

For a formation that transforms life

Dearest Sisters,

From the echoes received, we know that everywhere the culminating and solemn moment of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute was lived on August 5th. In some parts of the world, this celebration was intertwined with the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of the presence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and therefore contributed to increasing the enthusiasm and involvement of young people, of the educating communities, of the Salesian Family. I am thinking of the recent experience of the celebrations for the centenary of our presence in Germany, Cuba, Poland, India, and Panama. I thank you for your participation and generous response in the organization and implementation of this event that has taken on a strong vocational connotation. There was great commitment, an accurate and unanimous preparation without calculating the sacrifice, and this will certainly have re-awakened the sense of belonging to the Lord and to the Institute.

I wish that everyone will prolong the fruits of these events of grace over time to 'rekindle the fire' of our vocation, make the educational mission more fruitful, and be communities that generate life and hope in the heart of contemporaneity.

We thank the Lord for the 111 new-perpetually Professed, for the 144 newly professed of this 150th anniversary, and for the fidelity of each one, especially the Sisters who celebrated 25, 50, 60, 70, 75, 80 years of consecrated life.

Let us allow ourselves to be formed and transformed *together* by life

In GC XXIV, the Chapter Assembly, allowing itself to be enlightened by the presence of Jesus and Mary at the wedding at Cana, made three indispensable choices: to be in ongoing formation for a new vocational impulse, to walk in synodality, to network in the perspective of integral ecology. Three actions whose guiding thread is the *prophecy of presence*, our being there in this 'today' personally and as community. We are called to live life as a vocation with our specific Marian identity and to rediscover the Salesian charism in all its apostolic and missionary dynamism (Cf *Acts GC XXIV*, p.15).

These are choices that lead to a wise reading of reality and help us to walk with our feet on the ground and our minds turned to Heaven, in a continuous attitude of *docibilitas*.

There is a need in the communities for formation to be rooted in the concreteness of reality and to harmonize the different dimensions of the person in the various stages of life in vocational unity.

Also, in the *Report on the life of the Institute in the 2014-2020 six-year period*, the priority of formation emerged in its all its dimensions: human, spiritual, charismatic, cultural, and professional as an indispensable responsibility before God who has called us and before all those whom God has entrusted to us. We feel the need to allow ourselves to be formed and transformed together by life in order to respond generously to the call, *I entrust them to you*. Surely the best investment we can make is that of formation, because the quality of life of the Institute and the fruitfulness of the mission depend on this.

Mary accompanies us, continues to walk in our houses, and asks us to live the generative power of the charism today as at Valdocco and Mornese.

The XXIV General Chapter insisted a lot on formation as a personal and community responsibility, lived in daily life. In fact, life is the place where the *spirituality of everyday life* is incarnated and in the ordinary circumstances of one's existence one grows in configuration to Christ in fidelity to our Constitutions.

In the faith of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello dwells the seed of the future of the Salesian charism and of the continuity of our Institute, the support for our hope, and the nourishment for our apostolic charity. In faith and hope, even amid frailty and fatigue, we are called to revive the charism of the Founders over time. But it is evident that faith and hope need to be nourished in daily personal and community experience, in prayer, in the sacramental life, in community relationships, and in the giving of ourselves to young people. Our Saints wisely left us some ordinary means of formation which mark our daily journey, just as they marked the journey of personal and community holiness of so many generations of FMA.

The Regulations indicate the specific times of personal and community formation: the private encounter, the weekly conference, the Good Night, Mother's Circulars (cf. Reg. 124). In this Circular I wish to focus on the preciousness and the charismatic importance of the Good Night.

The 'Good Night' in Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello

The Salesian tradition of the 'Good Night' was born thanks to Mama Margherita who, after experiencing in the morning the flight of some young people whom she had reproached the previous evening, proposed a brief talk before greeting them in the evening. When next morning, Don Bosco found the boys still peacefully asleep, unlike the first group who had slipped away taking with them sheets and blankets, he attributed the merit to the words spoken by Mother Margherita the previous evening.

Don Bosco was convinced that it is not necessary to say many words to young people, but rather to address them with the language of the heart in a direct, clear, familiar way, avoiding impulsiveness and aggression of tones. In his pedagogy, the 'Good Night' expresses an educational mode of communication which reaches everyone. It is a short and incisive message addressed to each one and which, at the end of the day, helps to find the meaning of what one has lived. In fact, the 'Good Night' takes its cue from concrete events, reread in the light of the daily wisdom that teaches the art of living.

