

***With the heart of the good Samaritan
in a wounded world***

Dearest Sisters,

In these thirteen years I have felt so close to all of you, reaching you with the ‘monthly letter’ and I thank you for your welcome and willingness to make it a reason for personal reflection and sharing also with the educating community. It is a desired appointment, a family meeting between mother and daughters to keep alive the joy of fidelity, consolidate the unity of the Institute, and keep lit the ardor of the *da mihi animas cetera tolle* (cf. *Circular* no. 1000). I recognize that for the communities the Circular is like a light, a respectful and discreet orientation to face the present with hope and develop future projects in fidelity to the charism, with attention to the indications of the universal Church, and with openness to the events of world society, tried by various forms of pandemic, not just that of the coronavirus.

Now, in continuity with the journey undertaken together, I give you this circular in response to the appeal of Pope Francis who, in his latest encyclical *Fratelli Tutti- On fraternity and social friendship*, invites us to dream "*as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.*" (No. 8). It has been said that reality is interwoven with a dream, that of unity, and we just have to have the courage to free it. This is the right time to make it *together*, we cannot wait for ‘after’, it could be too late!

As consecrated educators, a living part of a wounded humanity, we can find in the encyclical, written while the Covid-19 pandemic broke out in an unexpected way, the roots of the prophecy to build with young people, and for them, spaces where they can be protagonists and architects of a universal fraternity, mirror of the plan of God who dreams a fraternal and supportive humanity for us.

Solidarity with universal love

Fratelli tutti is the third encyclical of Pope Francis after *Lumen fidei* (2013) and *Laudato si* (2015). As is well known, it was signed in Assisi on 3 October 2020, seven years after his election as Vicar of Christ. It is a letter that flows from the heart of a father who wishes to speak to everyone, men and women who populate the earth, and does so with the clarity, courage, and determination typical of his style as a Shepherd who seeks the good of those entrusted to him. It reaches everyone in an inclusive way and invites us to "*a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance*" (n. 1). It invokes an open fraternity that recognizes the same human dignity for all with which it is possible to dream and build a new humanity, where there is welcome, mutual respect, care for the common home, solidarity, work, peace.

When I approached the encyclical, a feeling of gratitude was born in me first of all to Pope Francis for this important and precious document, for the concreteness and keen ability to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel.

I confide to you that there are many reflections that I carry in my heart and that I would like to share with you. I dwell, in particular, on the figure of the Good Samaritan who is presented to us in the second chapter and is the key to reading the whole encyclical. It is a parable told by Jesus two thousand years ago, but it is of great relevance and challenges men and women of all times. This

chapter opens, almost in a preparatory form, by presenting some passages from the Old and New Testament where we find an explicit reference to a universal love open to all, because the Most High, the heavenly Father *"makes his sun rise on the bad and the good"*(Mt 5:45) (cf. n. 60).

The more one contemplates the merciful love of the Father, the more one discovers the relevance and greatness of the Good Samaritan. He stops, bends over his wounded brother. He is not interested in knowing where he comes from, what matters is to help him with the love that knows compassion and dignity. Others of 'good standing', important officials in society and also in the Church, do not stoop down to assist this brother, to waste a few minutes of their time or, at the very least, to seek help. None of this! But here a Samaritan passes by who without hesitation, puts aside his plans, his desires and interests to make himself not only close, but neighbor.

How many wounded populate the world today, the realities where we work, sometimes even our own communities. Wounded brothers and sisters who lie on the 'road' abandoned and voiceless in order to ask for help. There are physical, moral, and spiritual wounds that ask to be healed with the same heart as the good Samaritan. Even today it can happen that *"the sight of a person who is suffering disturbs us. It makes us uneasy, since we have no time to waste on other people's problems. These are symptoms of an unhealthy society. A society that seeks prosperity but turns its back on suffering."* (n. 65).

In order not to fall into this sin, Pope Francis points out to us the model of the good Samaritan who with his gestures of great humanity shows us how our life is linked to that of others. We all have something of the wounded man in us, something of the person that goes beyond and also something of the Good Samaritan.

In our daily choices, in the small or big situations that weave our days, we do not want to be people who turn away and hurry up without stopping, but women inhabited by the Gospel, aware that no one must remain on the 'margins of life' because we are all brothers and sisters. Pope Francis, in his reflections entitled *'Let's go back to dreaming. The road to a better future'*, says that if we want to leave the crisis less selfish than we entered it, we need to let ourselves be touched by the suffering of others. In every crisis like the one that the whole world is suffering, there is always a way out, provided that the principle of individualism is replaced with the strength of tenderness and solidarity, like beneficial water, which overflows from the mercy of God, and is capable of transforming suffering into hope.

It is not an easy undertaking, but together we can help each other to mature a universal dimension of love that is open to all, overcoming prejudices, historical or cultural barriers, and courageously deciding to embrace those who are 'wounded' with a supportive heart and give life to more human times, tailored to the person created in the image of God.

