

150 years for education full-time

Dearest Sisters,

The International Conference: *Contribution of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to Education (1872-2022). Paths, Challenges and Perspectives*, which the General Council had entrusted to the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences "Auxilium" ended a few days ago.

On behalf of the Institute, I thank the Dean Sr. Piera Ruffinatto, the Professors, the Coordinator of the Scientific and Organizing Committee Sr. Grazia Loparco, the Head of the Secretariat of the Conference Sr. Maria Teresa Spiga, all and all those who made it possible.

With this special event, we wanted to reflect on the fruitfulness of the educational charism of the Institute which, in these 150 years of history, has been implemented and spread with dynamic vivacity and creativity in the world, bearing fruits of life and hope everywhere. The use of technological means has allowed us to connect with the educating communities of the five continents and to listen to speakers at an international level who shared research and reflections on education, in the most diverse facets, identifying the challenges of contemporaneity on a global scale.

Together we lived and enjoyed a rich experience, an expression of the universality of the Institute, and a sign of an enculturated charism in the various countries, with evident differences, but also with strong charismatic harmony. I would like the richness of the content gained in the conference to be shared and deepened in our communities as a formative opportunity that is offered to us with love and competence.

Celebrate and thank

The time in which we live calls upon us to renew that educative-evangelizing passion which characterized our Institute from the very beginning and marked its vocational fruitfulness.

In the Conference, we listened to the past to reread starting from precise statistical data, the rich experience lived and to compare ourselves with the educational projects of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians that are particularly significant in the various Continents.

Our Founders set up the mission starting from the educational relationship lived according to the charismatic parameters of *presence*; a presence oriented by the intention to take care of the life and integral maturation of young people. They therefore favored the term 'house' to indicate the various works. The first educational concern was, in fact, to help young people to experience 'home', to create a family atmosphere in which to meet, feel loved, valued, and accompanied.

For development in the various geographic and cultural contexts in which it is inserted, the Institute assumed from the beginning a universal missionary vision that has supported the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in facing the emerging challenges with daring and courage.

Our first sisters, with Mother Mazzarello, were poor, with little culture and means, but they let themselves be inflamed by the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*, by the mandate received, *I entrust them to you*, by the desire to communicate, beyond the narrow-known borders, the Gospel message to many girls and families, especially the poor and neglected.

In the course of the Congress, it was stressed many times that precisely in moments of greatest crisis, hardships, and unprecedented turning points, the transforming and transformative vitality of the Salesian educational charism was manifested. In the various epochs of history, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have had the wisdom to reinterpret the charism in order to plan every educational intervention in the light of new challenges. From this arose the multiplicity of works and various expressions with which the Preventive System is carried out in the world.

If we compare the humble origins with the spread of the charism today, we are amazed, astonished, and we cannot help but be grateful. We live in a time that urgently challenges us and offers us unprecedented opportunities for preventive education especially for women who today are called more than ever, in reciprocity and complementarity with men, to build a better future for all.

During the Conference we were reminded, often by secular voices, of the importance of cultivating the awareness of having a great treasure to be kept and shared on a wide-ranging basis. Each of us, and each educating community, is personally responsible for its vitality, because it is a gift of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church. Indeed, it possesses an intrinsic prophetic dynamism and demands a continuous personal and community conversion, a condition for being able to be "generative" in mission.

This is why we consider the Conference not only a celebratory event, but an experience of relaunching a new path in the name of responsibility towards the young people who are entrusted to us, towards our Founders, towards the Church and the society in which we are inserted in the various geographical and cultural contexts.

From the present to the future

Once again, we were able to recognize the fruits of holiness matured in our religious family, thanks to generous Sisters who witnessed the charism with the coherence of an educational charity that is diligent in grasping the new needs of young people from working class areas, in which the condition of women paid and pays a heavy price in family and social life.

The figures of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who were presented at the Conference as creative interpreters of the Preventive System make us reflect on the dynamic potential of the charism embodied in the routine of their lives, on the Salesian joy that animated them, on the foresight and courage shown in facing the many and inevitable difficulties. They transmit to us the experience of a living charism, woven into the texture of every day.

Like them, each of us can with her own life make the charism grow and enrich it with her own characteristics and resources. Each of us in our educating community can share and make concrete in the mission what Don Bosco said, "You will complete the work that I begin; I sketch, you will spread out the colors. Now there is the seed ..." (MB XI 309).

We live as a grace to be in continuous relationship with young people, to take care of them, to listen to them, to know them, to understand them, to remain among them, to support them in building a new model of integral development, to prepare them for the great choices in life, open to a future of hope.

Our identity as Salesian educators is often recalled in the Constitutions as our life project. I dwell on article 64, because it highlights the importance and beauty of our being educators according to the heart of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello:

“By the very fact of being a member of a specific community every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians is commissioned.

