

***Regenerated by the Holy Spirit
communities that generate life***

Dearest Sisters,

As you have noticed, the goal of the Circulars of these months is to study some aspects that I consider especially important for the life of the Institute in preparation for GC XXIV. In this letter, I invite you to reflect on the importance for the Institute after 150 years of its foundation to be more *generative* starting from the regeneration of ourselves, as individuals and as communities, by the Holy Spirit who is the source of new life and of authentic transformation. We are all aware of the need for deep renewal that will again give authenticity to our life and fruitfulness to our mission. We recognize that strategies, programs, projects are important, but today, we are asked to listen with ever more docility to the Spirit of God to be available and open to His transforming action in our life, in the Church, and in the world.

If the Institute, and in it every individual Province and community, does not generate more life, it will not have a future. This expression may arouse many questions. I think among all of them, the one that has priority is to ask ourselves how to rediscover ‘new life’ that awakens in the communities the freshness of vocational fecundity, the joy, the missionary openness of the origins.

Mary can help us “to live the generative power of the charism in this historical hour, supported by the joyful and unwavering certainty that the Holy Spirit effuses and infuses in our today new vitality and creativity, full of the hope of new wine that flows from faith” (Circular 985, *In preparation of General Chapter XXIV*).

Under Her guidance we want to journey this path together with her maternal style and gaze, placing ourselves in a listening attitude attentive to the educational challenges of the young people of today.

I am certain that the ardent desire vibrates in all of us ‘to let ourselves be transfigured’ through a deep encounter with the Holy Spirit, and in Him, to be women who generate life and radiate joy and hope to the new generations.

The Holy Spirit, presence that transforms

The *Circular of Convocation of GC XXIV* highlights that the first FMA community is a community that generates life because it is ‘regenerated’ by the Word (*Cf. I Pt 1: 2*) and it is strengthened by the Eucharist, and by forgiveness received and given.

The wealth of interior life and the apostolic resourcefulness of Mother Mazzarello and the first sisters are the fruit of their heart open to the action of the Holy Spirit who finds space and freedom of action, so much so that their life becomes an eloquent witness of love for the One who first loved them.

Wisdom of heart, gift of the Spirit, makes them impassioned lovers of Jesus, ready to give everything to make Him known, loved, chosen as the only aim of the life of many young women of their times.

To go back with the heart's memory to the origins of the Institute is to recognize the marvelous work that the Holy Spirit was able to accomplish in the life of these first sisters who, effectively, knew how to build generative communities because they were daughters, sisters, mothers.

Today we too, want to let ourselves be 'chiseled' by the Holy Spirit who with delicacy makes us relish the whisper of a 'light breeze' often through ordinary signs, sometimes imperceptible, or through situations of significant events like GC XXIV. 'His voice' is heard, but we do not know where it comes from or where it goes (Cf. Jn 3: 8).

He is the Artist, the real Protagonist of change who acts with wise creativity and through unimagined manifestations, renews the face of the earth (Cf. *Psalm* 104:30). However, His action always comes from within, "But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you" (*Jn* 14: 17).

It is a call to adventure on a journey of the inner life that does not close in on itself with egotistical confines or personal interests, but opens to undreamed of horizons of an inhabited interior life where one finds the beauty of the encounter with God and with our sisters and brothers in the ordinary situations of life. It is a journey of 'open spaces' that leads to a deep encounter with Jesus in whom the Holy Spirit found the definitive manifestation. The whole life of Jesus is an event of the Holy Spirit, from conception (Cf. *Lk* 1: 35), to the period preceding His ministry in Galilee (Cf. *Mt.* 3: 17), up to attributing to Himself Isaiah's prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (*Lk* 4: 18).

On this journey of openness to the Spirit, we meet Mary who let herself be guided by Him throughout her whole life: from the Annunciation, when she entrusted herself totally to God, then at Cana, at Calvary, in prayer with the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus, and in the Cenacle when the Holy Spirit bursts forth at Pentecost. Everything in Her is the transparency of the Spirit's presence and unconditional openness to His action.

