

Radiate the joy of the vocation

Dearest Sisters,

As I write this Circular, the Provincial Chapters are being celebrated and I thank you for the preparation accomplished in the life of every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians and in the Educating Communities during the preceding months. It is very beautiful to hear we are united in traveling the same path that is concretized in every part of the world according to each specific reality.

There continues to arrive from many Provinces appreciation for the *Circular of Convocation in preparation for GC XXIV*. It was received with gratitude, with a sense of responsibility, and as an opportunity to keep alert in all of us and in every Educating Community, the invitation of Mary to do what Jesus tells us every day in order to be “communities that generate life in the heart of contemporaneity.”

In this regard, I feel prompted to share with you an aspect that I deem essential and that merits to be increasingly the subject of our personal and community reflections and of our life experience: *the joy of vocation*. We need to discover and express more and more in depth, the joy of the vocation that has been given to us by the gratuitous love of God, to witness to it every day among ourselves, first of all, and in all our relationships, to manifest the presence of the Lord. He invites us to be channels that He can pass through and communicate His love.

We know that the vocation is not a ‘private gift,’ destined to remain within the individuals’ confines. By its nature, it must expand and ‘explode’ in a hymn of Easter joy, of gratitude in the spirit of the *Magnificat* (cf. C 4). This is the condition for our communities to be able to generate life, re-awakening the freshness of Mornese that makes them rich in vocational fruitfulness: it is the miracle of the ‘new wine’ for everyone’s joy.

I offer you only some aspects, already shared on other occasions, that I deem necessary to highlight the source of this joy and the commitment that derives from it to be fruitful communities from the vocational point of view. I have much hope that *together* we can create the conditions so that the young people may discover the plan of God for their life and be happy, ‘joyful’, according to the spirit of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello.

The love of God source of joy

So many reflections emerge in my heart from the fruit of numerous experiences shared with many of you, with the young people, with adults in moments of deep interiority and of searching for the *why* and the *for whom* to give one’s life. It is a search that is always journeying towards the high aims to which the human heart aspires and that offer authentic joy.

How can we fail to recognize in the yearning of many sisters, of many people the desire to taste the essential of this ‘journey’ which is to discover that joy has a name, a face: God’s love present in the history of humanity and in every person, with the tenderness that only He knows how to give in full gratuity and fidelity? It is a ‘pact of love’ that imbues each day with light, with joy, even when

sadness, doubts, the trials of life, and eventual failures tend to place it in the shadows and weaken it. These are times in which the dimension of the Paschal Mystery radiates more brightly, which is the source of true joy, of authentic happiness shining in our life as consecrated persons, to the point of reaching the heart of many young people and arousing in them the question of ‘why’ so much joy.

Today it is not easy to speak of joy, to witness that it is possible to be happy in a time in which what often prevails is a culture of sadness, of fear, of death; where in many realities there is a spiritual ‘desertification,’ result of the attempts of societies that want to build without God or eliminate their Christian roots (cf. EG, n. 86). However, it is precisely in the deserts of society that the more or less explicit signs of the ‘thirst for God’ can manifest themselves. This is why there is the need for people who know how to sow hope, of ‘people-amphora to give others to drink’ (EG no. 86). To quench thirst with the water of hope also means making joy gush forth in abundance. Joy and hope, fundamental elements for Salesian spirituality, can never be separated because they flow from one and the same certainty: God’s love that accompanies us is present, and makes the heart burn with the fire that generates life and life in abundance.

Joy is born from the encounter with the Risen Jesus, from the certainty that He has loved us to the point of giving His life for us. If we do not have Him, we lack everything and nothing has meaning any more. Thus, joy is not an ephemeral, superficial feeling, but rather an ‘interior essence’ that matures into a deep life of faith, into an intense experience of prayer, letting ourselves be touched by the Spirit of God who speaks when He finds hearts ready to listen. I ask you to faithfully give the best time of your day to daily meditation on the Word of God, to the Eucharist as thanksgiving, source, and culmination of our prayer (cf. C 40).

The joy we are speaking about presupposes an experience of encounter; it is acceptance, trust, listening, humility, patience, openness of heart to let ourselves be inhabited by God and by others, keeping in mind that true communion is built *on being-with* and not *only for* others. It also involves humanizing our relationships as the place where our ‘loving each other’ is expressed, and not being afraid to show it, because ours is *consecrated love* that comes from God and in Him there is only love pervaded by freedom and authenticity.

Humanize also the pace of our days to live every encounter as a festive and joyful experience, even if we are aware of the weight of problems that sometimes bring us anxiety and worry. A serene, smiling face lets the joy of God transpire, the beauty of being gathered for a mission that makes us “sign and expression of His love” (C 1).

These are the communities that become fruitful wombs of new vocations, as we repeat every day in the prayer in preparation for GC XXIV. When Jesus is at the center and where the Gospel of love is breathed, joy appears as the most credible vocational message.

