

A dream that still calls

Dearest Sisters,

I still have in my eyes and in my heart the faces, the colors, the expressions of life and joy of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, of the young people, of so many boys and girls, of the educating communities who took part in the World Day of Gratitude, recently celebrated in Maputo, in the Mozambican Province "Saint John Bosco". I again thank the Provincial, Sister Carolina Ilda Hermínio, and all the Sisters of the Province for their careful preparation and for having facilitated the cordial and affectionate presence of the educating communities of the world, through careful and coordinated work with the Social Communication Sector of the Institute.

I write to you with a heart full of gratitude for the many expressions of affection and closeness that I have received and I assure you of my prayers for the intentions that you carry in your hearts. Together with you, I thank the educating communities and the members of the Salesian Family who have made themselves present in various ways. Thank you also for the concrete signs of solidarity that I have received and that will serve to provide for the project presented by the Mozambican Province and other needs of the Institute.

Towards the 150th anniversary of the first missionary departure of the FMA

The year 2027 will be for us Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the 150th anniversary of the departure of the first missionaries from Mornese to Uruguay and then to Argentina. Every celebration, every important anniversary, is a call to return to the roots of our history, to the sources of our spirituality. Let us recall, with joy and gratitude, the words of Pope Francis at the Chapter Assembly on 22 October 2021: "Do not forget the grace of the origins, the humility and the smallness of the beginnings that made transparent the action of God in the life and message of those who, filled with wonder, began this journey."

The 150th anniversary of the first missionary departure is placed in this horizon and invites us to rediscover the missionary call that is part of our being Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, from the beginning. We feel, as has already been shared in preparation for GC XXIV, that sometimes superficiality, activism, the weak sense of belonging to the community, the overload of work, the lack of educational passion, and the mission experienced above all as a professional occupation, weaken our journey, compromise the effectiveness of the educational mission and the vocational climate of the communities. "We are therefore called continually to renew vocational motivations, remaining in tune with reality and with the preferential option for the poorest young people" (Working Tool GC XXIV, 3).

Sometimes, visiting our works, one gets the impression that there is no clear Salesian identity; that the missionary spirit is not a burning, dynamic, and strong fire. We seem more concerned about professional outcomes than educational ones. The ardor of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle* and of the mandate received by Mother Mazzarello, '*I entrust them to you*', seems to have subsided.

In a culture that tends to de-Christianization, to make every intervention, even the educational one, 'neutral'; in a society that seems to silence its conscience making everything equal and everything possible in the same way, the dream of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello resounds even stronger in our hearts. This is why we are called to rediscover, with more enthusiasm and responsibility, the sense of mission, of 'walking together' as an educating community, with young people, to indicate to them reasons for hope and joy in Jesus.

Our witness will thus help to reawaken in everyone the sense of a life given out of love, the impulse of missionary activity, the protagonism of love, in view of a more just and fraternal society. Charismatic passion, which makes significant our presence among the young, finds its roots in the mysticism of *da mihi animas* and in the asceticism of the *cetera tolle*. We cannot live one without the other. For Don Bosco, educational passion is a fire that burns and is aimed at winning young people to Christ. Referring to Saint Francis de Sales, our Founder directs his life to the realization of the mission, personally experiencing the love of God from which he draws strength to love and lead young people to "full and abundant Life" by accepting to pay the price of the *cetera tolle*.

An itinerary of conversion of the heart

I would like to share with you the reflection we are making with the Sisters of the General Council in preparation for the official celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first missionary departure of our sisters (November 14, 1877) two years after the first missionary expedition of our Salesian brothers (November 11, 1875).

We want to dedicate three years of preparation to this great event, which will begin on 14 November 2024, and will end on 14 November 2027. As an Institute, in fact, we intend to follow a personal and community journey of conversion of heart and gratitude to the Lord for the wonders worked in our humble but courageous missionary history.

At this point in our journey, as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, it is vital and urgent to reawaken the fire of missionary activity, a particular characteristic of our charismatic identity.

Aware that it is not just a matter of doing things or carrying out activities, we welcome the invitation of Pope Francis, "In our day Jesus' command to 'go' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth'. Each Christian and every community must discern the journey that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel." (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 20).

