon which we dwell?

Pope Francis has repeatedly identified the dangers that threaten the joy of belonging to the Lord and that, at the same time, undermine the credibility of consecrated life: "individualism, spiritualism, withdrawal into small worlds, dependency, complacency, the repetition of rigid patterns, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, and taking refuge in rules" *(Gaudete et Exsultate 134).*

The *mystical* perspective of the Christian and Salesian life finds its fullness in the spousal encounter with Jesus, that is, in the quality of one's relationship with Him and in a life of prayer. It is necessary to "rediscover the first love, the inspiring spark from which the following of Christ began. The primacy of love belongs to Him. Following Christ is solely a response of love to the love of God. If "we love," it is "because He first loved us" *(1 Jn 4:10, 19).* This means recognizing His personal love with that intimate awareness which led the Apostle Paul to say, "Christ loved *me* and gave His life *for me" (Gal 2:20)* (Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 22).

Without a return to our first love, to a relationship of intimacy with the Lord, we run the risk of failing to remain faithful to our specific *charismatic identity*, reducing the fulfillment of our mission solely to works and activities of human promotion. We even run the risk of forgetting that, in giving ourselves to others, particularly to youth most in need, we are loving and serving Jesus, just as He Himself affirms (cf. *Mt* 25:31 ff.).
In carrying out our mission, we discover a sure path to holiness, which we walk each day alongside the young people, as Article 5 of the Constitutions reminds us:

"United in community
we bind ourselves by public vow
to follow Christ, chaste, poor, and obedient,
totally available
for His mission of salvation.

In this way we proclaim
our will to live for the glory of God
by our service for the evangelization of young people,
walking with them on the path to holiness."

It is a path of holiness that we wish to pursue *together* and may Mary Help of Christians assist us in becoming sparks of hope, offering gestures of humanity to the people we encounter who are in need. In particular, we wish to reach, through our prayer and daily offering, the children, young people, and families who are currently suffering due to wars, other forms of violence, and unacceptable injustices.

To Mary, Mother of the Church and of humanity, we entrust Pope Leo XIV who, with courage and love for the truth of the Gospel, invokes peace for the entire human family. May she, Our Lady of difficult times, sustain him, comfort him, and grant him the joy of being, in this present age, a faithful herald of Jesus, who even today tells us, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

I wish you the grace to live out the joy of the Resurrection in your daily lives and to spread it to those around you.

Rome, 24 April 2026

Affectionately Mother