I can attest that there are many communities that progressively discover the secret of authentic happiness, finding its source in God’s love. At the same time, I am aware that individualism and activism are still real pitfalls that can deface or weaken the joy of our being Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with the consequent difficulty of witnessing to it. Certain bitterness, sadness, and disappointments about the ‘why of the scarcity of vocations’ must give way to a radical resumption of those values I mentioned above. I invite you to a serene and decisive personal and community evaluation to be able to rediscover, if there is need, fidelity to Jesus and the joy of belonging to Him.

Dear Sisters, we must love our vocation, be happy to serve the Lord in joy. It is a joy that we cannot keep for ourselves. Radiating the joy of our vocation is a kind of evangelization that we are all called to. It is a way of letting ourselves be pervaded by the spirit of the Magnificat, by the atmosphere of the beatitudes characteristic of our spirituality (cf. C 8/10).

Are we aware of being women who walk on this marvelous road to make the beauty of the Father's love shine in a world thirsting for the infinite?

Allow these questions to rise in us:

Do I have the awareness that I am called to be 'person-amphora' ready to pour out in the environment the joy of vocation in gratuity and in the spirit of the Magnificat, because I am immensely loved by God? (Cf. C 4/8).

Am I aware that I must first give it to those closest to me: my sisters, the young, and every other person who awaits gestures of humanity, of fraternal charity in an attitude of open dialogue, of trust, of respect and esteem towards the diversity each one carries? (Cf. C 50)

How can we try together to make each other happy in daily life?

These are some questions we welcome with a new heart, in the certainty that they can help us with renewed enthusiasm in vocational animation.

The joy of a renewed vocational animation

The Circular *In preparation for General Chapter XXIV* offers us useful elements so that our communities, guided by Mary, may be increasingly prophetic and fruitful at the vocational level. Mine wishes to be a warm invitation to again take up this document, fruit of prayer, and make it the object of sharing and of personal evaluation.

Mary is presented to us as the disciple who walks in faith and has the courage to accomplish God's dream in herself. "She invites us to be disciples with Her and to trust Jesus repeating: '*Do whatever He tells you.*'" (Circular *In preparation for General Chapter XXIV*)

It is interesting to ask ourselves what Jesus wants to tell us today to be capable of *restoring the joy of the call* and contagion other young people with it?

During this time of preparation for the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, I think He asks us to pay greater attention to the daily indications of the Holy Spirit that make our communities "generators of new life." We are the depositories of a rich charismatic heritage of which we are responsible not only to guard it, but to make it grow, to increase its fecundity at the ecclesial and social levels. It is an historical hour to live with Mary in order to be with Her 'helpers' of life, guardians of the joy and hope of the young people (cf. Circular *With Mary Towards the 150th of the Institute*).

With the experience lived during these years in contact with many realities, I have noticed a new sensitivity in the FMA and laity to 'reawaken' joy in the heart of the young at a time when they often do not feel understood, listened to, loved, valued. I think I can affirm that the commitment to build a vocational culture as the "path to encounter," where every person expresses their vocation in the joy of a specific identity and in the realization of the common mission; where the young people are accompanied to discover God's plan for them; a 'place of life' in which they all feel involved in a journey that has happiness as its point of arrival.

At Valdocco and at Mornese, the climate of Salesian joy was at home and became an irresistible invitation to share the experience of following Jesus radically. We recall the simple and attractive expression: "Here we make holiness consist in being very happy" (Domenic Savio); "My one desire is to see you happy in time and in eternity" (Don Bosco). Mother Mazzarello wrote to a young Novice, "Courage and always have great cheerfulness which is the sign of a heart that really loves the Lord very much." (L 60: 5) For her, joy is the expression of love. Those who love can only be cheerful.

Our Founders were true ‘seekers’ and ‘promoters’ of happiness in the young. With acute pedagogical intuition they knew how to make them experience the taste for joy as a point of departure and as the goal to reach holiness.

In a splendid synthesis of consecration and mission, Mother Mazzarello is vigilant so that every relationship is the expression of sweetness and of joy. Hers is the heart of a mother who speaks with deep humanity to the heart of the girls and sisters.

We too, are called to be mothers who generate life, especially where there is need of a supplement of joy, of hope. Today requires a *dynamic generativity* which sets in motion, which arouses joy and vocational fervor.

Dear sisters, in order to be fruitful we need to be mothers and as such, courageous in daring to witness with our life that following Jesus is the most beautiful dream.

Experience tells us that daring to make demanding and audacious proposals that point to high goals, arouses questions in those who receive them and does good to those who propose them.

Let us remember what Pope Benedict told us, “The Church does not grow through proselytism but through attraction.” This is the way it is for every pastoral and vocational journey!

