

“Mornese outgoing”: communities that proclaim Jesus with their life

Dearest Sisters,

I write to you with a heart full of gratitude for the many expressions of affection and closeness that I received on the occasion of the World Feast of Gratitude and I assure you of my prayer for all you hold in your heart. Together with you, I thank the Educating Communities and the members of the Salesian Family who made themselves present in various ways. I am also grateful for the concrete signs of solidarity that I received and that will be a gift for those most in need.

In presence or online, we shared the pilgrimage in our beloved Salesian land and walking again the stages of our history, we have again enjoyed and appreciated the grace of being a Religious Family wanted by Mary and sustained by Her over time amid the many cultural and social changes.

Article 1 of the Constitutions reminds us of the origins of the Institute and in a few lines, traces the identity of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, “Through a gift of the Holy Spirit and with the direct intervention of Mary, St. John Bosco founded our Institute as a response of salvation to the profound hopes of young girls and women. He endowed it with a spiritual heritage inspired by the charity of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and imparted to it a strong missionary characteristic.”

When Pope Francis visited us during General Chapter XXIV, he invited us to transform the contemporaneity in which we are living into a *Kairos*, a favorable time to go to the charismatic roots, working on the essential, and rediscovering the beauty of consecrated life. It is a call to let ourselves be questioned by the Lord and by reality, to be the prophecy of the Gospel, witnesses of Christ and of His style of life. To be consecrated Women ready to collaborate with the creativity of the Holy Spirit in continually re-visiting the charism and ensure that it expresses all its vitality today.

Don Bosco imparted to our Institute a strong missionary characteristic

I would like to dwell on this aspect to deepen with you the missionary dimension, essential element of the Institute’s identity. (Cf. C 75)

In article 6 of the Constitutions, we find well expressed the ideal program of Don Bosco shared and assumed in an original and creative way by Mother Mazzarello, “the ‘da mihi animas cetera tolle,’ that led Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello to make themselves a total gift to the little ones and to the poor, this is the soul of our educative mission.

It urges us to go to children and young people of the working class, especially the poorest, to help them grow to full stature in Christ. Striving to keep alive the missionary fervor of our origins, we work for the spreading of God’s Kingdom...”

The missionary spirit is deeply rooted in the sequela of Christ and is expressed in missionary daring. It is an impetus that for us is transformed into educative passion and in the search for a constant vital renewal, moved by Gospel joy. The missionary spirit should be lived by us as a natural dimension of our life. If we do not feel in our every action the intense desire to proclaim Jesus, then as the Pope reminds us, “we need to pray insistently that He will once more touch our hearts.” (*EG*, 264).

The proposal for holiness, totally shared and assumed by Mother Mazzarello, that Don Bosco offers to the Salesians and to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, is that of living radically and with great generosity, the sequela of Jesus for the salvation of young people.

To make God known and loved is to respond to the deepest needs of the human heart, thirsty for light, for love, for the infinite. This was precisely the fundamental missionary inspiration of the educational plan of Mary Domenica Mazzarello.

For us, her daughters, the spiritual life thus consists in living in God’s presence, feeling ourselves indwelled by Him, and remaining in His love through fidelity to little things and to the indications of the Rule, especially by participating in the salvific mission of Christ in the Church.

The apostolic tension, shared by the first communities both at Valdocco and at Mornese, is ardent, strongly motivated, and expressed in a capacity for adaptation to everything, to the point of extreme sacrifice, without self-seeking or protagonism.

It is a model of a joyful and austere life that is built day after day in a readiness without limits and without hesitations (remember the example of the handkerchief), in an essential, ascetical, and generous style. The *cetera tolle* requires radical choices: tireless hard work, daring and patient charity, amiability in relationships, and fidelity to the community dimension of the mission.

