

## *Networked, for a culture of life*

Dearest Sisters,

I come to you with joy before the celebration of World Gratitude Day, a charismatic event that strengthens the communion of the Institute in the Family Spirit.

All the experiences lived in presence in the various Provinces were unforgettable, where the 'prophecy of together' shone in an extraordinary way. The Feast has always been celebrated *online*. Joy and hope grow in this event of love. This year because of the pandemic that is still active, the feast will be celebrated in virtual mode. I am certain of the intense participation of the whole Institute and that we will feel in deep communion. Frontiers do not exist in this way! And the heart does not know barriers! We will be happy to live this encounter 'virtually'!

I reach you with my deep gratitude for the creativity, the strength of *together*, and the readiness with which you are giving the best of yourselves at this time of uncertainty and fears, of fragility and new poverty that arouse life questions and unheard of challenges in the young, in families, in all of society, and in the Church.

We are facing an epochal transformation at all levels and these changes can be an opportunity to help us to read and understand what comes, intensifying the educational mission, the privileged way that forms a *culture of life*. It is an opportune time to express evangelical and Salesian courage and to look with confidence at the demanding challenges in which we are immersed.

In this context, we will celebrate the World Day of Gratitude in Rome, on 25 April in the see of the Pontifical Faculty of Education Science *Auxilium*. I thank *Mary Mother of the Church* Preprovince that accepted the invitation to make it happen, choosing the theme: *Networked for a culture of life*, which wishes to be under the banner of hope and focus attention on the need for formation today.

I am grateful to the Preprovince Superior, Sr. María del Carmen Canales Calzadilla; to the Principal of the Faculty, Sr. Piera Ruffinatto; and to all the collaborators who with educational sensitivity and cultural competence organized this significant family moment. The Feast of Gratitude addressed to Mother is also a sign of gratitude for all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, for the young people, for the laity who share our mission. I pray that an immense thank you will cross the whole world like an arrow of light that indicates the future. The source of gratitude is the Lord because everything in our life is a permanent gift of His love.

The choice of theme and logo is very appropriate. In fact, if the Institute is a solid network that is not broken by the vicissitudes of history, it is because we keep firm *together*, strong with the Word of God and with fidelity to the *da mihi animas* that animate our mission.

A special thank you to Sr. Chiara Cazzuola, Vicar General, for her rich, deep letter sent to the Provinces and in which we find precise indications for living this event with joy, hope, and a gaze on the future.

I thank all of you for your active participation and generous response, in the limits possible, to the gesture of solidarity requested in favor the needs of the Institute and for the other needs indicated in the letter. May God be your recompense and Mary, our Mother and Helper, render fruitful every gesture of solidarity in the communion of goods.

## In our *dna* the culture of life

Celebrating the World Feast of Gratitude is another opportunity to reconfirm that we *are* gratitude by vocation (cf. C 4). Gratitude is one of the fundamental aspects of the identity of our Institute. It is part of its *dna* and rediscovering it by building networks among the communities, a network woven with threads that have the color of love, is a noteworthy sign of life. To speak of life necessarily evokes the educational, cultural, Salesian process with hope and with a passionate heart for education. We enter it with a quicker step to express our faith in the One who is Life par excellence: Jesus who died and rose again so that all may enjoy life in abundance.

I think that this very special time needs a supplement of soul from all of us to know how to integrate with balance situations of suffering and of hope. We are aware that hope is never utopia because it finds its reason to be in the mystery we are celebrating during this time of Easter. Strengthened by this hope, it is possible to move from 'I' to 'we', to build a synergy of educational and formative purposes of which we feel the urgency for the new generations.

In other circumstances, I reiterated that building a network is a tangible sign of believing in 'we', in the value of the educating community present in the social and ecclesial fabric. It is welcoming and promoting the richness of cultures in their diversity. It is paying attention to the integral education proper to the Salesian pedagogical humanism of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, identifying common lines of action, studying ways to create new educational synergies and be able to give answers, albeit always in constant evaluation, to the expectations of young people today.

The Church Magisterium is very rich in this regard. I invite you to reconsider for example, the Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit* where we find clear and indicative guidelines to promote the culture of life in the young people.

*Being networked* today is both a need of our charism and a new call to value our best creative and collaborative energies to give a response to the 'educational catastrophe' brought on by the pandemic and by actual social, political, and economic problems as is mentioned in the letter that was sent in preparation for the Feast of Gratitude.

I wish to reflect with you on the importance and urgency of a specific formation, besides than that of the young people, also that of the sisters called by vocation to be educators-formators and we are all called to this regardless of our age and the mission entrusted to us.

GC XXIII reminded us that "All phases of life require *careful formation* in order to live our vocation in a way that is meaningful and joyful. The new cultural situations require *preparation and continuous updating* in view of our educating and evangelizing mission" (Acts GCXXIII, n. 32).