In a context saturated with Salesian values that created the family atmosphere in Valdocco, it was the moment in which Don Bosco revealed his fatherhood and expressed a love that contributes to growth, leads to reflection, gives new hope, makes us feel that we are welcomed as children, and knows how to wait for the maturation of everyone. The 'Good Night' didn't have to be long; it had to last no more than three minutes. However, it was a family event, an important moment, indispensable at the end of the day. Don Bosco reserved this commitment to himself and, when he could not, Fr. Michele Rua replaced him.

In Mornese as well, the 'Good Night' was a dear custom, a moment awaited by all, in which Mother Mazzarello gathered around her the community, generally in front of the statue of the Help of Christians.

It was the moment of family intimacy. Sometimes Mother gave indications or notices for the following day, recalled some benefactor for whom to pray, shared the most urgent needs of the house or the Institute, recommended this or that point of the Rule on which the community needed to be particularly vigilant. Above all, she insisted on preparation for Holy Communion, on correspondence to the grace of the vocation and on the desire which must animate every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, to make herself more available every day for the mission among youth.

It was an experience of concrete life, of sharing, of an authentic family spirit. Mother Mazzarello spoke to the sisters, the young girls, the lay women who were in the community, with a maternal and serene tone. Her eyes met the gaze of her daughters, in which she could see joy, amazement, sometimes worry or sadness.

Nothing escaped her and with her intuitive attitude, she could accommodate all the inner resonances of the persons she was addressing.

The 'Good Night' is a precious charismatic heritage

The reference to the sources leads us back to the meaning and the pedagogical and spiritual value of the 'Good Night' in our community life. It refers us to its typically family and maternal origin: it was born from the attention of a father and a mother for their sons and daughters.

Perhaps too easily, we sometimes neglect this simple practice that is so significant and fruitful for the life of the communities, or we live it as a burden, a debt to be paid.

I think it is opportune to re-appropriate this typically Salesian practice which arises from the desire for encounter and sharing, from the family spirit, and has the purpose of nourishing it.

The 'Good Night' is not only a good thought, a generic and abstract reflection, but it originates from what is lived in the educating community, in the Church, in the world. It helps to make a believer's reading of history, to recover the center and unity of life, to make a synthesis while avoiding dispersion and fragmentation. It also contributes to give peace to the heart and helps to restore an inner balance at the end of the day often lived in fatigue and tiredness. It facilitates silence and interior recollection that are so indispensable for a life entirely given to the good of young people.

I believe it is important that in the 'Good Night' there is always a Salesian touch, that is, a reference to significant figures, to events in the Institute, to educational challenges that call to us, and to orient the brief reflection on this so that it is incisive and engaging.

To be effective, the 'Good Night' must be well prepared and welcomed, have a familiar tone, never that of a lesson or conference. It should not contain reproaches or excessively negative remarks. At the end of the day, there is already the weight of tiredness and an often-pressing pace of work.

It needs to leave a positive, encouraging momentum, which leads to a serene night. Often from the solicitations of the 'Good Night' ideas, initiatives, and desires for good are born that are prolonged into the following day.

Fr. Philip Rinaldi summed it up like this, "A 'Good Night' must prepare for a *good night*".

Important Salesian formation events

I would like to recall the International Conference to be held in Rome, in the Generalate, from 25 to 30 September on the theme: *Contribution of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to Education (1872-2022) Paths, Challenges, and Perspectives*. Framed in the various celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, this will be a formative and engaging event that will open up paths to the future in our educational mission shared with many lay people.

On Sunday 9 October, as Salesian Family, we will experience the solemn canonization of Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti, a man of God, rich in humanity, in positive relationships rooted in the Gospel and in the Salesian charism, given unconditionally to humble people. Through his intercession, we ask the Lord for the gift of missionary generosity that awakens the readiness of mind, the spirit of sacrifice, the absolute detachment from all personal seeking to contribute to the good and joy of others.

I also recall that next 20 October will be one hundred years since the birth of the Servant of God Mother Rosetta Marchese. In the context of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, this anniversary can constitute a further occasion to give thanks for the history of holiness aroused

by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Institute and to delve the charism in depth as it was actualized and witnessed by Mother Rosetta.

For the occasion, a round table will be organized in the Generalate to remember her and get to know her better. Notice will be given on the Institute's web page.

I greet you affectionately also with the Sisters of the Council. I invoke upon you the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and Mother Mazzarello, and I wish you a beautiful month of the Rosary and the Missions.

Rome, 24 September 2022

Affectionately, Mother