In the resolutions of the first Superiors’ meeting at Mornese in 1878, we read that “the two inseparable goals of our Congregation are: become holy and make ourselves useful to the Institute, glorifying the Lord. A daughter who enters with the intention of thinking only of her soul is not suitable for the accomplishment of duties that are incumbent on the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians” (*Orme di vita*, 239). Thus, the missionary dimension belongs to the very identity of the Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

It is interesting to recall that in the third missionary expedition of February 1881, Mother Mazzarello was not well and had a very high fever when they were at Sampierdarena, by now close to departure. She asked Don Bosco to say a few words to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. He willingly accepted the invitation and thus said to the missionaries, “...work as best you can in the way the Lord counsels you. But this work must be shared, and then it will not be heavy. Each of you must seek to work for one and not for three. It is a good rule of life that will keep you healthy, and with God’s help, you will become saints...I recommend to you, do not hold on to anything! That is, do not hold to discontent, suspicions, jealousies...deposit these miseries at the feet of Jesus and you will live happily. I urge you, be charitable with your neighbor” (Maccono F., *St. Mary D. Mazzarello* II, 321).

Still at the same event, before the definitive departure of the missionaries, Mother Mazzarello, as Sr. Lorenzina Natale recalled, gathered her strength to leave a few simple reminders, “Relentless war on self-love, pride. Spirit of humility, piety, and simplicity” (*Ibid*, 327).

Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello teach us that the ardor of the *da mihi animas* cannot be expressed without the realism of the *cetera tolle*. Herein lies the secret of its fruitfulness.

Our entire history shows how since the beginnings of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, they possess an educative and evangelizing self-awareness, which is the unifying reason for every Salesian action, and they are convinced that the missionary perspective does not depend so much on the type of work that is done, but on a fundamental attitude of the heart, which is the awareness of living for the glory of God and for the salvation of young people.

This attitude helps to achieve vocational unity and gives fruitfulness to the mission.

Article 75 of the Constitutions reminds us that “the missionary dimension, an essential element of the identity of the Institute and the expression of its universality, has been part of our history since its very beginning. We work among the people who have not yet received the good news of the Word so that they may find in Christ the deep meaning of their aspirations and of their cultural values.”

This very important dimension nourishes the awareness of belonging to a religious Family open to the various Nations, without barriers of language and of culture. This gives our experience a broad and universal horizon through which the transfer of sisters, not only from one Province to another, but from one Nation to another, facilitates inter-change, the sense of belonging, overcomes nationalisms, and renders visible the concreteness of the missionary dimension of the Institute. This increases the responsibility of everyone in sharing the life of the Institute and of its continuous expansion in the world.

Communities “outgoing”

We recognize with gratitude that, at the origins of our Institute, the first missionaries arriving in America experienced the fruitfulness of the inculturation of the Gospel and of the Preventive System. They were young women animated by great missionary fervor, ready to face any sacrifice and difficulty, to proclaim the Gospel in unknown places.

Animated by strong vocational motivations, they knew how to understand with spiritual intelligence and a generous heart, the reality of the culture and the needs of the persons met. They offered with simplicity, and not without sacrifice, their contribution as an evangelical response and witness of life. This fundamental experience, rooted in a profound love for Jesus and open to the ecclesial context, expanding to ever wider apostolic horizons, continues today to inspire our educational mission and to renew our missionary ardor, wherever we find ourselves.

We are called together, to a new ‘missionary going’. Each community is called to discern the missionary path that the Lord is opening before them, and we are all invited to take this journey with generosity, to leave our own comforts to reach the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel.

The Gospel joy that fills the life of the disciples’ community is missionary joy, sign that the Gospel was proclaimed and is bearing fruit. However, this requires putting into action the dynamics of the exodus and of the gift, that is, to go out of oneself, to go and sow always, again, without getting tired. Whoever evangelizes is always on a journey, searching together with others. This also applies to our communities. Just as it is important to pay attention to everyone, not to leave anyone behind, not to keep those who struggle at a distance, not to withdraw into comfortable relationships. Whoever really proclaims does not seek escape from the world, nor from the community. Whoever proclaims welcomes God’s dream of love and tries to reach everyone because they know no enemies, but only traveling companions with whom to share this love.