Dear Sisters, in the 'journey' we have undertaken toward GC XXIV, God's Spirit is a living presence even in us and among us, gradually involving us in a process of 'new life'. He is the dew that irrigates personal and community spaces, ones that are sometimes tepid, arid, without great zeal or ideals, weak in hope, and fatigued in the search for future roads.

In my visits to the various areas of the world, I meet sisters and laity, young and old, who let themselves be gripped by a new process, by an unheard of 'apostolic fire' that transforms their life into an exalting dynamism, fruit of deep dialogue with the Spirit through listening to the Word of God and attentive to the challenges of reality.

I thank the Lord for this passionate openness that marks the concrete steps of *new life* in the spirit of the charism, sign of a journey of *conversion-transformation* in harmony with the whole Church.

In this time of special grace, the Holy Spirit counts on each of us, He asks us to let Him act so that He may be the Protagonist of our life. Only with Him can we accomplish the objective of GC XXIV, *to be communities that generate life in the heart of contemporaneity*. If we let Him act, He creates deep harmony in us and around us. Unfortunately, the fast pace of our times forces us to marginalize this harmony, sometimes even in our communities. We need the Spirit! "At today's frenzied pace of life, harmony seems swept aside...The Spirit is peace in the midst of restlessness, confidence in the midst of discouragement, joy in sadness, youth in aging, courage in the hour of trial... He is the Consoler, who brings us the tender love of God" (Pope Francis, *Homily on the Solemnity of Pentecost*, June 9, 2019).

I reflected a lot on these words of the Holy Father and I feel the duty to share them with you so that they may help us on the journey we are taking together.

Today, we are called to be *women of the Spirit, spiritual women* and thus, *deeply human*. The Spirit finds a 'home' where there is love, and one savors the joy of giving and receiving simple gestures of acceptance, respect, human warmth, patience, and trust. I have underlined these attitudes on various occasions. I propose them again, reinforcing the necessity that they be translated into life through contemplation of the Word, strong with constant prayer, happy to open the heart's door and the gates of our houses to the 'coming' of the Holy Spirit. Let Him never be the 'great unknown', the 'forgotten one', but the one who is 'welcome', 'familiar', the 'sweet Consoler', so that the communities become a 'new Pentecost' where differences in age, culture, language are harmonized; where possible tensions and conflicts give way to peace, mercy, forgiveness, to Easter gazes and gestures that know how to look positively at the good and beautiful in every person and situation. It regards a journey that is more and more open in which the step of each one opens new horizons. Even our weakness is the space in which the Spirit can live and act more so that His power may triumph in our fragility.

This is the time of *new wine* to pour into *new wineskins*. Let us ask ourselves, which attitudes must I cultivate in order to live daily relationships with renewed love and hope, the sign that 'something new' is happening?

How can we help each other to be more aware of the active and transforming presence of the Holy Spirit in our personal and community experience, in the life of the children, of the young, of the people we meet? What attention of the heart is needed to perceive His voice, His light? To be always seeking, desirous of encountering the Love of our life is a fundamental attitude that He Himself arouses in us.

I invite you to share the signs of new life you discover in the daily routine. It is a possibility for transforming our gaze and opening our heart to joy and to gratitude.

The communities, places where life is generated

In the actual culture, some researchers reflect on 'generativity' and apply it to various contexts and situations. This is not the place to enter into a deep analysis. Here I wish to speak to you 'heart to heart', specifying that the theme of GC XXIV has the aim of reviving or re-awakening, if there is need, the awareness of being *generative communities* formed by Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, lay adults, and young people whom we have at heart. Generativity is not an individual but a synodal fact. It is the educating community called by the Holy Spirit to assume this very beautiful and demanding journey with typically Salesian characteristics, to become 'wombs' that generate life, places of love's fruitfulness.

