

## *Fraternity generates life*

Dearest Sisters,

I am happy to reach you for our monthly encounter that no lockdown can cancel. Love always needs to communicate and my heart feels the desire for a continual concrete and real communion with each one of you and with each community. During daily prayer, I ask Mary Help of Christians to walk in every house of the Institute, in the entire world to make her maternal presence felt, to bless, protect, encourage, support, thank. I am grateful for all the news that comes to me from the Provinces and that permits me to continually actualize my prayer. It comes spontaneously for me to repeat with Paul, *"I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you"* (Phil 1: 3-4).

In this unprecedented time in which the whole world is struck by the pandemic, we are challenged to go to the Essential of our life, overcome the limitations of fragility, of human vulnerability, discovering the presence of God-Love who invites us to be courageous and daring witnesses in the heart of the world. I accompany you on the journey along with the Sisters of the Council, carrying your concerns, hopes, aspirations, and projects for the good in my heart and in prayer.

### **The love of God is the source of human fraternity**

The love of God makes all human beings brothers and sisters because we are daughters and sons of the same Father. During this time, a lot is spoken about fraternity and Pope Francis illumines the way of the Church and of humanity with his gestures and his Magisterium. On 4 February 2019, the Great Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, signed at Abu Dhabi the *Document on Human Fraternity for world peace and common coexistence*. It is a point of no return, not only in relationships between Christians and Muslims, but also among all the members of humanity.

In the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, signed by Pope Francis at Assisi on 3 October 2020, he shared his concern for the depth of the crisis that the world is living and that makes fraternity collapse. He leads us to reflect on the "dream of fraternity and of social friendship" that he has at heart for humanity, on its solid foundation, on its challenges and threats. In order to propose to us a style of life that has the flavor of the Gospel, he indicates the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. With the gestures of the Samaritan, he shows that *"the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions"* (*Fratelli tutti*, n. 66).

We often live *near* others, but we are called to be *neighbors*. It is a free choice and a commitment that translates into concrete attitudes, gestures of goodness, availability of time, starting from being moved in our heart like Jesus. It is the opposite of the indifference proper to those who are centered on themselves, unable to look at others with attention, with the desire to enter their life. It is necessary to let oneself be guided by Jesus in order to live with Him, to love like Him, to give life like Him: "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it" (Lk 17:33).

When we speak of fraternity, we are not only referring to our rapports as FMA, but to the totality of relationships in the educating community of which we are members, young people and adults, lay people and consecrated persons. We are all called to give a specific contribution to create a climate characterized by the typically Salesian family spirit. In saying fraternity, we also include the relationship with Creation according to the spirit of *Laudato Si* that emphasizes how the universe is all inter-connected: “Nature is filled with words of love...an integral ecology requires.... contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence ‘must not be contrived but found, uncovered’. We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full” (LS nos. 225-226).

May the Lord help us to become more and more women of relationship, capable of creating a fabric of interconnected threads, of ever wider networks, starting from the love expressed day by day in an infinite number of bridges built and rebuilt with patience, trust, and perseverance in the continuous search for the common good.

Right now we are surrounded by many people who experience a deep loneliness that causes fear, insecurity, sometimes aggression, suffering. Our communities can be ‘hearths of tenderness’ that give back hope and let the light enter the darkness that, at times, seems to envelop life and society.

### **The charism generates fraternity**

When we FMA speak of fraternity we cannot disregard the family style that we are called to express in daily life. Don Bosco continually insisted with his young people and in his confreres on the need to establish ‘fraternal’ relationships that make one feel the warmth of home. Mother Mazzarello addressed the first FMA with the name of ‘sisters’ and she really felt them to be such, meeting them in the Heart of Jesus. Fraternity is, in fact, a consequence of being in Jesus, all daughters of one Father. As Salesian educators we live it in a family spirit, in a relationship that expresses sincere affection, sharing, co-responsibility, knowing how to take care of one another. Fraternity finds its concrete expression in the Preventive System, in that spiritual heritage which Don Bosco transmitted to our Institute and which is inspired by the charity of the Good Shepherd (cf. C 1). Our Constitutions remind us that its foundation is the charity that Saint Paul recognizes as the greatest of charisms (cf. 1 Cor 13).