Each one of us has the primary and most direct responsibility for our personal formation (cf. C 80) and the need to form ourselves is always increasingly felt as an indispensable requirement. Many of you shared with me the need to be better prepared to understand the 'cultural revolution', the importance of our charismatic presence on the social networks, the need to communicate the faith with an understandable language and with the educational passion of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle*.

Regarding this, I thank the *Pontifical Faculty of the Science of Education "Auxilium"* and the other *Institutions of Higher Studies* of our Institute, marvelous laboratories of culture and of life, for their specific and competent commitment to dedicate themselves to the formation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, of young people and adults, without tiring of 're-inventing education today' and discovering innovative opportunities for cultural formation appropriate for the needs of the new challenges and new poverties. In all the formal and informal educational works, the mission is always a laboratory of ongoing formation because education is lived in reciprocity. I wish to insist on the urgency of systematic formation together with the laity in order to build networks of co-responsibility and give continuity to the Salesian educational charism. The future begins today!

The educational mission asks us to build an efficacious *educational network* with the Salesian Family in the Church and in society to become ‘agents’ of the culture of life, promoters of a humanity renewed in the spirit of the Gospel and in fidelity to the charism.

Valdocco and Mornese are the emblems of a courageous and wise network built, consolidated, and spread throughout the world with simple means, sometimes at the forefront for that time, with the aim of guaranteeing to the young a dignified and professionally competent life in which to express the best of themselves with joy and a sense of responsibility. Thus, we need to be prepared to translate into formative opportunities the challenges of this time of trial with the participation of everyone, no one excluded.

I understand that it is not an easy adventure, but with great trust I launch the appeal to the Provinces to make concrete choices so that the sisters may have the conditions of time and of opportunity to adequately form themselves for the mission with a planning mentality, with broad horizons, directed principally to the areas of Educational Sciences, of Catechetics, of Social Communications, choosing even with sacrifice, a systematic formation and not only an occasional one.

The Institute has an educative charism and for this reason it feels the responsibility to insure by making a priority choice, a quality cultural formation to continue to respond to the requirements of the education of the young people today in view of the future. The Church expects much from us and it is important to make ourselves competent.

I am certain that you will not let this appeal fall into the void and I thank you for the choices you will make with a vision for the future, with openness to discover the newness of the Holy Spirit in the history we are living.

These choices are a response to the question: *how can we promote the culture of life?*

### **Witness to the beauty of God to build a culture of life**

On 25 March 2021, 25 years after the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* of St. John Paul II, the Letter, *Witnesses to the beauty of God*, was made public. It is signed by Card. João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and by the Secretary of the same Dicastery, Msgr. José Rodríguez Carballo.

Reading this Letter, I perceived a full consonance with our reflection. Where there is beauty there is life, and where there is life in God, beauty and hope invariably shine. During this time of trial, the Letter expresses solidarity with all those “in tribulation and in hope” (*1 Cor 1:4*) due to the pandemic that is still active and for the consequences that touch the entire community. In this dramatic hour, consecrated women and men are personally called to reawaken a sense of hope in everyone.

I accept this appeal as a mission that is entrusted to us today to bring life, hope, trust into the darkness that becomes still denser over many realities.

Our heart is deeply touched by the suffering, fear, solitude, poverty, the absence of relationships, the fatigue, and the suffering of many families, of adults, children, and young people. Sometimes, we feel powerless in the face of these situations and questions arise on how to intervene, on what we can concretely do.

We find the response in Pope Francis: “The Virgin Mary, Jesus’ Mother, who is also His first disciple, shows us. She followed her Son. She took upon herself her own portion of suffering, of darkness, of confusion, and she walked the way of the passion, keeping the lamp of faith lit in her heart.” (Angelus, 28 March 2021).

On the journey we are making *together* in preparation for the World Feast of Gratitude, we want to give, with the grace of God, gestures and signs that contribute to weaving networks of solidarity and of proximity with those around us.

I want to pause on an aspect of the quoted Letter that struck me very much and that at first, can seem inadequate for the time we are living, beauty. It says that, “Consecrated men and women must

reawaken in themselves, but above all in the men and women of our time, an attraction for what is beautiful and true”.

I find it significant that such a proposal is launched at this very special time!

The sequence of reflections that are briefly offered is engaging: beautiful, and not only courageous, the testimony and the word offered must be beautiful because beautiful is the Face we proclaim; what we do and *how* we do it must also be beautiful; beautiful is the fraternity and the air breathed there; beautiful is the place of prayer, because it is beautiful to pray together and let oneself be challenged by the Word of God. Beautiful is also being together in the name of Jesus, collaborating in communion, even if at times it can be tiring. Beautiful is our being virgins to love with His heart; beautiful is our being poor to declare that He is our only treasure and in Him it is beautiful to have a free heart to welcome the pain of those who suffer and show them the Father's compassion; the rooms are beautiful and moderate because everything must let God's presence shine through (cf. Letter, *Witnesses to the Beauty of God*).

In this sharing matured in my heart in the company of Mary and thinking of all of you, I also recall the beauty of the call of Jesus who asks us to be "women bearers of beauty", open to the appeals of the Gospel, ready to face the new and demanding challenges of contemporaneity and therefore, be builders of *a culture of life* witnessed in joy and hope.