Becoming neighbor in the style of the Good Samaritan is possible on the condition that we start from above, from the recognition of the fatherhood of God, in the conviction that "without an openness to the Father of all, there will be no solid and stable reasons for an appeal to fraternity. We are certain that 'only with this awareness that we are not orphans, but children, can we live in peace with one another' (n. 260). For reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between people and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity" (n. 272).

Perhaps we should reflect more on this reality and ask ourselves if we are willing to 'kneel' to touch and heal the wounds of others; if we are ready to carry those who suffer on our shoulders! It is a challenge that can scare us and arouse fear in the awareness of the weight of our frailties and inadequacies. Courage comes to us only from Jesus who trusts in the best of the human spirit. Presenting us with this parable, He encourages each of us and our communities to persevere in love, to restore dignity to the suffering, and to build a society worthy of the name. (cf. no. 71)

A solidarity of broad breath

Pope Francis, recalling the style of the Good Samaritan, awakens in us that fire of love to pour into a wounded world that invokes solidarity and is thirsty for hope. He bets on a real change of mentality and proposes to us the values of the Gospel with the radicalism that it requires. A mentality open to new relations in politics, in dialogue between religions and cultures and between peoples; a new modality of more solidarity and evangelical relationships with those who live next to us and to be not only close but neighbor. I am sure that we all feel in full harmony with the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* which encourages us, in the concreteness of everyday life, at times tiring and uncertain, to walk in hope to realize together a dream called fraternity and which builds social friendship that the world urgently needs today.

From 26 to 28 May, I had the joy of participating online in the joint UISG and USG Assembly in the light of the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. It was an important event, I would say historical, because it was the first assembly of the International Union of Women Superiors General and the Union of Men Superiors General organized together, which allowed us to reflect as female and male consecrated life on *how to become sisters and brothers at the service of fraternity in a wounded world*. Working as language groups, we faced various questions and asked ourselves how to continue to promote fraternity and social friendship together in the various realities on a world level.

Personally, I asked myself how to respond to this aspect that I feel deeply in tune with our charism. I found the answer in the third chapter of the encyclical, '*Thinking and generating an open world*'. It presents us with marvelous aspects that I invite you to meditate on and contemplate so that they become an experience of life, of friendship and, therefore, of fraternity. Social friendship and fraternity do not exclude, but include. It is a fact that no one can experience the value of existence without concrete faces to love (cf. n. 87). Like the Good Samaritan, we too have concrete faces to love, wounded people to relieve, to look at with the same gaze of God, because "*God does not see with his eyes, God sees with his heart*" (n. 281).

It is lovely to enter this perspective with courage and apostolic initiative, to walk together to build communities that are attentive to take care of those who are 'down', wounded, and in need of compassion. Probably among these people there are those we know, sisters, young people, adults, families, wounded people who are waiting to be treated with the oil of love, with a look of tenderness, with gestures of solidarity and humanity. These become, in silence and discretion, signs of the presence of God in this much troubled today, but always guarded by Him who holds our history in His hand.

There are many experiences that I have had the gift of living with you in personal and community encounters, for this I dare to affirm that, in some moments of our life, we must also be *Samaritans to ourselves*; to look at our limitations with mercy, to embrace our frailties with tenderness and with love, to know how to uplift ourselves, get back on our feet, and start again. It is a fundamental experience that humbly opens us to 'us' and prepares us to take care of the frailty of every man and woman, every child, and every elderly person with the attitude of the Good Samaritan (cf. n. 79). In other words: to be kind to ourselves in order to be kind to those we meet on the road to Jericho. The parable of the good Samaritan still has much to offer us in this regard!

I can say that in my travels I have met communities and individual sisters who are truly resources of fraternity, inexhaustible sources of solidarity, because they know how to put their lives at risk, supported by a strong experience of faith and prayer and by the word of Jesus, "*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*" (Mt 25:35). Without these evangelical resources, authentic social friendship and the recognition of Christ Himself in every abandoned and excluded brother/sister would be impossible for them (cf. nos. 84-85). Perhaps, unbeknown to them, they are already realizing a new dream of fraternity that is not limited to words, but that knows how to appreciate the contributions of each in their own diversity and variety. I see in them a style of life "working to create a many-faceted polyhedron whose different sides form a variegated unity, in which 'the whole is greater than the

part'" (n. 215). It is certainly a geographical opening that leads to 'going out' to the peripheries, but it is above all, an existential opening!

Dear Sisters, we recognize that *fraternity* is not alien to us. I think I am not making an undue interpretation by affirming that the term *fraternity*, as presented in *Fratelli tutti*, can be translated into the *family spirit*, an essential value of the Salesian charism, which passes through our Constitutions as an ever new light that illumines everyday life in every corner. The articles of our Life Project on the family spirit are a mine of spirituality and humanity and it is good to be able to compare them with some aspects of the encyclical which, in full harmony, help us to be *brothers and sisters* in the contemporary world with all its challenges and hopes. We know that living in fraternity is never taken for granted. Every day each of us, each community is called to allow ourselves to be converted to love by letting ourselves be touched in the depths of our hearts, welcoming the grace of the Lord and translating it into concrete choices. The responsibility of each person is great and irreplaceable. I cannot wait for the others, the others to become brothers and sisters. I am the first to decide to become the sister of those who live next to me or whom I meet on the way.

