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EDITORIAL

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, WELL PREPARED

Dear friends of ADMA,

We are already fully immersed in the **month of Mary Help of Christians**. Our homes and churches are filled with colours. A healthy excitement vibrates in our hearts. We all want to honour the Mother of Jesus, **our Mother too**. Salesian creativity is activated to share in our localities, through songs, celebrations, processions, moments of prayer, popular events, cultural, educational and solidarity initiatives, to show with sincerity of heart to show how happily we love Our Lady. During these days, thousands of people will approach Mary to give thanks for the graces received and for the favours obtained through her intercession; to continue to pray for so many needs, situations, people who live in a lack of hope, of love; to ask for her intercession with simplicity of heart.

It is a great feast for the whole Salesian Family; It is the feast of our Mother; it deserves our preparation primarily in our hearts, apart from external decorations. Don Bosco hoped that the children of the Oratory would take advantage of this feast to convert their lives and grow spiritually following Mary's example. One of the most effective means of Salesian pedagogy is the sacrament of Confession which Don Bosco fervently recommended during the month of May.

150 years ago, precisely on the night of 31st May

1873, Don Bosco made this important statement after the prayers, when he gave the 'good night' to the students, saying that it was the **'result of his prayers'** and that it **'came from the Lord'** (dream).

"Throughout the whole time of the novena of Mary Help of Christians, indeed throughout the month of May, in the Mass and in my other prayers I have always asked the Lord and Our Lady for the grace that they might let me know what it is that sends more people to Hell. Now I won't say whether this comes from the Lord or not; I can only say that almost every night I dreamt that this was the lack of firm intention in the Confessions. Then I seemed to see young men coming out of church after their confession, and they had two horns.

How is this? I would say to myself. Eh! this comes from the ineffectiveness of the intentions made in confession! And that is why so many go to confession even often but they never amend, they always confess the same things. There are those (now I am making hypothetical cases, I am not using anything from confession because there is secrecy), who in the beginning of the year had a bad grade and now have the same grade. Others murmured at the beginning of the year and continue with the same fault. I thought it good to tell you this, because this is the result of Don Bosco's poor prayers; and it comes from the Lord. He did not give any other details of this dream in public but undoubtedly used it privately to encourage and admonish; and for us even the little he said, and the form in which he said it, remains a grave admonition to be frequently reminded to young people" [MB X, 56].

It is Don Bosco himself who invites us to a good confession during the novena with firm and decisive resolutions. We know that when we approach God with a repentant heart and right intentions, the Lord's forgiveness is not lacking and His grace fills our souls. But at the same time, it is fruitless if it is not accompanied by works of mercy towards our brothers and sisters.

It would be like receiving a seed from a flourishing tree and not planting it to bear abundant fruit and help satisfy the hunger for love and hope of so many people. We know that reconciliation gives us the joy of the Father's forgiveness. It rebuilds communion with those close to us: spouses, siblings, children, friends, acquaintances. **It helps us all to be "brothers";**

and it also purifies our apostolic intentions, putting us always at the service of the mission. **Confession is an opportunity to let ourselves be embraced by the Merciful Father, to let ourselves be embraced by his tender and patient love.**

Let us pray:

Father, we know that you carry the priceless treasure of your life in fragile vessels, marked by weakness and sin; let us hear your voice which always calls us to conversion and grant us to respond with vigilance, with sincere repentance and with fraternal and generous forgiveness.

Reconciled with you by the passion of Christ, through the sacrament of Penance, grant that we may grow in purity and holiness and be welcomed, together with our young people, into your paternal embrace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We invite you to prepare a beautiful feast of Mary Help of Christians with a holy confession in your heart. Listening to the invitation of our Father Don Bosco is a sure path towards true inner growth and a good feast.

Happy feast of Mary Help of Christians for everyone.

Renato Valera,
ADMA Primaria's President.

Alejandro Guevara,
ADMA Primaria's Spiritual Animator.