Joy is achieved by walking

The golden thread that accompanies my sharing is to dream of welcoming, joyful communities able to share the values of life with the young and ready to walk with them. “Young people await those who know how to propose authentically evangelical lifestyles and journeys of initiation to the great values of human and Christian life.” (Circular *In Preparation for General Chapter XXIV*)

There is a journey that leads to happiness and it is the one Jesus offers to everyone and we cannot let anyone be excluded. Happiness is the right of everyone.

The Post Synod Apostolic Letter that Pope Francis wrote to the young and to all the people of God opens horizons of great hope for the young people themselves who live in a world in crisis. “Anyone called to be a parent, pastor or guide to young people must have the farsightedness to appreciate the little flame that continues to burn, the fragile reed that is shaken but not broken (cf. *Is* 42:3). It is the ability to discern pathways where others only see walls, to recognize potential where others see only dangers. That is how God the Father sees things; He knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young. Each young person’s heart should thus be considered ‘holy ground’, a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must ‘take off our shoes’ in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the Mystery.” (*Christus vivit*, n.67)

To walk with the young requires a new attitude, to know how to look at them with the same gaze of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. With love’s intuition, our Founders scrutinized the hearts of the young, discovering in all of them, even the most difficult, rebellious, and indifferent, the good, the beautiful, the hidden potential to the point of transforming ‘wounded lives’ into fulfilled people, even accompanying them to the heights of holiness. We must believe that this ‘miracle’ is possible today as well. It is not utopia, but realistic optimism, the indispensable characteristic of our spirituality. Is it not perhaps a value that must be regained to make our actions and our every choice *for* young people and *with* young people shine with greater joy and certainty?

I trust that with the heart of daughters you will know how to interpret, welcome, and recognize in every word of mine a reflection of what you yourselves give me in our encounters.

A few days ago, I received a letter from a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians that brought me joy. Here are her words, “I had spoken to you about a group of young people (19/20) who had invited me...we got together for three hours in the home of one of the girls ...each one was a magnificent plan of God and I told them this. Wonderful young people, university students and workers, with transparent eyes and a great desire to give themselves. They listened to me, they questioned me...it

was an encounter that fills the heart at seeing young people of this kind, beautiful inside and out...returning home, I gratefully sang my Magnificat in my heart.”

Certainly similar and encouraging experiences are lived in many communities and it is good to circulate them in order to praise God, and above all, to make them the subject of prayer and dialogue among ourselves. Sharing the positive, the beautiful that we meet in daily life helps us to nourish missionary enthusiasm. We can exercise our gaze to become like that of Jesus: a look of trust that sees the positive, that encourages, that discovers the shoots of new life in the simple gestures of life.

We are preparing to celebrate GC XXIV involving the educating communities, the laity, the young people, and the ecclesial and social realities. We are aware that we are living precarious times, but the Lord will not let the signs of His love be lacking and He can reserve unheard of surprises for us if we work in synergy to let ourselves be conquered by the Risen Christ and by authentic love toward the young entrusted to us, those close and those distant, those in situations of poverty and of hardship of various kinds.

I hope that everyone will be strong in their desire to be ‘seekers’ and ‘promoters’ of happiness with the courage to announce to them that “Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way He brings youth to our world, and everything He touches becomes young, new, full of life.” (*Christus vivit*, n. 1)

It is a journey that fascinates us and at the same time intimidates us. Let the cry of the young people touch our hearts deeply and courageously make our days a ‘response’ to their deepest expectations.

I *re-propose* to you what I already suggested in Circular 960 as *working strategies* for a renewed vocational animation. Among them, I choose one that is dear to my heart: *intensify* personal and community prayer for vocations and the joyful witness of fidelity to the call of Jesus lived in community, in the mission with the young people. I invite you to pray with faith the monthly novena to Mary Help of Christians with the intention of committing yourselves as a community to live fraternal charity more intensely, the atmosphere that favors the emergence of vocations.

I close by entrusting the communities to Her, Mother of the young, so that she may make them “fruitful wombs of new vocations” and teach everyone to pour “the good wine of joy”, so that at “the wedding feast” the young can be the favored, the closest, and most loved by Jesus.

It's lovely to think that Mary turns to each one and whispers, “Do whatever Jesus tells you.”

May the blessing of the Lord inundate our life with joy and help us to rejoice at every sign of new life that is continually sprouting in us and around us.

Rome, 24 October 2019

Affectionately, Mother

New Provincials 2020

Province "St. Rose of Lima" <i>Sr. Elsy NÚÑES</i>	America PER
Province "Morning Star" <i>Sr. Eun Kyeong Cecilia KIM</i>	Asia KOR
Province "Mary Help of Christians" <i>Sr. Louise McKEOGH</i>	Oceania SPR
Extension for one year	
Province "St. Catherine of Siena" <i>Sr. Helena GESSER</i>	America BSP
Province "Our Lady of Penha" <i>Sr. Ana Teresa PINTO</i>	BRJ
Province "Immaculate Help of Christians" <i>Sr. Maria Lúcia BARRETO</i>	BCG