

The monthly circular
A dynamic journey open to the signs of the times

Dearest Sisters,

With much emotion, joy, and deep gratitude, I am happy to send you this historical circular that has reached an exceptional goal: **number 1000!**

Gratitude for the clarity and the depth with which the circulars have been redacted over the course of the years. Although with different styles, they kept the identity of the charism alive in the various contexts. They nourished a renewed educational passion throughout the entire world. They delved deeply into the beauty of Salesian consecrated life in the Church on the horizon of religious life and in rapport with the social reality.

Gratitude for the reception of the ‘monthly circular’ on the part of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians everywhere who perceive it as a sign of communion, a dialogue between mother and daughters, a message that questions, keeps lighted the joy of fidelity, consolidates the unity of the Institute, and the ardor of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*.

It is interesting to highlight how the sisters themselves at the time of Mother Catherine Daghero, in the General Chapter of 1913, had explicitly requested to receive the circular every month. The first to have number 1 is that of 24 November 1914. From then to now, this channel of communion has not been interrupted, and has increasingly strengthened the sense of being in a Religious Family that belongs entirely to Mary and owes Her everything.

Dear Sisters, my desire to reach you one by one is strong, to express my heartfelt gratitude for the affection, seriousness, and the sense of belonging with which you receive the circular. There are many positive resonances that reach me and for which I thank the Lord.

The circular is the fruit of reflection, of prayer, of attention to the various and diverse needs of our realities spread in the entire world. It is the expression of communion with the sisters of the General Council who periodically are given space especially in the choral Circular.

In this circular, I also announce the opening of the second year that prepares us for the 150th anniversary of the foundation of our Institute that for 2020-2021 invites us to *Accept a mandate*: “*I entrust them to you*”.

The circular – a family ‘encounter’

In one of my first circulars, I manifested the desire that the monthly circular be an ‘encounter’, an expression of the family spirit that makes us feel deeply united (cf. *Circular* 898), for all of us *together* to be impassioned for the charism that has been consigned to us, open to the needs of the youth world, ready to receive the calls of the universal Church, and listening to the educational challenges present in the various contexts.

Indeed, reading back over the path taken, I can say that, thanks to the dialogue, your solicitations, and the sharing of the concrete life that takes place throughout the Institute, this objective has been achieved with continuity, with discretion, with affection, and with a lot of trust for each community,

for each sister, and for all those who share the mission in the spirit of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*.

With the monthly circular I have entered your houses, sometimes even with trepidation, but always with great joy and hope. You have opened the door of your heart to receive solicitations, questions, evaluations, and sharing on the *present* and on the *future* of our *being* in the Church and in contemporaneity with a specific mission.

This ‘monthly appointment’ has been in the past and continues to be, a privileged space of encounter, of sharing, of openness to the signs of the times. It is an opportunity that confirms us in the gift of fidelity to a call that unites us as Salesian Family around a marvelous charism so that the young may have life and life in abundance.

From the beginning, the circular has had a familiar face, not for normative or scientific purposes, but exhortative and educational ones, and, depending on the events, it was also a means of information. In its evolution, it has always manifested itself with considerable charismatic depth. Let us think of the precious letters, circulars, teachings, and exhortations that Don Bosco addressed to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and which are collected in our Constitutions. A true heritage to be revisited and, if needed, to be rediscovered in all their richness and actuality.

His successor Fr. Michael Rua, continues along the lines of the Founder. His knowledge of the communities and of individual people, his simple, familiar relational style, and his capacity to listen, give his correspondence with the FMA an intensity and a depth that is special. In the 372 letters addressed to individuals, and in the 35 circulars of a more institutional nature, we discover a “faithful custodian of the spiritual heritage received from Don Bosco” that is in turn transmitted with discretion and clarity, and above all, with great respect and love towards our Institute.