**Mary, Help of Christians,
pray for us.**

FORMATIVE PATH

AT THE SCHOOL OF HOLY MARY: MAGNIFICAT, FIAT, STABAT

When we were in the process of preparing the list of themes for the formation this year, the three key words of the gospel that summarise the attitude of Mary in her journey as mother and disciple in the gospel come to our mind: **Fiat, Magnificat, Stabat**; that is, thy will be done, at the annunciation; the hymn of praise, in Elizabeth's house; and her Presence under the cross. They make Mary the best interpreter of the 'holy obedience'. St. Francis de Sales gives it to us as a legacy, after having received it in turn as a gift from St. Ignatius and St. Teresa.

The sequence is obvious because it is also the 'chronological' one, according to the account in the gospels.

It happened, however, that during a seminar something prompted us to change the order and a new light emerged which perhaps gives even greater prominence to what Francis de Sales proposes to us as a mature attitude of a life of faith, which is no longer easily comprehensible due to the meaning commonly given today to the term "steadfastness".



Let us begin with the new sequence of Marian expressions par excellence:

1. **Magnificat**
2. **Fiat**
3. **Stabat**

Why begin with the **Magnificat**?

It is said that all psalms end in glory, even those where the cry of pain and supplication are most intense and at times shocking. Certain verses we would not dare utter if they were not put on our lips by the Bible. Without GLORY, however, there would be no psalm. There would be no page of scripture.

To start from the Magnificat is to **have from the very beginning that horizon of good, of good-diction**, which is the vision of life that Mary did not invent at Ain Karim, in Elizabeth's house but which was her breath always, a breath common to all Scripture of which the Magnificat is a perfect echo.

When we learn to adopt a **PERCEPTION of life**, in all its expressions, illuminated by gratitude for the presence of God who creates, sustains, saves, brings to fulfilment, raises up the humble, remembers His promise, the rhythm and direction of our steps change.

If we look at Jesus' prayer, the model of all prayers, at his intimate relationship with the Father in the Spirit, His praise, His blessing, His magnificat also bursts forth in an irrepressible way, causing him to 'exult in the Holy Spirit': *"At that very hour, Jesus exulted with joy in the Holy Spirit and said: 'I give praise to you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the little ones. Yes, O Father, for thus you have decided in your goodness'"* (Lk. 10:21). His magnificat reaches its climax in the thanksgiving-Eucharist before His passion. What prevails in the approach of the most tragic hour is thanksgiving.

From this **PERCEPTION of reality** flows full and unconditional adherence to the plan of love that is being fulfilled today as it is from the beginning and will be until the final fulfilment of history.

It is not the praise on the one hand, perhaps on Sundays in church, when as a ritual we have to stand up for the Gloria, Alleluia and Hosanna, and then the valley of tears on the other hand, where we beg for graces to cope with the heap of problems that beset us and which seem to have nothing to do with what is celebrated in church.

As long as our way of perceiving the reality is compartmentalised, and God and the gospel of His Kingdom remain well isolated within the walls of the church as if they were those of a laboratory protected from contamination, Mary's liberating journey does not even take off in our lives.

To train ourselves day after day to a **MAGNIFICAT** approach, or better still, **to try to PERCEIVE our day every night with these eyes of hers** since the Magnificat is the gospel, the good news of every event that sets us on our way.

Mary is an all too evident guarantee that the

Formative path

Magnificat is the right gaze not only in the days of triumph but also in the uninterrupted rosary of uphill and difficult hairpin bends. And yet, her 'Magnificat' remains so true that it is also **her attitude forever**. Mary, Assumed into heaven, risen with her son and as queen, mother and sister of all, is the bodily promise of our being made for that same risen glory that she already lived. **Hers is a magnificat that fills the whole universe and all lives, starting with those of the martyrs, where cross and glory are inseparable.**

In July 2022, images from James Webb, the most powerful telescope ever, began to arrive on our screens. From its position, three times the distance of earth and moon from us, it allows us to PERCEIVE the universe with a depth and image quality never seen before. Questions about where we come from and where we are going are also perceived with new intensity.

This is not the time to go into this world of questions: however, it is good to look up and realise that our life, even without bothering with astrophysics, is the result, or if you like the evolutionary fulfilment, of an immensity of freedom in time and space, without which no second of my being would be possible. Just think of the chain of generations behind and in our own time.

