

**Towards the Fifth World Elective Assembly 2015
Fifth Nucleus**

Words of Sr. Maritza Ortiz, World Delegate, on the Identity of the Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the light of the primary sources

Before dealing on the Identity of the Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians it is important to remember what the word signifies to us. Identity is the set of characteristics of an individual, a community or an association. To be able to share and collaborate with other groups and associations and grow in the sense of belonging to our Association, it is crucial to know the relevant moments that have established its birth and growth.

Return to the origin, the roots of the Association

To define the identity of the Past Pupils it is necessary to go back to the origin of the Association to find out the reasons for which it was created and who was the founder!

At the root of the Association there is, no doubt, Don Bosco. In the Biographical Memoirs we read his words confided to Don Barberis on February 19, 1876: "I have already done another project that in these two years will mature, already assured of the existence of the Salesian Cooperators, I'll reveal the next: there would be, I should say, a third order for women, not to be aggregated to us, but associated to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians" (BM XI, 73). These were the prophetic words of our father Don Bosco confirming today that the group would be formed in the near future, by the Past Pupils. Currently it is the only group of the Salesian Family that has a direct reference to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Don Philip Rinaldi in 1911 affirmed in a meeting with the FMA Directresses regarding the association: "Don Bosco would have done it, yet it was not the right time, but if this was not an idea of Don Bosco, I would not have founded it." So to speak, Don Bosco was the founder of the Association of the Past Pupils of the FMA.

The adventure began with the first ex-oratorians of the Oratory of the FMA in Valdocco (Turin) desired by Don Bosco in 1875. In early 1900 Fr. Philip Rinaldi was the confessor of many young people in the Oratory of the FMA in Valdocco. There was a large group of them that after attending the Oratory wanted to continue to sow the education received in the Salesian House of the FMA. Fr. Philip Rinaldi suggested to Sister Caterina Arrighi, Directress of the House of Valdocco, to form an Association from this group of young ex-oratorians. The first meeting was held on March 8, 1908, during which Don Philip Rinaldi explained what he thought of the Association, hence, the draft of the Regulation of the Union was laid out. A few days later, on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1908, in the Oratory of the FMA in Valdocco, in via Cottolengo 33, the first Regulation was approved and the first Union of Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was officially formed. The first Council was composed of Sister Caterina Arrighi (President), Felicina Gastini (Vice-President), Giuseppina Bijino Rigotaz (Secretary) and the Councillors: Annetta Comazzi Nerva, Francesca Lavezza, Giuseppina Cattro, Lucia and Maria Saroglia Vigo.

Fr. Philip Rinaldi, considered the founder of the Association, on the same day of its foundation, gave a spiritual program to the long-time pupils of the Oratory: "To live in the spirit of Don Bosco and to spread it in fraternal union, with affectionate feelings of gratitude to the Superiors."

With surprising initiatives, these pioneering Past Pupils started everywhere the road to concrete solidarity and education to reach out to young people, children, mothers, workers, teachers and farmers. Evening schools for housewives and for Italian emigrants, free vocational schools, mutual aid societies and Savings Bank, secretarial office for information, circulating libraries and theater companies were established.

It is interesting to know that in 1881, at Nizza Monferrato, during the celebration of the 30th day from the death of Mother Mazzarello, the "old pupils" of Mornese and Nizza participated in a presentation of gratitude and affection for the education that they received. They were the first Past Pupils who directly knew Mother Mazzarello and the first FMA. From them, we can say, that this great movement of pupils and past pupils started.

In the first Regulations of the Association approved by Don Philip Rinaldi, Sister Caterina Arrighi and the first ex-oratorians of the FMA of Valdocco, on March 19, 1908, are presented in three simple items but deep and clear, the purpose, mission and field work of the past pupils: Keep alive the memory of the past years in the Oratory, encouraging one another to persevere in the good principles,

even as married women; morally assisting companions who are adjusting in a new state of life, addressing the difficulty of a new family; visiting old companions when they fall ill, and giving the support that they need, as far as possible.

Which model to follow? The first Regulation of 1908 proposes to the female Past Pupils and today even to the male Past Pupils to have as model the beloved mother of Don Bosco: Margaret Occhiena. A strong and wise woman, a Christian mother and a heroic wise educator.

Who are the Past Pupils?

