

Dearest Sisters,

At the beginning of this new year, I come to you with joy to present to you the Strenna for the year 2023:

AS YEAST IN TODAY'S HUMAN FAMILY.

The lay dimension of Don Bosco's Family

Together, as Salesian Family, we want to say thank you and look ahead following the theme of the Strenna for 2023 that the Rector Major Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime proposes to us. We will see that the Strenna is addressed to children, adolescents, young people of the world, and to the groups of the Salesian Family, invited to rediscover their own lay dimension lived by so many lay men and women of all countries, called to be true yeast, in our time, in the midst of the people, of humanity thirsting for God and hope.

As consecrated women in the Salesian Family, we too are called to be "yeast in the dough of the bread of humanity" and to live alongside others, together with others, for others, allowing ourselves to be enriched by the evangelical laity of our brothers and sisters to make the Family complete and alive. Faithful to our specific educational charism, we wish to help boys and girls, adolescents, young men and women, to discover their own resources of good in order to be the yeast in the world which helps to leaven the dough and to make the "bread of the human family tastier."

The theme of yeast recalls the Gospel parable, rich in pedagogy and educational topicality, referring to the nature of the Kingdom of God; a humanly small and apparently irrelevant reality. To become part of it, one must be poor at heart; not to trust in one's own abilities, but in the power of God's love; not to act to be important in the eyes of the world, but precious in the eyes of God, who prefers the simple and humble.

The Kingdom of God requires our collaboration, but above all, it is the Lord's initiative and gift. Our fragile work, if it is inserted into that of God, is not afraid of difficulties because the Lord's victory is certain. His love will cause every seed of good present on earth to sprout and grow. This is the certainty that animates and consoles us.

In the Strenna, the Rector Major invites us to recognize that there is so much good in our contemporaneity, but also so much suffering created by our way of being and acting as a human family. Therefore, he urges us to open our eyes and hearts to the action of God who establishes His Kingdom in a very special way: by leavening the human heart, relationships, creation, and all of humanity with the Gospel.

Jesus presents us with a particular style of life based on meekness, mercy, and unconditional love for each person. A style that is often not understood even by His disciples.

Sometimes our human contribution, our small effort may seem insignificant, but before God we know that it has great value. We cannot evaluate the success of our actions only by the commitment we put into carrying them out, because all fruitfulness comes from God. It is He who vivifies and multiplies the good with His presence in us and in all those who give themselves to improve the world.

In this regard, Mother Mazzarello affirmed, "It is the hand of God that works in us" (cf. *L* 66:2) and she said it as the fruit of personal experience, of those who have allowed themselves to be enlightened and worked interiorly by God's grace. She was deeply convinced that one must allow oneself to be shaped throughout one's life by the creative and purifying hand of God.

Together, as Salesian Family, we are challenged to be the good yeast in the flour of humanity and to recognize the richness of the vocation of lay people in all educating communities, valuing in different cultures and societies, the gift of life, the strength of faith, the creativity of love, the beauty of the family, experience and professional competence, Gospel witness.

Salesian spirituality, which animates and vivifies the Salesian Youth Movement, focuses on valuing daily life as a place where life, the experience of faith, and growth in the capacity of young people to give is incarnated. It supports their leadership in being multipliers of good and in carrying out actions and behaviors of solidarity that build and strengthen peace and fraternity among peoples. At the same time, young people continue to be recipients of our mission in the world, sharing the beauty and richness of the charism, gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

The style that animates the Salesian Family unites young people, educators, consecrated men and women, and lay people in a single charismatic experience and presupposes an environment of participation, sharing of values, prayer, and holiness. In Salesian spirituality, relationships are marked by the "family spirit" that cancels distances, fosters confidence, brings generations closer together, and creates a climate of trust in which people can grow in freedom and collaborate with each other in reciprocity.

We begin a year full of worries, international tensions, war, and violence, but also of hope and trust in the goodness of the human heart and in the strength of God's presence. Pope Francis, always attentive to the situation of young people and open to the vision of universal fraternity, invites us in the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* to generate a world open to the search for truth and happiness, which he identifies in love of neighbor and generous service to others for the construction of our common home.

Being yeast in today's world is responding to the call *to be there, to be a presence that generates life*, that accompanies the growth and maturation especially of young people in feeling they are a living part of society and of the Church, willing to go beyond the narrow horizons of their own life to discover in the fabric of daily life, the ecclesial, political, and social dimensions of commitment.

After the great celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute, it is now up to us to continue the journey and keep alive the fire of belonging to the Lord and to the Salesian Family. He leaves us, as humble yeast in today's world, with the task of transforming dough into bread for the hunger of brothers and sisters in every part of the world.

On behalf of all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, I thank the Rector Major for having offered us with this Strenna, the opportunity to renew our commitment to be instruments of communion within the Salesian Family, giving our specific contribution as consecrated women educators.

I offer my best wishes to the Salesian confreres, to the various groups of the Salesian Family, to the educating communities, and to all of you Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, for a 2023 bearer of peace and understanding among nations.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit to enlighten, console, and sustain with His strength all those who work for peace and good.

To the protection of Mary, Help of Christians and Queen of Peace, let us entrust the whole of humanity.

Rome, 1 January 2023

Affectionately, Mother