

INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Founded by St. John Bosco
and St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello

N. 975

Dearest Sisters,

I would like to preface this brief presentation of Strenna 2018 with gratitude to the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, for this gift to the Salesian Family. The theme is very significant, current, and interesting from the evangelical, ecclesial, and charismatic point of view:

**“Lord, give me this water” (John 4: 15)
We cultivate the art of listening and accompanying**

It is a choice that profoundly touches the "Salesian heart" and gives renewed vigor to the mission we are called to accomplish with joy and hope every day.

The purpose of the Strenna, the Rector Major specifies, is to put ourselves in full harmony with the journey of the Church that is preparing to celebrate the great event of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: *Youth, faith and vocational discernment*, to be held in Rome in October 2018.

It is an appeal to prepare ourselves in the best way possible, together with the laity and many young people, for this important ecclesial event in which, as the *Preparatory Document* states, "the Church has decided to question itself on how to accompany young people to recognize and welcome the call to love and to life in its fullness, and also to ask the young people themselves to help it identify the most effective ways to proclaim the Good News today "(Preparatory Document, Introduction).

The Strenna points out two aspects of vital importance for the world and youth realities in which we are immersed and called to serve: *listening and accompaniment*.

The Gospel icon of the Samaritan woman who encounters Jesus illuminates these two aspects and helps us to penetrate the value of encounter and of accompaniment as the path that leads to the transformation of life.

I have met many young people, Fr Ángel highlights, who have a generous heart and wish to serve others, to help, and to give themselves. Young people who ask, sometimes explicitly and sometimes subtly, for help to mature or to begin a journey of faith.

They feel the need for an encounter. They ask to be heard and are willing to make a personal and community journey of discernment.

Regarding this, the Strenna presents some questions that call to us and on which we want to make a serious reflection: What are we waiting for? Why don't we decide to be much more available to accompany all our young people in what is important for their life? What stops us? Why do we 'occupy' ourselves or 'spend time' on other things when this is a real educative and evangelization priority?

Readiness to listen and to dialog leaves 'traces of life' in the young and in the families. To be listened to is an experience that lasts forever, that time does not cancel out, rather, it makes it continually shine with more light.

Listening is an art, and therefore, cannot be reduced to a technical, functional fact: it is much more. It is interesting to note that Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman comes in a secular place and 'out in the open', beside a well that is transformed into *the place of encounter with God*. The 'strategy' of encounter Jesus uses teaches us that to listen is to welcome, and to welcome is more than just a feeling. It is meeting the person, understanding them, and trusting them. The 'wisdom of listening' requires the educator involved in the Salesian mission to adopt attitudes and attentions that make listening become an experience of discernment and accompaniment in the manner of Don

Bosco that is still today an excellent witness of efficacious experiences in this regard (cf. for example *MB VI*, 438-439).

Through gestures of goodness, attention to the person and their situation, arising from opening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and from prayerful confrontation with the Word of God, one can open the door to faith. One can discover one's own vocation in its various expressions and the joy of love that God places in the heart of every young person so that their existence may bear fruit. Recognizing, interpreting, choosing are the three criteria that the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* highlights to live discernment, following the example of Jesus who, in His dialogue with the Samaritan woman, accompanies her on the journey towards truth and freedom. What a marvelous transformation!

How can we not think of Don Bosco as a *genial accompanier, educator, and spiritual guide* of his young people? It is enlightening to note, however, that Don Bosco was simultaneously concerned with giving *quality to the educational environment, so that accompaniment would be more effective for everyone* in whatever situation they found themselves. In Valdocco, in fact, accompaniment was not only for the individual, but also for the community. In Mornese as well, Mother Mazzarello created, together with the community, the charismatic climate in which the young people accompanied personally, could grow in all the dimensions of their personality, and discover the dream of God in their life.

Through a wise application, the *Strenna* presents us with suggestions and pastoral directions that we must consider in order to face, with a Salesian gaze and a sense of responsibility, some current challenges that we cannot ignore.

We are motivated in this effort by the desire for the young to discover a *way of living and of dreaming of their existence* as a time to mature values such as gratuity and giving, openness to others and openness to God.

I conclude, dear sisters, by inviting you to study the *Strenna*, to put it in dialogue with the Acts of GC XXIII and with the reflections concerning accompaniment proposed by the Institute in these years; to make it the object of sharing with young people, with the educating community, with the people involved in the mission of proclaiming the Good News.

I encourage you, moreover, to make decisions to live an effective accompaniment with all young people, so that they can discover the project God has always thought for them. Accompaniment is reciprocal: let us also allow the young to accompany us with openness of heart.

I am sure I interpret all of you in renewing gratitude to Fr Ángel for the gift of the *Strenna*. It will be a sure guide that prepares us, as Salesian Family, to celebrate the event of the next Synod in full communion with the universal Church. It will also be a motive for reflection in the next Triennial Verificas that will start in January 2018 and will continue throughout the year.

May Mary of Nazareth bring our gratitude to the Rector Major and continue to make his mission fruitful in the Salesian Family and among the young.

The presence of Mary urges us to witness in daily life to the joy of the call to follow Jesus unconditionally. May she obtain for us the grace, as the *Strenna* emphasizes, to be an authentic mediation of the Word of the Lord that resounds in the heart of every young person, in the families, in all those who are searching.

God bless you!

Rome, 1 January 2018

Aff.ma Madre