The MAGNIFICAT is the only sensible perspective, even for non-believers. If we then trust the fulcrum on which all our faith is based, Easter, what lies before us, the *'what we are made for'*, the fulfilment of our journey, has a width, height, depth in front of which the galaxies James Webb shows us really weigh less than the speck of dust on the scales, to quote the psalm. This universe is a time machine. We are forever. We are made to live as His children, to live as God with our bodies. I believe in the resurrection of bodies, in a fullness of life that needs all eternity to unfold.

What do you say? Can we start every morning with a Magnificat attitude and expressing it, professing it with all our heart, all our mind and all our strength during the day and checking it every night?

Take it up seriously and try. Let's do this exercise for a few months and then decide if it is worth continuing it... for a long time, **AMEN.**

It is the Hebrew equivalent of the Latin FIAT, or at least they are close in meaning.

The Hebrews of scripture were a people of shepherd farmers, with a relatively poor vocabulary - especially when compared to the Greek one - but dense with vitality, made up of concrete references: words that you can almost feel before you even hear them. The 'Amen' refers to the peg of the nomadic shepherds' tent (Abraham): when the peg is solidly planted on firm ground, stable as rock (think of the parable of Jesus of the house on the rock), it is 'Amen': ***I can be sure of it; it certainly holds; neither storm nor sandstorm will sweep me away.***

Mary's FIAT has this trust in it. I believe that if I am in your hands, there is no other safer place to put myself, and I trust that what you have in your heart and mind for me is better than anything else, more than what I could devise for myself on my own.

An expert in high-intensity 'Amen' was Paul, who, from the time he said a full and complete 'yes' to the son of Mary on the road to Damascus (*"for me to live is Christ"* Phil 1:21) began to see before him a continuous series of dangers and tribulations. At one point he even made a list of them (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:16-33).

Yet, it is he who assures us, after what he has gone through and will still suffer according to God's plan, that *"all things work together for good, for those who love God, for those who have been called according to His plan"* (Rom. 8:28).

A **FIAT/AMEN** of this depth is not the equivalent of fulfilling a few precepts, giving a little alms, and then going on our way, keeping a clear distinction between what happens inside the church and the rhythm of survival to be sustained outside.

This is why only a deep breath as a Magnificat **opens the way to a relationship of trust such that we embrace** (not endure or fear) with full adherence those opportunities that everyday life offers us to live more and more as sons and daughters of God. What else is His will if not this? What is the way, the truth and the life for us has already been given to us in His Son, who is alive and present at our side just as He was for the two on Emmaus. *"But, we do not see him!"* When was their 'Amen' most ready, most transforming? When they saw him without



recognising him, after the breaking of the bread (our own broken bread), they ran back to Jerusalem, turning back from the direction they had taken before? *"I run in the way of your commandments because you have opened my heart"* (Ps. 118:32).

If we do not first let our hearts be opened (Magnificat), it is very difficult to find the track and even more difficult to start the race.

Mary was a great athlete. The gospel records very long journeys and most of them in rather precarious situations: from Nazareth to Bethlehem, towards the end of her pregnancy; with the newborn child and Joseph, refugees in Egypt; and then Jerusalem, with the anguish of the lost son being prepared for another, much more painful, loss of her own Son. It is here that we find the **STABAT**.

The **STABAT MATER** (Mother Mary stood by the cross) has left such a deep impression in art and popular piety that one does not need to know 'Latin' to have **Mary immediately before one's eyes at the foot of the cross.**

Would this then be the finishing line, where the ribbon of victory is held, for those who better than anyone else knew how to *'run in the way of your commandments'*?

The STABAT seems to extinguish at the root every voice of Magnificat, and draw to the Fiat the "darkness over all the earth" of which the Gospels of the passion speak to us, with that cry that runs through history and always disquiets us: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

And yet, it is there that Son and Mother bring to



There is no more transforming event.

completion not only the whole journey that led them to that skull-shaped hill outside Jerusalem (this is the Aramaic meaning of Golgotha), but also the whole history, of this universe (James Webb included), of all life. **The 'EVERYTHING IS COMPLETE' says that the reason why everything exists, lies in the salvation of every one, guaranteed by an eternal love of Father, Son and Spirit (TOGETHER! ALWAYS) that does not stop in the face of our rejection and that is capable of uplifting, of resurrecting any kind of pain, injustice, tragedy, death, the cross.**

The cross cannot be explained or understood: it is STABAT! One can only enter it and let oneself be carried and transformed by it into resurrection.

