

## Sharing life

Dearest Sisters,

We reach you at the end of this *Plenum*, in which we shared the rich experience of the encounters and visits made in the last semester by Mother and by the General Councilors. Thanking for what has been lived in every reality, we strengthen the certainty that "presence is life-giving" and that the path proposed in GC XXIV for each Province is a valid guide to responding to the calls of contemporaneity.

### **An important year with Mother Caterina Daghero**

Next 26 February marks the centenary of the death of Mother Caterina Daghero who, at only 25 years of age, replaced Mother Mazzarello in the leadership of the Institute. It was a task that she carried maternally and wisely, with authoritativeness and missionary zeal for 43 years. It is a figure to be rediscovered and fundamental to understand the dynamics of consolidation and development of our Institute in a period marked by countless transformations in the world, in the Church, and in the Salesian Family.

During this centenary year, some publications and initiatives will allow us to study deeply this woman who was called "the dearest of Mothers". Sister Catherine knew and was accompanied by Don Bosco both in her first formative experiences in contact with the reality of youth in Turin, different from that of Nizza, and at the beginning of her task as Superior General.

Surely, the most difficult and painful moment for her was the separation of our Institute from the Salesian Congregation, requested by the Holy See after the issuing of *Normae secundum quas* (1901). Yet, that pruning revealed the solidity of the Institute and its charismatic potential. Mother Catherine and all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians could count on the discreet and wise fatherhood of Fr. Michele Rua, as a guarantee of fidelity to the same original spirit. She said with determination, "We belong to Don Bosco; we must think, do, pray, live, as he taught us." And also, "Where our work is not yet present, we must go. We must bring the spirit and Our Lady of Don Bosco."

During her government, the Institute obtained recognition of Pontifical Right and initiated the cause of beatification of Mother Mazzarello. With the valuable collaboration of the General Councilors and with bold faith, she continued to send the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to the most distant mission places, so much so that, at her death, the Institute was present in 34 nations of 4 Continents. She herself made over 400 journeys, America included, with the desire to "see for herself" and be with her daughters with motherliness and understanding, having clear the goal of the mission to be reached with open-mindedness and courageous determination.

In the wake of Don Bosco who, in his "dream at nine years", had received the mandate, "Not with blows, but with meekness and charity... with obedience and knowledge..." Mother Daghero promoted not only catechetical and social works, but also the Normal Schools for the formation of qualified educators and teachers (religious and lay) according to the Preventive System of Don Bosco. In 1900, the process of equalization of the Normal School of Nizza begun in 1896 was accomplished. Many competent missionary educators and municipal teachers were formed in that school.

She also encouraged the opening of numerous festive oratories and the animation of the parish catechesis, exhorting, "Do not pay attention to toil, to sacrifices for the good of the oratorians... open, open the doors wide in the oratory... you will be formed by studying and teaching catechism." She courageously accepted that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would direct boarding schools for workers, hostels for university students and employees, and other educational and promotional works that responded to the needs of a world in transformation due to the Industrial Revolution, with the involvement of many girls in work outside the home.

She was open to collaboration with lay associations and various administrations, to encourage assistance and preventive formation. Her charity and loyalty to the *da mihi animas cetera tolle* were the driving force behind her intense governing activity.

With this centenary, we begin a three-year period of preparation for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our first missionary expedition (1877), which followed that of the Salesians (1875). The celebrations will begin in 2025 and we will shortly communicate them to the whole Institute.

### **Build peace**

The drama of war is still perpetuated today in history, even if "with his work and his ingenuity, man has always tried to develop his own life" (*Gaudium et spes*, 33). After all, peace is not a good that is achieved once and for all, but requires continuous and dynamic commitment to generate it every day. We cannot remain indifferent to the continuous tragic news coming to us from the channels of information and we are in solidarity with our Sisters who, in different parts of the world, live more directly situations of violence, aggression, conflict, and abuse of power, with its dramatic consequences for the educative mission as well.