Since the foundation of our Institute, Mother Mazzarello as well felt the need to reach her daughters. How many letters she sent to the nearby and distant communities, the expression of her deep humanity and interior wealth. She writes to the communities, but within them, with a delicacy of soul and an exquisite maternity, she reserves a space for each sister, speaking ‘heart to heart’ so that each one will feel remembered, supported, encouraged, and above all, loved!

We can ask ourselves: do we know in depth the spiritual patrimony that has been left to us so that it may become a reason for gratitude, for rediscovery of the freshness of Mornese, and nourishment for our life today? Her letters are an incalculable mine of charismatic values, of passion for the salvation of the young, of missionary ardor, and of the search for holiness in daily life.

I invite you to take them in hand and to value them in their depth and charismatic significance as ‘pure sources’. They are letters that accompany us on the journey of daily life and constitute the mirror of Mother Mazzarello’s heart indwelled by the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to retrace the historical evolution of the circulars. In the *Deliberations* of the first General Chapters, the Superior General is asked to send and have the Rector Major send a yearly circular letter to all the sisters (cf. *Deliberations*, art. 40). The *Manual* of 1908 speaks of the duty of the Superior to send circular letters to the sisters without specifying its frequency. It is emphasized that “these letters will all be read in their entirety to the Community gathered at an opportune time, and conserved in the House Archives” (Manual 1908, art. 5).

During her long service to the Institute, Mother Catherine Daghero wrote a letter to the sisters two or three times a year according to particular occasions, but the sisters expressed the desire to receive them more often. Without a doubt, this desire is an indication of a lively sense of belonging to the Institute, of an increasingly stronger family spirit, and of an effective love for the charism, which little by little, was spreading beyond the confines of Mornese, reaching as Don Bosco said, “the most remote Countries of the earth.” (1880)

The request of the sisters was accepted and proposed by one of the Commissions of General Chapter VII (1913): *“In all the Houses there is the lively need to hear the word of our Venerable Mother and of the other Superiors more often. Therefore the Commission, in the name of all those present and absent, makes a warm request to the heart of our beloved Mother so that she may, through special circulars, comfort us often with her efficacious maternal counsels and encouragements, and also the other Reverend Councilors, as the Reverend Salesian Superiors do, add what they deem opportune to recommend to us for the good progress of the Institute.”*

Fr. Paul Albera confirmed in GC VII the value of this ‘letter’, recognizing that it promotes unity of thoughts, affections, and maintains the family spirit (cf. *Minutes* of 9-21-1913).

Thus, the proposal was accepted by all the Chapter Members and thus from November 24, 1914, the circulars are written by Mother on a monthly basis and begin to be numbered starting from number 1.

Throughout history up to today, they place themselves on the horizon of significant Institute occurrences and ecclesial and social events, with a privileged look at what refers to consecrated life and emerging educational challenges.

The wealth contained in each circular is not only tied to Mother’s word, but also to each of you, in your openness of mind and of heart, in your ability to let its message resound in life and in the educating communities. I count on your readiness to revisit what we have sought to offer you during these years following the Institute’s journey, as I already specified, the Church Magisterium, especially that of the Holy Father, and also the orientations of the Rector Major who places us in communion with the Salesian Family with a gaze that is always open to a future of hope.

The circular also echoes the suffering, the labors, the concerns of the Institute, the challenges it faces in the various historical periods.

Recent circulars have sought to keep in mind the actual difficult situation caused by the pandemic that has upset projects, interrupted processes, and provoked doubts and uncertainties about the future, but that is also the source of new opportunities. The circular has always communicated hope, has re-lit trust in the presence of Jesus who is with us until the end of time, and in the vigilant presence of Mary Help of Christians, Our Lady of difficult times.

