

## *Generativity as prophecy today*

Dearest Sisters,

God's surprises ask us to welcome the unprecedented of every day in the context of an overall crisis caused by the pandemic. We too experience a new reality that sees us reunited in the *Plenum* in an unusual period. We are in harmony with a world that suffers, lives in uncertainty and with the serious challenges of the present time.

We are united in a special way with all of you whom we reach with different modalities, accomplishing the service of animation in new but engaging ways. We follow in prayer the situations you are experiencing and we thank you for the creative giving with which you carry out the mission in favor of so many children, adolescents, young people, and families so that they feel accompanied and supported by trust in the One who guides history.

### **The dynamic power of generativity**

The time that is being extended in anticipation of General Chapter XXIV is an opportunity for us to reflect in an even more vital way on the chosen theme, which we consider extremely timely. *Circular* 992 had already helped us to grasp its depth in the light of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit who regenerates us, so that we can be fruitful communities of life in the situation in which we find ourselves.

In this regard, the online meeting with Dr. Chiara Giaccardi of Sacred Heart Catholic University of Milan who for some years, together with Dr. Mauro Magatti, her husband, explores the theme of generativity in its various perspectives. On 7 October, she developed this theme for us in the light of the Magisterium of Pope Francis and the pandemic, as a space in which God speaks to us and questions us. We share some of our resonances that can accompany you on your pre-Chapter journey.

Generativity is a way of calling life, because "what is alive bears fruit and what is alive generates, and what is alive is transformed" (Goethe). It is a dynamic power that takes us beyond ourselves and makes us do things we didn't think we were capable of. It helps us to rediscover the vocation to be fruitful and thus make a new contribution to the world for the good of all.

The future that awaits us is not something already written in its premises, but a reality that all of us can and must contribute to building. In fact, generativity is not only individual, but also a factor that changes communities, institutions, the Church itself.

As FMA religious educators, we are called to be mothers, generators of life and hope in the heart of contemporaneity through our educational mission, together with the laity who share the charism with us (cf. *Circular* 985: *In preparation for the Chapter General XXIV*). Generativity is lived in relationships of proximity and in taking care of others, in particular of young people most in need.

On many occasions Pope Francis in speaking to the religious, invites them to be in the Church the icon of Mary's motherhood, 'mothers' who promote life and feel the responsibility for the new generations. It is a call to our vocation which is expressed in a total giving clothed with joy and gratuitousness, with skills, and with ever new educational alliances.

Especially in this time we feel touched by the cry of so many young people and families who in different parts of the world live experiences of hardship and struggle dreaming of a new future.

It is a cause for joy to observe the creative giving of many people at the service of the neediest, in defense of human dignity, and in finding new ways to reach the poorest. During this time, we observe with admiration that in our communities as well, the network of solidarity has been strengthened with the young, the laity, members of the Salesian Family. This is a prophetic sign in a world often crossed by divisions, violence, natural disasters.

It is beautiful to see that the pandemic does not impede the freshness of the charism in its educational dynamism, rather, it empowers it in the search for new spaces and opportunities of encounter.

In this period of history, generativity can be a *way of resilience*, typical of those who do not only adapt to the situation in order to survive, but who have the courage to change by building a new future.

### **A generative path**

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* n. 24 Pope Francis highlights some paths of missionary generativity that are particularly in tune with the Salesian educational style: take the initiative, get involved, accompany, bear fruit, celebrate.

*Take the initiative* means going out without fear to encounter, feeling the responsibility of making an unrepeatable contribution for the good of all. Whoever experiences that God has taken the initiative, preceded in love (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), dares to take the first step with courage. Boldness moved by love has been a vital aspect of our charism from the very beginning.

*Get involved* by letting oneself be touched by the life of others; it is knowing how to shorten distances, live in reality, especially the one closest to the least, that periphery from where fragilities, needs, hopes, and opportunities for intervention are better seen.