Humanity desires peace, but has not yet found the way to reach it. In a prayer for peace, the Pope noted that we do not know well what we mean by peace. We have tried so many times and for so many years to resolve our conflicts with our forces and also with our weapons. [...] But our efforts were in vain. [...] Instill in us the courage to make concrete gestures to build peace" (Pope Francis, *Prayer for Peace*, 8 June 2014). It is our daily behaviors that generate a culture of peace, that affect and spread in society. At the same time, peace is a gift of God to be invoked with trusting insistence. At this historical moment, we are called to intensify our prayer and our daily commitment to multiply gestures of peace, letting small things fall and cultivating benevolence and reconciliation in our relationships. Let us pray the Hail Mary for peace, which we already recite together every morning, with greater awareness and a spirit of communion, feeling that we are part of the great human family. To deepen the true meaning of peace, our Magazine *Da Mihi Animas* will address this theme, always current, throughout the year 2024. The intention is to cultivate a common idea of peace and justice, to better understand the importance of listening to the Word of God, which reveals His dream of peace for humanity. Moreover, to rediscover the relevance of the Preventive System as a valid instrument of education for peace, which enables us to "take care" of the new generations to help them build more human and generative life relationships.

### ***The process of updating our documents***

We are continuing our commitment to update the text of the *Formation Plan*, "*Rooted in the Covenant*" and to review the *Guidelines of the FMA educational mission* "So that they may have life and have it to the full". In this period, the *Focus Groups* have been organized as a way that favors the involvement of many Educating Communities and expresses the conviction that true renewal is measured, not only in the documents produced, but in the "effective growth of personal and community identity in the spirit of the Salesian-Mornese charism" (Circ. 1031).

The Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors asked questions, identified the characteristics of the people, and the Inter-Provincial Conferences indicated the participants and facilitators of these groups. The majority of these focus groups, which will involve about one thousand people from all

continents (FMA, young people in formation, lay people, young people, local Churches, and other members of the Salesian Family), will take place online in the first part of the year. In January, the online meeting of the *Focus Group* facilitators was held. The full transcript of the meetings will be analyzed in view of the revision of the two documents.

### ***Activities and celebrations for the next semester***

One of the priority choices highlighted by General Chapter XXIV was that of formation: in every circumstance, at every age, and for every time. On this depends our spiritual growth, the quality of our witness of daily life, the fruitfulness of the mission, the relations among us and with creation. To form ourselves and grow together, from 7 to 27 February, the Conference for Novice Formators on the theme: *Being Formators of Novices today*, is taking place in the Generalate. *How to accompany and personalize formation by activating new formative processes?* Among the aims is to rethink the processes of vocational discernment and accompaniment in the light of anthropological challenges and their educational implications in personal growth and in fragile identity processes.

As we have already shared in Circular No. 1030, the celebration of the Seminars "For a service of generative authority" in March, will allow us to reach the Provincials, the Provincial Councils, and the Sector Referents of the Interprovincial Conferences CIB, CICSAL, CINAB.

At this time, we also begin the preparation for the World Feast of Gratitude, which we are invited to live in communion with "St. John Bosco" Province of Mozambique. The Vicar General, in synergy with the Province, has already sent the details of the feast.

We have received with joy the announcement of Pope Francis proclaiming the first World Children's Day on 25 and 26 May in Rome. We thank him for his attention and predilection for boys and girls and we feel enthusiastically involved in this great ecclesial initiative, so much in tune with our charism, which will also engage us at the local level.

In preparation for Jubilee 2025, "Pilgrims of Hope", a memorial of God's mercy for His people, the Pope invites us to live and dedicate this year to prayer. And thus he writes, "What better teacher could we have than our Holy Mother? Let us put ourselves at her school; let us learn from her to live every day, every moment, every occupation with an interior gaze turned to Jesus; joys and sorrows, satisfactions and problems. All in the presence and with the grace of Jesus, the Lord. All with gratitude and hope" (Pope Francis, *Homily at the First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God*, 31 December 2023).

We have already sent the letter for the preparation at local and provincial levels of the Triennial Verification, which we will carry out by Interprovincial conferences in 2025. It will be a new opportunity that the Institute offers us to revive the awareness of our charismatic identity, to re-read our experience in the light of the Word of God and of today's challenges, and, together with young people, to project ourselves with new hope towards the future.

During this Lent, we entrust ourselves to Mary, the Teacher and the Guide, so that she may help us to live everything with joy and hope, with faith and apostolic enthusiasm.

Rome, 24 February 2024

Mother and the Sisters of the Council