I can say that in many communities this appeal is gradually being realized, not only in written projects, but as a *lifestyle*. It is the fruit of a great commitment on the part of each one of you and I thank you because I understand that it is not always easy to find convergence of thought and appropriate choices regarding this.

I encourage you to persevere along these lines that can really fill with new lymph and renewed hope the 'empty wineskins' in this unprecedented time in history that challenges us in depth as an educational Institute and that sometimes leaves us uneasy and uncertain. The inevitable difficulties must not obscure the happiness of feeling called to a great mission that the Spirit Himself entrusts to us: to be *mothers, consecrated women who generate life!*

Being mothers is a gift given to us in full gratuity, along with the suffering that any gestation requires. We wish to give it with joy in response to the deep expectations of many young people and to God's dream that, through the Holy Spirit, guides us to desire with prophetic passion and apostolic daring a future rich in humanity.

Meaningful and encouraging are the words of Pope Francis to the Religious, "May this joy of spiritual fecundity motivate your life; be mothers, as a figure of Mary, Mother, and of Mother Church. It is impossible to understand Mary without her motherhood; it is impossible to understand the Church

apart from her motherhood, and you are icons of Mary and the Church” (Pope Francis, *Discourse to UISG*, 8 May 2013).

I wish to offer you *some indications* so that the beauty and richness of being communities that generate life may be expressed fully. They are reminders of some already known values, but it is opportune to revitalize them in order to give our communities a new face. In fact, it is the communities that require an authentic transformation, a need that many of you shared with me in the various encounters. The theme of generativity, as I have already emphasized, is studied by researchers of contemporary culture, and it is interesting to note that they highlight the importance of some *generative actions* among which emerges *taking care*.

In our charismatic tradition, taking care recalls reciprocal accompaniment. This requires “looking more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary” (*EG*, n. 169). It is entering into the dimension of the ‘sacredness’ of the person before whom we must remove our sandals because we are touching sacred ground (cf. *Ex* 3:5).

One of the ways for accompaniment, although not the only way, is the *personal encounter* (Cf. C 34/147) as a life experience, the possibility of sharing with the people the Lord places beside us and with whom we share a vocation, the charism, gift of the Holy Spirit. The encounter is an event of grace that arouses hope, generates trust, touches the depths of the interior world, and reverberates in the community. It is not adhesion to a norm or just a formality, but a choice dictated by the family spirit that characterizes us. It is in tune with the same gaze of God who is mercy, tenderness, forgiveness, trust, gratuitous love, because God is Father and Mother, and where fatherhood and motherhood shine, everything has the face of gratuitousness.

Thus lived, the encounter can be the ‘good wine’ poured into the daily routine that creates ever broader spaces of love, letting us taste the fascination of following Jesus, the joy and hope of proclaiming and witnessing the beauty of the Gospel, to gradually mature the readiness to welcome the other into one’s own interior dwelling. The encounter can contribute to maturing the capacity for reciprocal forgiveness that is the ‘triumph of love’ stronger than any wound, offense, fragility. All this, dear sisters, gives new energy to the daily gestures of living in community. My heart resounds with the voices of many sisters who invoke and desire the encounter experience and who at times, suffer its absence!

Let us ask ourselves why the encounter, which according to Don Bosco is the key to open hearts, has fallen into disuse in some of our realities? I invite you to look for the motives in an attitude of prayer and with serenity, keeping in mind various personal and community situations and its importance for growth in communion (Cf. C 34).

Let us feel responsible for each other because the Lord gathers us in His name to be the sign of His love. It is a gift and a task that we are called to live each day with the help of the Holy Spirit. In this way we can accomplish together a marvelous plan of love that gives fruitfulness to the mission entrusted to us.

Education space of generativity

As I have already said, to bring to birth is not an individual, private fact, but a mission of the educating community that cannot be substituted. It is called to sow abundantly with creative fidelity in the *present* to give a face to the *future* in which, especially the young generations, can find a place as ‘active citizens’ and ‘convinced Christians’, according to God’s plan of love.