There is no point in human history that has marked and changed history more than that Nazarene crucified, naked outside the walls of Jerusalem on Friday 7th April in the year 30, under Tiberius (this seems the most probable date, according to historians). There is no more transforming event.

And there is no more fruitful hour in Mary's life.

There, she becomes the mother of us all: the pain of childbirth is great enough for such boundless motherhood. Michelangelo understood this well when he sculpted the Pietà with Mary who is the sage of Bethlehem, ready to suckle her son who is born there.

The STABAT is not the anti-Magnificat or a Fiat imposed from above that has the flavour of the absurd.

But we only get to STABAT if day by day we allow our hearts to be enlarged by the MAGNIFICAT and the AMEN-FIAT that makes us say with our hearts rather than with our lips.

And so we also come to the "holy steadfastness" that St. Francis de Sales learnt to live by drawing inspiration from greats before him such as Sts. Ignatius and Teresa, but above all thanks to the practical experience he had to widen his heart and life more and more to the total gift of self to God and his brothers and sisters, facing poverty of all kinds and crude and even violent hostility, making of all this a formidable gymnasium of charity and meekness.

For him, steadfastness means taking in good heart whatever the new day brings, without wanting to be the one to direct and control every detail at all costs. Behind it is a proved and steadfast trust in God's providential love. St. Francis, like St. Paul, knows very well that **"everything works together for good"**, if it is only love that we seek and are eager to live. Everything becomes an opportunity for a step further in that one investment that remains forever: *"Charity will never end"* (1 Cor. 13:8). This kind of openness of heart becomes 'holy steadfastness', so open to goodness that nothing and no one becomes indifferent or too small not to love as He has loved us.

MAGNIFICAT, FIAT, STABAT: there is a path of daily holiness that is sufficient for us as an indication of the way from here until our last breath. It does not frighten us because the first to take care of it is the Help of Christians. In this she truly helps us become Christians, become her sons.

For personal prayer and meditation:

1) Do I have the perspective during the day to fix my gaze on problems, complaining, or to discern God's presence in the situations and people I encounter, by being thankful to Him?

2) Do I trust the Lord, knowing that there is no other safer place than His hands in which to place myself, and that what He has in His heart and mind for me is better than anything I could devise for myself on my own?

3) Do I try to take whatever the new day offers me willingly, without wanting to be the one to direct and control every detail at all costs?

Monthly commitment

Start every morning with a Magnificat attitude and express it, profess it with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength during the day and verify it every evening.

ENTRUST - TRUST - SMILE

LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR FR. ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME

THE POPULAR CHARACTER OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM

The Salesian charism and work are often associated with the world of youth. However, it is important to recognise, along with this fundamental aspect, the popular dimension of the charism which Don Bosco expressed through the foundation of the ADMA, which he promoted for the defence and growth of the faith in the Christian people.

In the Charter of the Charismatic Identity of the Salesian Family we read:

"Enlightened from on high, Don Bosco also took an interest in adults, with a preference for the humblest and poorest, for the working classes, the urban underprivileged, the immigrants, the marginalised, for all those who were most in need of material and spiritual help. Faithful to Don Bosco's orientation, the Salesian Family Groups share this preferential choice. The Association of Mary Help of Christians

has included in its new Rules the Salesian apostolate aimed in particular at the working class".

In fact, the commitment of Don Bosco's Family is addressed to the common people, supporting them in their effort of human promotion and growth in the faith, highlighting and promoting the human and evangelical values of which they are bearers, such as the meaning of life, the hope of a better future, the exercise of solidarity.

Don Bosco valued popular religiosity through a path of education to the faith for the people. In this perspective, Saint Pope Paul VI expresses himself in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: *"Popular religiosity (...) if it is well oriented, especially through a pedagogy of evangelisation, is rich in values."* In particular, it highlights the sense of Providence,

with the loving and constant presence of God, inviting to develop the virtues of patience, meekness, openness to others.