Each one of us went to a school, a youth center, an oratory, have worked in a house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, have lived unforgettable moments, supported, accompanied and guided by so many FMA or lay educators who have transmitted human and spiritual values with their loving service, with a Salesian educational style that comes from the heart, with the joyful passion of those who offer their lives for what they believe in. Therefore passing through a Salesian house, one becomes a Past Pupil for the rest of life, forming part of the great and wonderful movement of the Past Pupils of the FMA, automatically receiving the Salesian Stamp: Past Pupil.

Levels of participation

Coming in contact with the diverse reality of the Past Pupils of the world as a world delegate, I then realized that there are different levels of Past Pupils, not the different levels of holiness, that is another topic. I am referring to the different levels in terms of associative characteristics in four points that I am sharing with you after I have already shared this with Mother General and her Councils and the Confederation Council.

First level:

They are the people who have received an education in the Salesian school, oratory, youth center, youth groups, and catechesis or have worked in a Salesian House of the FMA. Passing through a Salesian house one becomes a Past Pupil, you have the "Salesian Brand" that no one can take away. In this level we can say that there are millions and millions of Past Pupils around the world.

Second level:

This level belongs to the Past Pupils who do their utmost to live in society the certain values received in a Salesian house.

Third level:

Part of this level are the Past Pupils who know the existence of a Union of Past Pupils, who still want to deepen the Salesian spirituality and commit themselves in the society. But for various reasons, they cannot attend all the formation sessions, cultural and social that are organized by the Federation or the Union.

Fourth level:

They are the Past Pupils who want to be the hands in the world, witnessing with the roots in the heart, sharing and deepening the educational values received in the family, at work, in the church and in the society. They believe in the association and work in reciprocity with the FMA for the salvation of the youth. To them to be a Past Pupil is not just a "stamp" it is a social commitment, but not individually, but as an associative group.

The Vision of the Association

For the term vision we refer to the direction to which the Association of the Past Pupils is headed and what it intends to become in the long term. The vision of the Association is:

To transform the lives of its members in the light of Salesian spirituality in order to become good Christians and honest citizens following in the footsteps of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello.

This is a long-term vision because it is a project that lasts a lifetime and one that Don Bosco wanted, in which it has guided us to the way of holiness and awaits us all in paradise! But now, to be honest, is it possible? Certainly it is not easy, but it is possible. Being honest is to be consistent with the human and Christian values that we were taught in a Salesian house: this is a work of a lifetime.

The Mission of the Association

With the term mission we mean the reason, purpose, aim or *raison d'être* of an Association.

The Past Pupils of the FMA participate in the educational mission of the Institute of the FMA and work in a Salesian lay style in the environment in which they operate. They have their hands in the world and roots in the heart. They engage in their human and spiritual growth by collaborating in the promotion and education of women, in the defense of life and family. They support the defense of human rights and peace, without distinction of race, language or religion.

The Salesian spirituality in the Mornese Style is the typical spirituality of the Past Pupils which is based on the Preventive System of Don Bosco and today it proposes an integral educational project that adheres to more authentic aspirations of a person: the search for truth, the need for God, openness to a relationship. It also enriches the charismatic elements of the lifestyle and actions of Mary Mazzarello who has shared with Don Bosco the same educative project, inspired by Mary "to take care", to live the daily with simplicity and joy, fill each small gesture with experience of God; testifying and promoting the culture of life and solidarity in the territory.

The structure of the Association:

Confederation, Federation and Union. The basic group of the Association is the Union. The Federation is composed of the Unions. The World Confederation with headquarter in Rome is composed of the Federations. In each level there are roles in the animation and deliberative and executive functions, an assembly, and a council composed of lay people with the presence of the FMA as a delegate. The delegate, who is sent by the community, represents the Institute in the animation and educational accompaniment of the Association and is the bridge between the Association and the Institute.

Visible signs of belonging to the Association

Statute

It is the document that allows the Association to grow and solidify in the unity of values, spirituality and structure. It is the fundamental normative act that regulates the organization and the works of the Association. It is for the common good. The present Statute was approved in 2003 and amended in 2009 by the World Assembly.

The Flag of the Association

The flag represents each Past Pupil wherever he/she goes. It is rectangular. It has light blue and pink colors. In front of it is the sign of the membership card, Mary Help of Christians together with his son Jesus and at the back is the logo of the hands in the world with roots in the heart. This model was approved by the Confederation Council in 2007. The Federations and Unions may have their own flag with the emblem of the Confederation and with the caption: "Past Pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Federation or Union of ... "

The Association keeps in the historical archive of Rome their own banner, which on one side shows Mary Help of Christians with Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello and on the other side the distinctive logo of the association with the letters MA and on all sides are the flags of the nations where they have established the Federations.