The mission of Christ the Redeemer, entrusted to the Church, is still far from being fulfilled and an overall look at humanity shows that it is still at the beginning, that we must commit ourselves with all our strength to His service. Pope Francis affirms that a "renewed missionary commitment, in the conviction that mission renews the Church, strengthens faith and Christian identity, gives new enthusiasm and new motivations. Faith is strengthened by giving it! The new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support in the commitment to the universal mission." (*Letter of Pope Francis on the occasion of the centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter "Maximum Illud" on the activity of missionaries in the world, 22 October 2017*).

We have chosen as the objective of the three-year period: *To celebrate with a grateful heart the missionary zeal of the Institute in order to revive, in today's contemporary world, the prophetic impulse of our charism as a gift to the Church and to humanity.*

It is a hypothesis for a process that truly touches our lives and helps us to become involved in a new missionary call. It will be accomplished with this timeline:

YEAR I 2024-2025: on 14 November 2024, during the Conference of the Formators, a solemn celebration and the word of the Mother, transmitted online, will officially start the three years of preparation.

YEAR II 2025-2026: "Pilgrims of Hope". In the Church, we will live the grace of the Jubilee Year and, as an Institute, we will celebrate the triennial Verifications.

We will join the initiatives that will take place for the celebration of the first missionary expedition of the Salesians.

YEAR III 2026-2027: will be marked by the celebration of the XXV General Chapter. On 14 November 2027, the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first missionary departure of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will end with the commitment of a new missionary sending.

This is the slogan: "*Now is the best time to rekindle the fire - 150° of the FMA missions*" (cf. Mary D. Mazzarello, *Letter 27*).

It seems opportune to us to strengthen the bonds that make us outgoing communities and to foster a new missionary impulse such as the assumption of projects for unaccompanied minors, the commitment to the new evangelization in Europe, also by sending and welcoming missionaries from other continents, encouraging the sending on mission of sensitive and prepared lay people.

The celebration of the centenary of the birth of Mother Caterina Daghero (1924-2024), the conferences and publications that follow are already a help and introduce us in the first stage of the three-year period.

In this time of preparation for the 150th anniversary of the first missionary departure, each Province is invited to rediscover its own missionary history, studying the missionary figures who left from there or who came there to bring the Salesian charism. It would be an excellent opportunity to understand how simple Sisters, with few resources, often without an adequate culture, were able to affect the social, cultural, ecclesial levels, to generate a real transformation of reality through a proposal of integral education and courageous evangelization.

For this precious contribution, it is possible to value and involve the Sisters who are members of the Association of Experts of Salesian History (ACSSA), other Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and passionate lay people, to undertake research in the provincial and local archives, to bring out still unknown aspects of the history of the Institute and the Provinces.

And, above all, go forward without fear of undertaking, with trust in God and much courage, "a missionary option capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language, and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to *go forth* and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with Himself."

(Pope Francis on the occasion of the centenary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter "Maximum Illud" on the activity of missionaries in the world, 22 October 2017).

In this particular journey, we are accompanied and preceded by Mary, Mother, Teacher, and first Missionary of the Gospel. Let us renew with courage and boldness our trust in Her, so that She may help us to remain open to the voice of the Holy Spirit who alone can show us new missionary horizons and, as at Pentecost, can enable us *to speak other languages, to proclaim the great works of God to suffering humanity* (cf. Acts 2:4.11).

Let us entrust to Mary peace among the peoples, our communities in difficulty, the young people whom we love with particular charismatic predilection.

Happy Feast of Mary Help of Christians to you, to your families, and to the educating communities. May the Lord fill us with His grace and grant us the ability to glimpse the future among the hidden folds of the present.

I greet you with affection and gratitude.

Rome, 24 May 2024

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2024

America

Province “Sacred Heart” Ecuador ECU
Sister Lupe Judith Erazo Arce

Asia

Province “Mother of the Church” India – Guwahati ING
Sister Mabel Gothorp

Province “Immaculate Heart of Mary” India – Shillong INS
Sister Rosa Pyngrope

Europe

Province “St. John Bosco” Slovakia SLK
Sister Jana Kurkinová