Pope Francis, in his discourse to the participants to the International Meeting *The outgoing Church*, in November 2019, affirmed, “I want to tell you with great simplicity, the joy of the Gospel flows from the encounter with Jesus. It is when we meet the Lord that we are inundated with the love of which He alone is capable. Then, when we allow God to lead us beyond ourselves, life changes and we reach our truest self. Therein is the source of evangelizing action, because at that point the need to proclaim is born spontaneously, becomes unstoppable, even without words, with witness. This is how evangelization began on Easter morning, with a woman-apostle, Mary Magdalene who, after having met the Risen Jesus, the Living One, evangelized the Apostles.”

The *new wine* of the charism that for 150 years nourishes the vocational fruitfulness of the Institute, empowers joy and amazement at the call to be missionary communities. It urges us to yet be “Mornese in outreach”, communities that proclaim Jesus with their lives, who take on the challenges of change, and witness to Gospel values that make us take charge of the various shades of poverty present in the existential and geographical peripheries. (Cf *Acts GC XXIV*, n. 26).

In General Chapter XXIV, we assumed as a priority choice missionary solidarity as a style of life. Together, we want to listen to and respond to the missionary mandate of Jesus, “Go and make disciples of all peoples.” And in that ‘go’ we discover the ever-new scenarios and the challenges of our educational mission.

Pope Francis encourages us to go ahead without fear, “Let us not be held back by the fear of making mistakes and the fear of following new paths. In life we all make mistakes, everyone. It's normal. There are no priorities to place before the proclamation of the resurrection, the kerygma of hope. Our poverties are not obstacles, but precious instruments, because God's grace loves to manifest itself in weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12: 9) ”(*Audience*, 15 January 2020). Faithful to the model of the Master, we go out to proclaim the Gospel to everyone, in all places, on all occasions, without delay, and without fear.

The solemnity of Pentecost, which occurs this year at the beginning of June, calls us back to the Upper Room, the place where Mary is present with the women and the “brothers of Jesus” (cf Acts 1:14) and urges us as Church outgoing, as educating people and communities, to continue the journey towards the celebration of the 150th anniversary which will reach its climax on the coming 5 August. As a sign of fidelity to the charism, like the first sisters of Mornese, I invite you to try to revive in all of us and in every environment the missionary call “to encourage missionary vocations” (C 75).

Mary Help of Christians, Star of the New Evangelization, in these difficult times that humanity is going through, help us bear witness to the freshness of the Gospel, grant us the ardor of our first missionaries, and the daring to seek new ways for the Kingdom of God to be proclaimed to all.

May Mary implore peace from God for wounded and suffering humanity; stop the horrors of war in various parts of the world and give the new generations the hope to look to the future of a better world. I thank you with all my heart for the good you give. I bless you and accompany you with my prayer.

On the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, I will be in the Basilica in Turin and I will entrust to her your life and your desire to be ‘Mornese outgoing’ in joy and with a missionary heart.

Rome, 24 May 2022

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2022

Africa

Province “St. Mary D. Mazzarello” AEC
Sr. Vera Cruz Roca Botey

Province “O. L. of Hope” AFE
Sr. Agness Mambwe Ngosa

Province “Mother of God” AFO
Sr. Yvette Badini

America

Province “St. Francis Xavier” ABB
Sr. Mariel Inés Martínez

Province “Our Lady Aparecida” BAP
Sr. Alaíde Deretti

Province “Our Lady of the Angels” CAR
Sr. Sandra Elizabeth Yela

Asia

Province “Sacred Heart of Jesus” INK
Sr. Lucy Rose Ozhukayil

Europe

Province “O.L. of Good Counsel” IMR
Sr. Ivana Milesi

Province “Mary Help of Christians” PLA
Sr. Anna Szczęsna

Province “Mary Help of Christians” SPA
Sr. María del Rosario Ten Soriano