Meaning of the logo with the Virgin Mary and the child

The author of this image, the logo, is Sister Alba Vernazza, an FMA of Genoa that has designed it in 2000. The background image is imbued with deep blue to express the color of the sky that is within infinite and the earth, a sign of unification and belonging, tranquility and contemplation. The color yellow indicates the light that comes from the child and illum inates the world. Among the colors yellow and pink, there is the color brown which signifies humanity. Therefore blue and brown

signifies the two natures of Jesus, human nature and divine nature, and yellow that He is our God, the saviour of the world. The colors pink and blue of the background are the colors of Mary Help of Christians and of the flag of the FMA.

In the vastness of the blue there is our Mother, who protects the firstborn son Jesus in a tender and warm embrace. It is Mary Help of Christians, our mother, with the child Jesus in her arms, her head in a tilted attitude of welcome, protection and assistance to all the Past Pupils. It is Mary Help of Christians,



the Mother of every Salesian house that Don Bosco taught us to love and to invoke. The Virgin Mary wears a long tunic that goes beyond her feet symbolizing Mary covering with her mantle and taking care of all the people who come into the house of the FMA, interpreting the words of Don Bosco: "When a young person enters a Salesian house, the Madonna takes him/her immediately under her protection" (BM XVII 144). And again: "It is enough that a youth enters a Salesian house for the Virgin to take him immediately under her special protection" (DB-Letter to the Salesian community of Turin-Valdocco, Rome, May 10, 1884).

In the photo we can see that from the womb of Mary comes out the silhouette of the world. This means that it is a worldwide association and that Mary is the mother of all Past Pupils without distinction of color, race and religion.

The image has no border or frame which indicates that the Association is open to all who wants to live the Salesian spirituality in a Mornese style. The Association is ecumenical and interreligious.

From this new generation of Past Pupils, which always multiplies in the history of the FMA Institute and of the Association, radiates the rainbow colors, soft, delicate, almost indistinct because across it is a bright light emanating from Mary, the help of Christians. The different colors that are unified are the Past Pupils of every continent and nation, of every race and culture, but with the same ideal: holiness. The different fading colors also symbolize the values of the Salesian spirituality in a Mornese Style.

Meaning of the logo with the hands and the world



This design was also done by Sister Alba Vernazza in 2008 on the occasion of the centennial celebrations of the Association, in Turin. (Cfr. Past Pupils' Historical Archive, Rome).

The hands represent every Past Pupil of the world, which means that the Association is in a global level and that their mission is in and for the society. The hands, profound expressions of our being and our works, are the protagonists of a love towards the world and the entire humanity. The phrase "hands in the world" means that the field of the apostolate of the past pupils is in the family, in the society and in the Church. These are the hands that penetrate into the world; hands holding the chest of the children who are alone, hungry, abused, helpless; hands digging into the dry and sun-drenched earth of the poorest countries on the planet to bring forth water, to give drink to those who do not yet have access to clean water; hands that build houses to give shelter to every creature and schools to restore dignity to every human being; hands that hold each other in a human chain of solidarity and advocacy; hands that are not afraid to get dirty or contaminated, capable of withstanding lacerations to soothe the wounds of others.

Fr. Pascual Chávez, IX Rector Major, during his message on the opening of the Centenary of the Association, on March 8, 2008 in Turin, strongly emphasized: "Having 'hands in the world' means above all assuming the same task of God, committing to heal the world and humankind with his own hands, fully engaged with the history of humanity, sharing their joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties." (GS 1).

This is the appeal: roll up your sleeves and get to work to make the world of God a hearth for humankind and of human history the Kingdom of God.

Hands driven by a deeply rooted heart in the Salesian spirituality of Mornese style; capable of loving others with a strong, free and reassuring style of relationship.

At the base there is the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, which recalls Don Bosco, and Valponasca which recalls Mother Mazzarello, symbols representing the Mornese style of the Salesian spirituality whose roots are in the heart of every Past Pupil.

Mother Antonia Colombo, during the Confederation Consultation in 2007, expressing its resonance with respect to the theme chosen to celebrate the Centenary of the Association "Hands in the world and roots in the heart" shared: "When the roots are in the heart inhabited by God and hands are available for the mission entrusted to us, these puts on a small light of hope. The Past Pupils have their hands evermore for the world. It is always impressing to see the Coliseum lit on special occasions such as, for example, the suspension of the death penalty against a man condemned to death. I think if the Coliseum would be lighted whenever the Past Pupils make a sign of hope, the lights will always be on. These are not striking gestures, but of small lights capable of feeding a great hope."