Dear Sisters, beauty is the mirror that reflects the life of our communities. It finds its source in the Risen Jesus. Here, and only here, is the root of such a gift grafted. My dream is that this experience of beauty can be poured out by us onto our educating communities, onto the people closest to us, and onto those we meet every day as a sign of gratitude and solidarity.

### **Networked to tell you my thank you**

I ardently desire that my thank you reach the depths of your life and that of the many young people and adults I met on my trips. How many love and share in full synergy, the wealth of the charism with educative and evangelizing passion!

Allow me then to knock discretely and with affection on the door of your communities, of the Provinces, of the Nations, of the five Continents to tell you with my 'heart's voice', THANK YOU! I am certain to be able to enter and meet your gaze, your sentiments, your aspirations, your doubts and perplexities, your fatigue, but also your joy to feel in communion with the entire Institute in this family moment that conserves, thanks to all of you, its beauty and richness.

My gratitude comes:

- To you Sisters of every age, formation, culture, convoked by the Salesian charism, gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, for which you spend your life with passion and creativity so that children, teenagers, and young people are happy in time and in eternity. To you who with dedication and competence qualified yourselves to use new ways of communication to continue the relationship with those entrusted to you, to save them from loneliness, and keep open horizons of hope.  
To you who, regardless of efforts and sacrifices, 'go out' and walk along unknown roads to meet those in need and do so strengthened by the prayer and the Word that sends you to proclaim that Jesus is alive and is the only true Hope, the Beauty that gives splendor to life. To you who, sometimes even with tears in your eyes, know how to embrace weaknesses and fragilities with compassion, with tenderness, confident that it is always possible to get up after the inevitable falls and regain strength, glimpsing flashes of resurrection for all.  
To you who have responsibility for animation, governance, management of the works and feel how important it is to network to start educational processes in the various formal and informal environments, and to cultivate the family spirit in the communities, an indispensable characteristic of our lifestyle. Commendable is your commitment to collaborate with the local Church and with the institutions interested in education in order to bring to them the richness of your femininity and of the Salesian charism.

To you, dear elderly or sick Sisters, a special thanks because you guard and keep the charism alive with prayer and daily offering. You have woven your existence with the threads of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle* in fidelity and gratuitous love. Looking at you with admiration, many young Daughters of Mary Help of Christians find confirmation that it is possible to be faithful forever in joy and until the last day. I can say that with many of you I have experienced *reciprocal entrustment*. In our encounters, you welcomed me with an open heart and the mandate *I entrust them to you* resounded strongly in me, as if at that moment God entrusted my person to each one, in a mutual entrustment that makes us experience the beauty of the family spirit.

- To you, dearest lay people, who in various roles and specific competencies and with diverse affiliations, feel the need for a new educational pact to be achieved with the family, with the school, with every other reality, in the belief that thinking about education is thinking about future generations and the future of humanity. *Together*, as artisans of education, it is possible to create a culture of life, by integrating the language of the mind with the language of the heart and the language of the hands. I am infinitely grateful to you for your commitment to collaborate with the family, especially during this time of the opening of the Year “*Amoris Laetitia* Family, indicted by the Pope on last 27 December (cf. Message sent to the participants in the online encounter “Our Daily Love”, 19 March 2021).

I cannot silence my gratitude to the members of the Salesian Family and to the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, who is its animator and center of unity.

I address in a particular way you Past Pupils who feel the need to form a great network with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and find strength in the Mornese charism, which is a source of creativity in the search for new ways for new situations. Yours is a vocation that you live in every part of the world with passion, conviction, and a sense of belonging. The great network that you know how to build is the indispensable way to give signs of new life to the future.

- With joy and great affection, I make space in my heart for the young people who are the privileged ones of our mission. I see many faces I met in my travels and I imagine many others unknown to me. Joyful faces and also faces marked by suffering, bewilderment, uncertainty about the future; faces of young people wounded by various forms of violence, born in wartime who do not know the beauty of peace.

Faces of courageous young people, ready to ‘fight’, sometimes even risking their lives, for the advent of peace, respect for human rights, ready to give the best of themselves to preserve or regain the beauty of our common home; faces of young people in a thoughtful search to discover the future that God has planned for them; faces of young people capable of going against the current and frankly saying that their dreams, sooner or later, will take shape, because the Lord of history is there and in the risen Jesus everything finds fulfillment. Thank you, dearest young people for believing that “Christ lives. He is our hope and the most beautiful youth of this world” (*Christus vivit*, 1).

To all, in communion with the Sisters of the General Council, I renew my and our gratitude. We say a warm and affectionate ‘see you soon’ on 25 April at the encounter we will live together in a great global embrace. With Mary Help of Christians and with our saints, we want to strengthen the *network* to build a *culture of life* with their help. May God bless you and in Him I wish you a serene month of May, month of Mary who is so dear to us.

Rome, 24 April 2021

Affectionately, Mother