It is a long-term task because, as I have already pointed out, building fraternity in love is a process that continues over time, without stopping; and it is here that we experience, in the brother and sister, the joy of welcome, of respect for diversity, of encounter lived in gratuitousness. We are all daughters and sons of one Father and in Him we share a dignity that nothing and no one can take away from us!

Make solidarity shine in the educational mission

In our courtyards, in classrooms, in informal environments, on social networks, on crowded streets, in the peripheries at risk, in the various forms of aggregation we can meet young people without hope, but with a great desire to live.

I am convinced that never before as today has the educational mission entrusted to us by charism, an anchor of salvation for them and for the future of humanity. The time of the pandemic has tried young people hard and their cry for help, often not expressed, urges us to join in full synergy with those who care about the good of children, young people, and families. Through shared educational choices we can build a fraternity that embraces the entire human family according to God's plan. It is the path to take to be today, like the Good Samaritan, ready to heal the wounds that very often disfigure the life of the new generations. A very serious but treatable wound bears the name of *educational poverty*.

I am very grateful to all the educating communities who tirelessly put into action their creative abilities to elaborate and offer all educational processes suitable for the various and concrete situations present in the different socio-cultural contexts. These are paths that enable young people to get back on their feet, to defend themselves in a peaceful way from injustice and discrimination, to return to dream of a better future with hope. Pope Francis recently reiterated this to a group of young people: "*The vocation of a young person is to dream*" (To the young people of the Policoro Project, 5 June 2021). A dream founded on hope that speaks to us "*of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love*"(n. 55).

These are the same aspirations that inhabit and make the hearts of many young people restless, even in those who, due to personal and family stories, see the desire to live extinguish, yet are hungry for authentic love, for full and lasting happiness.

It is in this reality that we must bet on education, feeling ourselves Samaritans with the fire of the *da mihi animas* in our hearts, ready to be *co-creators* of a new future.

I think it is useful, in this regard, to review what we find in the *Global Educational Pact* announced by the Holy Father in the message of 12 September 2019. The event as we know for contingent situations was experienced in different ways and at different times.

We are all called to be builders of an *education village* which, despite diversity, knows how to place stone upon stone to form a network of open, inclusive relationships, with attitudes of respect towards others in their diversity, care and protection of the common home, of welcoming all peoples, and of dialogue between religions.

It is necessary to reclaim this land first of all with prayer, as Pope Francis often urges in his interventions to the whole world, and with the implementation of shared educational processes, in constant evolution as situations require.

It is an effort that we feel and at times, perhaps, discourages us. In fact, the desired fruits do not always ripen from the abundance of sowing and, in certain situations, a feeling of educational failure arises. Let's not stop sowing! This is the time of sowing, to others the reaping of the harvest! You are investing a lot in creativity, competence, tenacity, hope, and faith in the mission entrusted to you and I thank you for your 'rock hard' fidelity to the needs of the *da mihi animas* never separated from the *cetera tolle*.

I would like to recall some important steps, 'pillars' of education, necessary to build the *education village* today:

- *Starting afresh from the person*, having the courage to put him/her at the center as a response to the current anthropological change. That is, giving a soul to every educational process that cannot ignore how the whole world is intimately connected and that, therefore, starting from the person, there are other ways of interpreting the economy, politics, development, and progress.
- *Invest the best energies with creativity, responsibility, and joy*. This is what I have recommended in other circumstances, since ours is an educational Institute on which the Church and social reality count a lot. *Undoubtedly, there are necessary conditions to be put in place and which you know wisely to identify* (cf. Message for the launch of the Educational Pact, 12 September 2019).
- *To form people willing to put themselves at the service of the community with competence and dedication*, so that each person, especially young people, develops the maximum of their potential and expresses them in freedom and responsibility. All this requires generosity and courage (cf. Francis, *Address to the participants in the Conference on Education: the global compact*).

We are not alone on this journey. There is a Mother, Mary, who at the foot of the cross received universal motherhood (cf. Jn 19:26) and "*in the power of the risen Lord, she wants to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom our societies discard, where justice and peace are resplendent.*" (n. 278).

Thank you, dear sisters who welcome this, which I believe is the last personal circular that will be followed by the choral one before GC XXIV. These are reflections dictated by a heart that loves you, that loves the mission, that desires only the salvation of young people, that sees in them the present and the future of the Church and of society. I can say you have found much space in my heart!

I make my own the words of Pope Francis to young people and which I consider suitable for you too: "*May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuitions, your faith.*" (*Christus vivit*, 299). I add: the Institute has faith in all of you and in each one in particular. It needs you to give fruitfulness and new visibility to the charism, a gift in the Church, to the young people of the whole world. How I want each one to feel that the Institute is a precious and unique pearl chosen by the Lord for the joy of many, many young people!

In this month we celebrate the solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. May He bless you, envelop you with His tenderness and mercy, and in Him, as Mother Mazzarello said, we can meet every day and always! (cf. *Letter 17,2*).

Rome, 24 June 2021

Affectionately, Mother