The experience of Valdocco and of Mornese remains for all a radiant point of reference for the dynamism, creativity, courage to become a ‘contagion of life’ for the many young people through appropriate educational paths.

It is a challenge that also today we are called to face *together*, putting into action the wealth of the Preventive System in order to recognize and fill the ‘empty jars’ of many young people in the whole world with ‘new wine’. By its very nature, education has generative fecundity and today re-proposes a strong wager that must not frighten us, but ‘provoke’ us to express new apostolic ardor in creating good conditions, attentive to the restlessness and the dreams of many young people that we know or that are unknown, because they live in the ‘existential peripheries’.

Many are the poverties that weigh down and wound the life of the new generations and that impede many of them from investing their potential in the best way possible. I believe that the greatest poverty is the poverty of values, of prospects, of vital significance. As an educational Institute, we cannot ignore them or wait for ‘better times’ to act, but we are called to walk with courage and enthusiasm as our Founders taught us. The young people ask for this, the Church asks for this, and perhaps not always explicitly, even society asks for this.

The educational challenge is at the center of the thought and choices of Pope Francis who, with a realistic gaze and a Pastor’s heart well knows how important it is to assume it as a positive challenge, as a resource, and not as a problem (Cf. Antonio Spadaro, *Sette pilastri dell’educazione secondo J. M. Bergoglio*, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1-15 September 2018).

With the farsighted wisdom that characterizes him, the Pope promotes a world event for May 14, 2020 on the theme, *Reinventing the Global pact on Education* which has as its objective “To rekindle our dedication for and with young people, renewing our passion for a more open and inclusive education, including patient listening, constructive dialogue, and better mutual understanding. Never before has there been such need to unite our efforts in a broad *educational alliance*, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity (Pope Francis, *Message for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019).

In the contemporary world in continual transformation and crossed by a multiplicity of crises, the Pope continues, it is necessary to build a ‘village of education’ where, in respect for diversity, we share the effort to generate a network of human and open relationships. Building this ‘village’ is the condition to be able to educate and accomplish “An alliance, in other words, between the earth’s inhabitants and our “common home”, which we are bound to care for and respect. An alliance that generates peace, justice, and hospitality among all peoples of the human family, as well as dialogue between religions.”

In the ‘educating village, the quoted message specifies, we must take essential steps to reach these objectives: *to have the courage to place the human person at the center, to invest our best energies with creativity and responsibility, to train individuals who are ready to place themselves at the service of the community.*

The Message concludes with the invitation that seems addressed to our educating communities: “Let us seek solutions together, boldly undertake processes of change, and look to the future with hope. I invite everyone to work for this alliance and to be committed, individually and within our communities, to nurturing the dream of a humanism rooted in solidarity and responsive both to humanity’s aspirations and to God’s plan.”

I warmly invite you to know and study this message as an educating community. It is a wonderful ‘frame of reference’ on which to share about making our communities ‘educating villages’, capable of *generating life and life in abundance in the heart of contemporaneity.*

We are walking towards Christmas which is the ‘Feast of Life’. We entrust ourselves to Mary who with her ‘yes’ became the ‘fruitful womb’ of the mystery of the Incarnation, so that she will teach us to listen to the Spirit who speaks in daily life and let ourselves be regenerated by Him to rediscover the joy of being ‘mothers’ and ‘helpers’ who generate new life.

I conclude, dear Sisters, wishing you a radiant solemnity of the Immaculate and a blest Christmas. I wish this greeting to reach your families, the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, our Salesian Confreres, the members of the Salesian Family, the educating communities, the families, and every person who shares the educational mission with us.

With great affection I address a special greeting to all the young people far and near. May Jesus be for them the motive of 'new life', of great hope, and of deep joy.

God bless you.

Rome, 24 November 2019

Affectionately, Mother
Sr. Reungoat Yvonne