Let each of us therefore,
no matter what task has been assigned by obedience,
live her identity as a Salesian educator
in community with her Sisters,
in the spirit of the *da mihi animas*,
and in the certainty that through different,
but complementary roles,
everyone cooperates in the salvation of young people”.

Pope Francis in his address to the Chapter members reminded us to live our identity as educators by looking at Mary, "... she is the attentive woman, fully embodied in the present and solicitous, a caring woman. So also, may you be attentive to reality, grasp situations of need, when the 'wine' is missing, that is the joy of love, and bring Christ, not in words but in service, in closeness, with compassion and tenderness ... Be mothers! God's style is always closeness. And God's closeness is always compassion and tenderness. Every day in the examination of conscience ask yourself, ‘Was I close today? Was I compassionate? Was I tender?’ Go ahead with this. Use the word tenderness a lot... Be like Mary, women of hope. You do it starting from the Salesian identity, with the *Salesian style*, especially *listening, active presence, love for the young*. The creativity of the moment, as Don Bosco said" (*Discourse to the Chapter members*, 22 October 2021).

The world is changing rapidly and the complexity, which challenges our giving ourselves to young women and young people as Salesian educators, is not faced only with good will, but with a qualified formation, continuously updated, based on sure anthropological principles, on the pedagogical humanism of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

Now, even more than in the past, it takes solid culture, wisdom, a critical and proactive sense to open new horizons and nourish dreams. It takes consistency and strength of testimony. The world today, despite its great potential and resources, is deeply disoriented, confused. The anthropological crisis affects the human being in their relational and transcendent identity according to God's plan of love. Rapid and profound changes first of all challenge education and its transforming capacity, requiring formation courses aimed at responding to the challenges of contemporary world.

For this reason, I renew an invitation that returned many times in the XXIV General Chapter, to invest more decisively in the formation of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and lay people who share the educational mission with us. It is the indispensable condition for generating life and hope in young people and for being significant in society.

Fidelity to our vocation requires wisdom, discernment, courage, openness to new cultural paradigms which require formation with more quality, in order to become competent in preparing the new generations to live up to the needs of the world of today and tomorrow.

Educating is an act of hope that young people, families, and society need so much.

Today it is necessary to maintain a high level of attention to social issues, interculturality, communication and technology, and the protection of the environment. We are called to educate young people to take care of each other responsibly, to be formed in the values of justice, peace, universal brotherhood in order to overcome inequalities and injustices.

The climate crisis itself questions us and commits us to be creative, daring, and tirelessly building networks. To make the necessary changes, in fact, a strong convergence is needed. In education it is indispensable, as our Founders taught us, *to be many* in order to have an impact. In fact, it is a synodal, generative work rooted in taking care of life, a typically maternal and Marian mission.

In order to face the future and prepare it with wisdom and foresight, it is therefore necessary to go forward together, as educating communities, in an ever-widening network in the Church, in society, in synergy with the Institutions, with groups of the Salesian Family, with other Religious congregations, and with different vocations.

Significant events of Salesian formation

I remind you that Sunday 30 October 2022, at 3.00 pm (Italian time), we will be able to join in prayer in live-streaming connection with the significant places where our Saints, Blesseds, Venerables, and Servants of God are buried, or particularly remembered.

It will be an "*FMA 150 Holy Ween*", Vigil of All Saints on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of foundation and in which we intend, with the intercession of these Sisters, to invoke the gift of peace and every blessing for humanity and for the Institute.

Don Bosco reminds us that "all our greatest things had their beginning and their fulfillment on the day of the Immaculate Conception" (MB XVII, 511).

I announce in advance that the preparation for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception in this jubilee year is meant to be an expression of gratitude to Mary, prolonged in the concreteness of the life of the individual Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and of the educating communities around the world, who will be represented by 12 stars. At the end of the novena, in this year so significant for the whole Institute, Mary will be crowned with the 12 stars. In order to be able to carry out the novena as it was intended, we will begin it on November 26th.

The proposal will be published on the Institute's website in early November.

"Courage", Mother Mazzarello tells us. We have before us a beautiful, fruitful, enthusing mission for which to be grateful. At the same time, she does not cease to challenge us to the public responsibility of keeping ourselves firmly faithful to the task, *I entrust them to you*, assuming our educational mission with renewed awareness.

To Mary Help of Christians, Mother and Teacher, we entrust the journey and the life of all educating communities, in particular of young people, and we invoke the gift of peace for the whole of humanity.

An affectionate greeting also on behalf of the Sisters of the General Council.

Rome, 24 October 2022

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2023

America

Province "Laura Vicuña" ARG
Sr. Silvia Boullosa

Province "Mary Help of Christians" CMA
Sr. Bertha Celmira Serna