

Paths of hope

Dearest Sisters,

The Holy Year 2025, which has just begun, is full of experiences that leave a mark of light on the path of the Institute. The suggestive rite of opening the Holy Door marked the beginning of a time of grace that invites us to revive hope in our lives and in our mission. It invites us to become "pilgrims of hope", that is, seekers of God, of the infinite in our daily life, to be signs of hope for young people.

This thirst for meaning, which gives flavor to existence and restlessness to the soul, puts us in a dimension of constant search. We are all pilgrims of the Absolute, like Abraham who from traveller and nomad becomes pilgrim-seeker of God.

In the journey of personal and community conversion that the Holy Year urges us to follow, we ask with confidence for the theological virtue of hope, which is a gift from God and the fruit of our faith in Him. We put ourselves, here and now, with humility, at the service of a fragile and wounded humanity, which lives the tragedy of war, injustice, poverty, natural disasters, aware that even in these situations of darkness, and often despair, the Lord calls us to find in faith the confidence and optimism necessary to seek new horizons.

A retrospective glance at the journey lived

In the process of implementing the General Council's Programming (2022-2027), the Lord has granted us to live, as an Institute, significant experiences that nourish hope and generate life in so many parts of the world. One of these experiences is the realization of the Seminars for a *generative animation*, which involved the Councils and the teams of each Interprovincial Conference. They were important meetings of vitality and communion with the sisters of the various Continents. We were able to come closer and get to know the different realities of the Institute on a journey of the synodal Church. This promotes *communion, participation, and mission* as a way forward to make present the Kingdom of God to new generations in the spirit of the Preventive System, through the education and proclamation of the Gospel.

We, as the General Council, have also ended the year 2024 experiencing a time of verification of our service of animation and government in the last three years, in the light of the Programming of the six-year term. Re-reading our experience as a community that animates and guides the Institute in synodality, has allowed us to grasp with gratitude many seeds of life and, at the same time, the fragilities for which we ask forgiveness and entrust ourselves to the mercy of the Father. The assumption of missionary synodality is an experience that we build together daily, trying to overcome the inevitable difficulties, to harmonize our differences, sharing the fraternity and joy of communion.

In this month of January, the *Triennial Verifications* of GC XXIV began with the Inter-provincial Conferences. We feel united in following a path of discernment and docility, to understand what the Holy Spirit asks us to be today, with Mary, a presence that generates life.

The local and provincial communities are also involved in moments of verification, whose fruits will enrich dialogue and discussion in the context of the Triennial Verifications. It is a time of grace and hope to evaluate together the processes underway, to re-read the experience illuminated by the Word of God, the experience of our Founders, and the challenges of the contemporaneity.

The Verifications will guide our Institute in the next three years, with renewed confidence and boldness towards the next GC XXV.

We believe in the action of the Holy Spirit who opens us to listening, to searching, to make concrete choices together, which strengthen our vocational response and make ever alive and current the educative charism of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello in the various cultures.

The gift of holiness with a missionary face

The perspective of the Triennium in preparation for 150th of the first missionary departure of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, repropose to us the beauty and the fruitfulness of the *outgoing missionary communities*, of Mornese first and then of Nizza. A few years after the foundation of the Institute, the community breathes with full breath the missionary spirit, which guides it to witness to Jesus in every part of the world with fearless courage and love.

The missionary spirit at its origins, and even today, is not lived as an addition to the activity of the Institute, but is an essential element. It revives the family spirit, apostolic boldness and collaboration within the Salesian Family. We would like the celebration of this special event to truly touch our lives, our communities, and our mission and involve us in a new missionary call.

The chosen slogan: *It is time to revive the fire*, we commit to revive it together, rediscovering the missionary passion of each baptized person and strongly incarnated by Sister Maria Troncatti: *mother, missionary, artisan of peace and reconciliation*.

She interpreted the missionary action as a work of God sprouted in the heart of the forest and was convinced that the seed of the Word, sown in that uneasy and isolated region, would bear fruit of charity and renewal. For Sister Maria, the missionary spirit was totally identified with holiness. In every action and choice, she expressed a supernatural charm and around her one breathed the *air of Paradise*.

We thank the Lord for the gift of her canonization, precisely in this Holy Year and in the heart of the Triennium of preparation for the 150th anniversary of the first missionary expedition. These are precious events, of great historical significance for our religious family, which encourage us to reinvigorate the inner momentum and be Mornese outgoing today.

Building sites of hope

As General Council, we are engaged in the reflection and implementation of the decisions of GC XXIV. With the collaboration of competent people involved in the various Commissions set up for this purpose, we are carrying on the processes initiated, including the updating of the *Plan of Formation Plan and the Guidelines for the Educational Mission of the FMA*.

To this task is added reflection on the criteria for the revision of the *Protocols relating to the Protection of Minors* and also accompaniment in the adoption of the *Deliberations* of the GC XXIV.

We are grateful to all the Sisters, lay women and men, young people from different cultural backgrounds who have made themselves available to give their contribution with a great sense of belonging and co-responsibility. The joint research, marked by moments of joy and effort, is always an experience of intense formation for all, of communion and discernment in the Holy Spirit.

On 16 February, in Turin-Valdocco, there will be the official opening of the 29th General Chapter of the Salesians, which has as its theme: *Passionate about Jesus Christ, dedicated to young people*, with the subtitle: *Living our Salesian vocation faithfully and prophetically*. For this event, we wish to express our support and assure our prayer to the Vicar of the Rector Major, Fr. Stefano Martoglio, and all the Chapter Members, invoking on the Chapter Assembly the gift of the Holy Spirit and the

presence of Mary Help of Christians, especially in the delicate moment of discernment for the election of the XI successor of Don Bosco and members of the General Council.

In the Jubilee Year just begun, may Mary, Mother of Hope, accompany us to walk as People of God on paths of peace and reconciliation. *"Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it."* (*Spes non confundit*, 25) in our communities, in the different educative environments, in the educating communities, in each of our pilgrimages with young people.

We wish, especially in this month rich in Salesian anniversaries, to nourish the hope typical of our charism and heart of our educative mission, making vital the words of Don Bosco, *"Walk with your feet on the ground and with your heart in Heaven"* (MB VIII, 752).

Finally, open to the Trinitarian Love that nourishes our personal relationship with God and the drive to act for good, we suggest to make our own the prayer that Pope Francis proposes in this Year of Grace:

Father in heaven, may the faith you have given us
in your Son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.
May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May the grace of the Jubilee reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed, be glory and praise for ever. Amen.

We greet you with joy and gratitude.

Rome, 24 January 2025

Mother and the Sisters of the Council