“Like the first community of Mornese, we are called to live this patient charity that excuses all, trusts all, bears with all, and never loses hope” (C 7). Article 50 of the Constitutions indicates the concrete attitudes that characterize every community: respect, esteem and understanding, open, family-like dialogue, good will, true sisterly friendship, appreciation of what each one brings to the community, the free gift of the best of oneself. With an authentic family spirit, each is ready to prefer the good of her sisters to her own, to choose the hardest part for herself, and to carry it out in humble, joyful simplicity. In fact, sisterly love is not only for great occasions but more especially in the circumstances of everyday life. It is there where authentic sisterliness is verified.

These are indications that are present, although with a different language, since the first Constitutions given to us by Don Bosco. Each of us, according to the times and places, has the responsibility of actualizing these attitudes in the real fabric of the community, in all the relationships that are lived in the mission, carried out in the house, in the local Church, and in the area. We know how sensitive families, for example, are to the relationship with them, to gestures of humanity and solidarity. We can see how an educational work grows or deteriorates according to the quality of the relational climate established at all levels. Our mission demands a great relational quality.

Don Bosco, Mother Mazzarello, and the first communities were aware of this, even if difficulties were not lacking right from the beginning. Perfection does not exist, but we are certain that the Lord walks with us and daily gifts us with the possibility of growing together, of accepting each other as a gift. The One who calls us, gathers us into the community, and invites us to proclaim His Love together. He does not let us lack the grace of forgiveness and mercy; He sustains in us the courage to start over each day with joy. For God nothing is impossible!

Sisterliness is translated concretely in the attitude of service, in serenely giving one's life for the common good, in wearing an apron like Jesus at the Last Supper, in kneeling before our sisters and washing their feet. At the same time, it also translates into kneeling together, in front of poor young people, in front of those who are 'discarded' to wash their feet, dry them, make them feel welcome, and sharing with them. We can do it in many ways, almost without realizing it, if within us there is the awareness that what we do to the least, we do to Jesus himself (cf. Mt 25).

It is lovely to think, as Pope Francis reminds us, that "we were made for the fullness that is reached only in love" (*Fratelli Tutti* n. 68). This is true for all of us, for young people, for every person, and especially for those who exercise a service of animation and government, since they have the responsibility for greater love, of service for the promotion of life and communion within the community and with social and ecclesial repercussions.

Each community is invited to concretize the multiple expressions of service that are required of them to be truly 'the house of the love of God', where the young people feel themselves welcomed, and where daily life, lived in love and in joy, becomes a continuation of 'Mary's Magnificat' (C 62). From the community inhabited by Love, fraternity radiates towards the geographical and existential peripheries, which call for listening, care, education. In this time marked by the pandemic, we are called upon to creatively invent new forms of service and solidarity. I thank you because you are already doing it, overcoming fatigue with courage and trying to form yourselves for the new ways of communication and mission, continuing to always be in search of the good for young people, for the laity who share the mission, for families. The charism is alive all over the world and no pandemic can hinder it!

### **"I entrust them to you": a gold chain of relationships**

In this second year of preparation for the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the institute, we are accompanied by the call, "I entrust them to you".

I like to remember that the Virgin Mary received first and directly from her Son, a similar mandate, a special entrustment. From the Cross, the dying Jesus told her: "Woman, behold, your son!" (cf. Jn 19:26). A mother receives a foster child to help him/her grow in humanity. Jesus asks Mary to take on a vast and total motherhood towards all those who will be His disciples, towards the whole of humanity of all times.