Pope Francis has repeatedly recalled that the popular dimension is a genuine form of evangelisation, which must be promoted and valued. ***“It would be a mistake to believe that those who go on pilgrimage live a spirituality that is not personal but ‘mass’. In reality, the pilgrim brings with him/her his/her own story, his/her own faith, lights and shadows of his/her life. Everyone carries a special desire and prayer in their heart. Whoever enters the shrine immediately feels at home, welcomed, understood and supported”.***



In this context, we renew the devotion to Mary Help of Christians in our Salesian Family, as Don Bosco wanted.

Andrea and Maria Adele Damiani

FORMATION OF ADMA ASPIRANTS

5. THE TREASURES OF THE ASSOCIATION

The fifth and sixth chapters of the training course proposed by the Primary ADMA, Turin-Valdocco, concern, participation in the spiritual goods of the Association and the general organisation of ADMA worldwide respectively.

5. The Association's treasure

In the previous stage of this formation programme, we dealt with the theme of the personal commitment of those who join the Association. In this stage, we will see that when we seek to do God's will, the gifts we receive are far greater than our contribution. In fact, associates share, by the firm desire of Don Bosco, the spiritual treasures of the ADMA and of the whole Salesian Family! These spiritual treasures are made up, in particular, of the indulgences and the fruits of worship and prayers which are raised in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin and in the churches where the Association is erected.

Pope Francis helps us understand the meaning of the indulgences that the Church gives us, explaining that:

“In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives sins, which are indeed erased; yet, the negative imprint that sins have left on our behaviour and thoughts remains. God's mercy, however, is even stronger even than this. It becomes the indulgence



of the Father who through the Bride of Christ reaches the forgiven sinner and frees him from every residue of the consequence of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than relapse into sin. (...) Mother Church is able, by her prayer and life, to meet the weakness of some with the holiness of others. To experience indulgence therefore means to approach the Father's mercy with the certainty that His forgiveness extends over the believer's entire life. Indulgence is experiencing the holiness of the Church sharing in all the benefits of Christ's redemption, so that forgiveness may be extended to the extreme consequences to which God's love reaches”.

To obtain an indulgence, beyond the state of grace, it is necessary that the faithful:

- 1) has the **interior disposition** of complete detachment from sin, even if only venial;
- 2) **makes** a sacramental confession of his sins;
- 3) **receives** the Blessed Eucharist;
- 4) **prays** according to the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff;
- 5) **renews**, at least privately but explicitly, his promise to faithfully observe the Rules of the Association.

There are also many prayers and good works with

Formation of ADMA aspirants

attached Partial Indulgences. Among them the two recommended by Don Bosco in the Regulations of the ADMA:

1. *Blessed and praised be every moment the Most Holy and Divine Sacrament.*
2. *Mary Help of Christians, pray for us.*

It is wonderful to know and experience that each one's journey of faith and grace benefits all the members of the Association and that the mutual prayer and intercession of Mary Help of Christians are a source of grace.

6. Organised to be united with the Basilica of Valdocco

Organisation is an instrument at the service of individuals and groups, and therefore must not suffocate but promote and support fraternal relations and the apostolic commitment of members. According to the Salesian spirit, all that is needed are a few clear, simple and shared rules to help people move forward, to give continuity and order to the good that already exists and is being done, looking more at life and experience rather than at formulations or juridical concerns.

On a worldwide level, ADMA is made up of local Groups, each of which lives in close communion with the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Turin-Valdocco and with the Association founded here by Don Bosco, which takes the name of Primary ADMA.

The canonical erection of the local ADMA is the responsibility of the SDB Provincial for all the SDB and FMA communities, through a Decree of Erection. For all the other ADMA, whether diocesan, or of other Religious Institutes, or of other Groups of the Salesian Family, they are erected by the SDB Provincial, competent in the territory, with the written consent of the diocesan Bishop.