*Accompany* is the verb of one who is among people, walks with them, and knows how to share life with loving patience; knows long waits, and welcomes with serenity skills and limitations. It is a verb of reciprocity which implies giving and receiving. You cannot accompany without living the experience of being accompanied.

*Bear fruit* is the expression of a fruitfulness rooted in love (cf. Jn 15: 5). It requires letting ourselves be enriched by the Holy Spirit in order to make others responsible for their growth and for their involvement for the good, in a bond that makes us all brothers and sisters.

*Celebrate* recalls the dimension of the fullness of life which guides us to celebrate with joy and gratitude the signs of the blessing presence of God in daily life.

In living these paths, educating communities can become more and more generative of life by walking with young people on the way of holiness (cf. C 5).

### **The beauty of youth holiness**

The holiness of young people is not an abstract idea, but a call to render Baptismal grace fruitful, assume responsibility for one's growth, and open the heart to solidarity by responding to the plan God has for each person (cf. C 69/71).

We admire this path of light in so many adolescents of yesterday and today, who are the youthful face of the Church: Domenic Savio, Laura Vicuña, Zeffirino Namuncurá, Juan Barrera Méndez of Guatemala a 12 year-old martyr who will be beatified shortly, and many other young people with different faces and cultures.

An atmosphere of grace and celebration was brought to the Church and to the world by the beatification of Carlo Acutis, in love with the Eucharist, pervaded with love for Mary and dedication to the poor, eager to proclaim, also through the internet, values and beauty to the today's world (cf. *Christus vivit*, nos. 104-106).

He is a new ‘beacon of light’ that attracts thousands of people to the Lord, raises questions, interrogates them on their own faith journey, and suggests the safest ‘highway’ to travel to reach Heaven: the Eucharist.

Holiness is today a prophetic sign, an expression of the generativity of faith that can transform young people and adults and renew hope in a humanity capable of speaking the language of fraternity.

This implies on our part, creating an environment where the values of the Gospel are breathed and where we feel the responsibility to strive together with joy for holiness in the Salesian style, explicitly proposing it to young people.

As the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano says: “the roots must have faith in the flowers” and therefore believe that the new generations, and those who will come after, will be able to make beauty blossom with their own, unique characteristics.

### **The fruitfulness of a global educational alliance**

Holiness is a gift from God, but also the fruit of an integral educational proposal that involves people, institutions, and environments. Pope Francis points this out to us in relaunching the *Global Educational Pact*. He recalls the need to combine resources, skills, and spaces to regenerate society, to create “a new development model”, an “integral, participatory, and multifaceted culture”, a “civilization of harmony where there is no place for the bad pandemic of waste” (cf. *Video-message*, 15 October 2020).

This proposal represents a new call to revitalize some aspects of our charism regarding environmental pedagogy, establishing constructive and open relationships, overcoming self-referencing, and networking with people passionate about education.

Every change in history requires an educational path and a commitment to recreate a fabric of relationships, involving all components of society. Education “is the way to humanize the world and history; it is a question of love and responsibility that is transmitted over time for the future” (cf. *Video-message* cited above).

Let us walk together, with courage and foresight, in the perspective of a service for the common good, aware that education is a way of development and social change. We are also invited to this by the new Encyclical “*Fratelli tutti*” signed by Pope Francis on 3 October this year in Assisi. He points out great ideals and concrete ways of implementation for those who want to build a more just and fraternal world, in dialogue and social friendship. We are certain that the Encyclical will become an object of personal reading, sharing, and research for ways of implementing it in the educating communities.

We are living in a potentially extraordinary moment of generativity because a germ of new life is contained in difficulties and crisis. It will be able to give a renewed impulse to the mission of Salesian educators in communion with one another and with the world.

We entrust all educating communities with their commitment, challenges, worries, joys, and projects to Mary, Mother who is fruitful with life and hope.

We greet you with affection and assure you of our communion in prayer and in listening to the new calls of God in history.

Rome, 24 October 2020

Mother and the Sisters of the Council