Mary exercised this motherhood with the Apostles and the disciples, remaining by their side until Pentecost. She did not complain because they had abandoned Jesus in His moment of trial, but she took pity on those men who found themselves fearful and weak. She prayed with them and supported them in faith and, perhaps, also made her contribution to the practical aspect of life in the Upper Room. I imagine that she listened to and consoled Peter for his betrayal, Thomas for his incredulity, and encouraged the others one by one, as they waited for the Holy Spirit.

And then she continued to live the entrustment by welcoming those returning from proclaiming Jesus, listening to those who confided in her the joy of seeing the Gospel received and those who shared the hardships and persecutions encountered. And she related, especially to Luke, the facts of Jesus' childhood, which only she as His mother knew. Who knows, perhaps at times she would also bring peace between two ardent disciples. After her Assumption into Heaven, her mission spread even further, accompanying the expansion of the Church with vigilant and caring love. We are comforted by the thought that we are all entrusted to her, so that she may guide us in following Christ, teach us to remain in Him and bear witness to His saving love in the world.

The call perceived by Mary Domenica: 'I entrust them to you' also contains the appeal for collaboration. Mary, in fact, as the mother of Jesus and our mother, continues to ask us to let ourselves be involved in the evangelizing mission, to be her 'true images' in the world, as Mother Mazzarello said. She will help us to express motherhood and fraternity within the educating communities, in the territory in which we live, and in the local Church where we are inserted.

All that I have shared with you so far certainly applies to us as FMA, but it is also an experience that is lived in relationships with young people, the laity, with anyone who collaborates with us and also with those who perhaps hinder us. Many brothers and sisters are entrusted to each and every one! It is a gold chain that never ends! How beautiful and great is this trust! True fraternity is always universal.

I therefore wish each one of you, dearest sisters and all the communities, to have a joyful and fruitful experience! It is not enough to say it, one must feel it in the depths of the heart called by God to become ever greater, expanding to infinity. May Mary help each of her daughters to have a heart as big as hers, a gaze that intuitively lets itself be involved as at Cana; a refined listening to hear even the whisper of voices; feet ready to move out; hands ready to express closeness and to serve through discreet, concrete gestures.

I pray that you may enter the new Liturgical Year with great hope. May Advent truly be a time of waiting in the ardent desire to welcome Jesus into our life, into our homes and, through us, into today's society. May this Advent be deeper than any other Advent, because the world really needs the Savior!

With the faith of our holy Founders, we prepare to live in communion with the universal Church and with those who await a better future, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and Holy Christmas. I want this wish to reach each of you, dear sisters, and your families, especially those tried by suffering, to the Rector Major Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, the Salesian Brothers, all the members of the Salesian Family, and the laity: young people and adults who become 'Samaritans' with us in this delicate time of pandemic.

May the blessing of the Lord and the maternal presence of Mary bring us light and consolation and may a new horizon full of hope be opened for us and for the entire human family.

Rome, 24 November 2020

Affectionately, Mother

## New Provincials 2021 and Extensions

### *Africa*

East Africa Province “O. L. of Hope”  
*Sr. Ruth del Pilar Mora* AFE

### *America*

Brazilian Province “O. L. Aparecida”  
*Sr. Nilza Fátima (de) Moraes* BAP

Brazilian Province “Mother Mazzarello”  
*Sr. Teresinha Ambrosim* BMM

Brazilian Province “O. L. of the Amazon”  
*Sr. Maria Carmelita Conceição* BRM

Uruguay Province “Immaculate Conception”  
*Sr. María de los Angeles Grassi* URU

Argentine Province “St. Francis di Sales”  
*Sr. María Elena Fernández* (Extended to 8 December 2022) ABA

Argentine Province “St. Francis Xavier”  
*Sr. Marta Liliana Riccioli* (Extended to 8 December 2022) ABB

### *Asia*

Japanese Province “Alma Mater”  
*Sr. Michico M. Assunta Miyawaki* GIA

Timor-Indonesia Province “St. Mary D. Mazzarello”  
*Sr. Alma Castagna* (Extended to 8 December 2023). TIN