A typical element of the ADMA is, immediately after the erection of a local Group, the request for aggregation to the Primary ADMA of Turin-Valdocco. This act expresses not only a juridical fact but first and foremost a spiritual bond of communion with the cradle of the Association and simultaneously a concrete link with all the Groups of the Association spread throughout the world. The bond of unity is constitutive for each local group: through the

aggregation to the Primary Association of the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Turin-Valdocco, one manifests one's full belonging to the Association and can enjoy the spiritual advantages because one is linked to it and with it, dependence on the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation.

Each local Group of the ADMA is called to take care of, to live and to bear witness to the close spiritual bond with the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians. By reason of the founding charism, there is, in fact, an original, constitutive link between the ADMA and the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, centre of communion and source of grace. The ADMA Primary, in a special way, is called to take care of and make visible this spiritual and historical link between the Association and the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians. It will also propose all those means which facilitate communion with the local groups, through contacts, visits, different forms of communication and information, concrete gestures of solidarity. **It is important and vital to maintain and cultivate this relationship on the part of each local Group and the provincial and national coordination bodies.**

By virtue of the special bond which binds it to the Shrine, the ADMA is the only group of the Salesian Family which has its headquarters in Turin. By tradition, the President and the Spiritual Animator of the Primary ADMA are also of the whole Association, with the following tasks:

- **officially representing the Association** both at Church level and within the Salesian Family;
- **promoting** the International Congresses of Mary Help of Christians;
- **to participate**, when there is a request and an invitation, in the Congresses and in the Provincial and National Councils.

Gian Luca and Mariangela Spesso

FAMILY EVENTS

The world leaders of ADMA in Portugal to take care of the preparation of the Congress of Mary Help of Christians at Fatima in 2024



Lisbon, Portugal - March 2023 - – On 24th to 26th of March, the group of the world leaders of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) and the ADMA Primary group from Valdocco (Turin) met the members of the team in charge of **preparing the International Congress of Mary Help of Christians**, which will take place at Fatima in 2024. The aim was to see to the preparation of the Congress by getting to know the places of the congress. Fr. Alejandro Guevara SDB, ADMA's World Spiritual Animator, Sr. Lucrecia

Uribe, FMA World Delegate, and the members of the ADMA Primary of Valdocco - Renato Valera, Giovanni Scavino, Barbara Mario, Barbara Rosa Clot, Elisabetta Seno and Francesca Cederle - gathered in Lisbon at the headquarters of the Salesian Province of Portugal (POR).

At the end of the meeting, Fr. Guevara thanked them for their support and the opportunity to meet the Provincial, Fr. José Aníbal Mendonça, the Provincial Vicar, Fr. João Chaves and Fr. António Marcelino from the team preparing the congress. *“These are days of fraternity, of preparation, of knowledge, accompanied at all times by the hand of Mary. I believe we are on the right track to prepare a beautiful experience of faith, prayer and encounter for all members of the Salesian Family,”* he said. The International Congress of Mary Help of Christians, a Marian event, that takes place every four years, will see the participation of the Rector Major and will take place **from 29th August to 1st September 2024 in Fatima**. The title chosen for this event will be *“I will give you the teacher”*, recalling Don Bosco's dream, when he was nine (1824) whose 200th anniversary will be celebrated in 2024.

Japan – More than 100 participants at the Recollection of ADMA



Tokyo, Japan - March 2023 - On the 31st March, a **retreat took place in Tokyo in which over 100 people took part, including members of the Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) and participants in the “Rosary on Zoom” initiative**. The latter was conceived during the pandemic by Fr. Angel Yamanouchi, ADMA's Spiritual Animator in Japan, and saw the participation of people of various nationalities, who pray the Rosary in five languages: Japanese, Portuguese, Spanish, Korean and English. The retreat focused on the Gospel character of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar

who threw off his cloak and approached Jesus and was healed, becoming His disciple.

Thus, each participant was invited to write down what they must now throw away in order to follow Jesus in their lives. In the afternoon meditation session, there was the testimony of a Brazilian gentleman who shared how he went from a life frustrated by addiction to gambling to a life of service. *The synodal sharing of the groups helped participants face their challenges and live their lives with renewed hope*. After the recollection, **many people wished to join ADMA**.