With her and thanks to her, I can say that love for the charism is alive in the whole Institute, the fire of missionary passion continues to burn, and there is an increasingly stronger sense of belonging to the Church. Sensitivity grows towards the expectations, not always expressed, of young people in situations of need and in those more open to Jesus’ call to follow Him radically. These are the values that, month after month, keep the unity of our Religious Family firm and that I consider a precious opportunity to strengthen the network of love that unites us all in a great Family.

Another step towards the 150th of foundation

On 5 August 2019 at Mornese, I officially opened the triennial of preparation for the 150th of the foundation of our Institute (cf. *Circular* 989). This year as well, I will be in Mornese to open with deep joy the second year, 2020-2021 that invites us to *Receive a mandate: ‘I entrust them to you’*.

From that first mandate to Mary Domenica Mazzarello God’s *dream* for the Institute began to take shape. From that moment on, the charism continues to develop through the years, to grow, and to gain more and more vigor through its acceptance by the sisters and the communities that express creativity, apostolic ardor, and live this experience in synergy with all those who share the educative mission in the spirit of preventive education.

“I entrust them to you” is not a slogan, but a *living word*, a *mandate* that challenges, sets in motion, sometimes also disquiets due to the responsibility it entails.

We ask ourselves, who is entrusted to us today? Which conditions does this mandate require so that from generation to generation, it will be a fruitful womb of new life *for all of us and for the new generations*? What can ‘Mornese’ say to the youth of today? And ‘Mornese’ is in every part of the world where we are present!

It think these questions can accompany us throughout the whole year and be motives for reflection also with the educating community, and especially with the young people and with the members of the Salesian Family.

Many realities have taken on the challenge to involve the laity, adults, and young people, “in rediscovering Mary Domenica’s richness as a young woman and in the prophetic dimensions of her spirituality and educational mission” (*Circular 989*). Thus, to discover her in her total availability to accept the unforeseen mandate that would mark her future with new fruitfulness.

The aim of the celebrations of the 150th is not only to evoke the past, but to celebrate the present, giving new brightness to a mandate that goes beyond time and space, and puts into play all our resources, our educative evangelizing passion, our will to look to the future with the daring of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello. This is why I invite you to approach her figure with new depth, to penetrate more into that “*I entrust them to you*” which was the guiding thread of her life and that challenges ours as well. Who better than she can help us to discover its beauty and responsibility?

The mission is entrusted to us by the Lord through Mary Help of Christians, the Mother who asks us to be the sign of her living, close, tender, and strong presence and, at the same time, capable of expressing love and *accompanying wisely* in docility to the Holy Spirit. The mission is not a generic reality, but is made up of real people, children, teenagers, young adults, adults who have a unique face and a particular story. We are continually entrusted with numerous groups of young people, and at the same time, with each one in particular. Mary Help of Christians helps us to have the double capacity for attention to groups and to individual persons. Let us receive with gratitude and deep joy the trust that the Lord shows us. Let us remember that it all began in the Covenant of love with Him and is nourished in prayer, which is the source of the fruitfulness of the mission.

We are all living through very difficult times due to the pandemic that does not cease to bring death and suffering. At Mornese, I will reserve for myself times of personal encounter with Mother Mazzarello, asking her who was tried by typhus, to support you in continuing to believe in the future in the certainty that Mary is walking beside us, continues to be the ‘helper’ among the young people, the families, and towards every person living in precarious conditions.

Dear Sisters, I wish you a year of new educational and vocational vitality and an August 5th lived as a privileged experience to entrust our whole life to Jesus and to serve Him in poor young people. Let us ask for everyone the gift of joy and of fidelity to the ‘first yes’, and let us courageously pray for new vocations with a missionary heart!

I close this special circular with Paul’s words, “You are our letter, written on our hearts... a letter of Christ written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh” (2 *Cor* 3:3). Each of you is a living letter of Christ written for your sisters, for the young people, for all the people you meet.

May the blessing of the Lord, the presence of Mary Help of Christians, and of Mother Mazzarello be our great hope.

Rome, 24 July 2020

Affectionately, Mother