The Badge

The badge is a sign of belonging to the Association and is the same for all the Past Pupils. The original is filed in the Headquarters of Rome.

The Membership card

It is the proof of membership in the Association. It is rectangular in shape, carries the details of the member (first name and family name, federation, union, nation and membership number); carries the same symbols of the flag. It can only be processed in the Headquarters of Rome. But being a Past Pupil is not only receiving a card, there is a lot more, as it is explained in the vision and mission.

The "Unione" Publication

The "Unione" Publication, founded in 1921, is a link for training and information that unites all the Past Pupils of the world. Why the title "Unione"? It is interesting to remember Mrs. Teresa Benvenuti, Honorary President of the Unione originally from Turin, then Councillor: "They wanted the name to be beautiful, meaningful, sound, poetic, and then came out the names "threads of gold and silver, Rings, Voices, Bells, Echoes," etc. Fr. Philip Rinaldi kind and smiling, allowed them to speak and discuss and then proposed his suggested name, very simple as his style but meant everything: UNIONE." (Cfr. Minutes of the Board of Directors meeting, April 24, 1921 in the Past Pupils Historical Archive, Rome). Don Philip Rinaldi, suggesting the name 'Unione' for the Publication of the Past Pupils, indicated the goal: unity among the Past Pupils. "Our newsletter is simply called 'Unione' and this title appears to be more fitting and more endearing. Unione is brotherhood/sisterhood, strength, love, and these feelings must influence all our actions. For which that will be all the more intense and more coordinated and this is precisely the main purpose to which our publication seeks"(cfr. Union, n. 1, p. 1, 1921).

In the program of life suggested by Don Bosco to the Past Pupils is stated : "Be united, help each other. Work hard for the glory of God" (Cfr. BMXVIII 759). Mother Rosetta Marchese in the hall of Paul VI (1983) stressed in her address to the Past Pupils the importance of unity, she said: "If we are as united as this, if our friendship is expressed in committing ourselves testifying together, helpers for the young of today, we will then help the world to change."

Regarding the printing for the Past Pupils it is important to point out to the community life of the Association that the Past Pupils of Argentina from 1915 until now continue to publish their magazine "Exalumnas".

Currently the Unione magazine is published in Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

Conclusion

Being a Past Pupil is a GIFT, a grace from God that we have received through education and one that we preserve and keep, and no one can take away from us this Salesian Mark.

Being a Past Pupil is a COMMITMENT to witness and proclaim the values of the Salesian spirituality in the family, at work, in the Church and in the society.

Being a Past Pupil is to be the EPIPHANY OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM in the world with the lay style.

I can therefore say that there are many Past Pupils who are committed in educational and charitable works, human development, literacy, catechesis, as well as in the animation of youth centres, oratories, cooperating with the lay Salesians, to the realization of the apostolic project of the Institute of the FMA. They are a major force in the transformation of the world towards the civilization of love. And there are many Past Pupils that in the silence of their suffering in the trials of life, illness, loneliness, remain faithful to the Gospel and to their love for Mary Help of Christians that sustains them and stands out with them! Thank you, dear Past Pupils, receive the blessing of Mary Help of Christians!

**WORK SHEET FOR THE CONFEDERATION BOARD, FOR THE FEDERATION,
FOR THE UNION AND FOR ALL THE PAST PUPILS OF THE WORLD**

You can find the fifth nucleus and the others in the previous section "life membership" in the website of the Confederation www.exallievfma.org. Please send your responses personally or by group to this email address maritzafma@yahoo.com or by post to: Via dell'Ateneo Salesiano, 81 - 00139 Roma RM

1. Read carefully the text of the fifth nucleus: "Identity of the Past Pupils and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the light of the primary sources."
2. In your opinion, why is being a Past Pupil in the third and fourth level, a challenge today in the context where we live?
3. Share this phrase: passing through a Salesian house, one becomes a Past Pupil for the rest of life, forming part of the great and wonderful movement of the Past Pupils of the FMA, automatically receiving the Salesian Stamp: Past Pupil.
4. Conclude your reflection with a Hail Mary, offering it to all the Past Pupils who are in difficulty or suffering.