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## EDITORIAL

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Dear friends of ADMA,

We started a new year, and faithful to our tradition, we organised the **Salesian Family Spirituality Days**, a meeting for all the members of our Family. More than 250 people gathered in Valdocco from 12th to 15th January 2023, presided over by our dear Fr. Angel Fernández Artime, Rector Major. We reflected on this year's Strenna "**To be leaven in today's human family**", which invites us to reflect and pray together on the lay dimension of our Salesian Family.

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This event offers us an opportunity to renew our sense of belonging to the Salesian Family as members of ADMA.

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This family, first of all, is **Salesian** because it refers to St. Francis de Sales, chosen by Don Bosco as our inspiration and patron. Salesian Humanism does not ignore man's weakness but is based on the unshakeable trust in the goodness of the person because he is loved by God and called by Him to Christian perfection in every life situation. It values everything that is positive rooted in people's lives, in created realities, in the events of history.

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Our family is **Charismatic** because it has its deepest roots in the Trinitarian Mystery, infinite Love uniting the Father, the Son and the Spirit, the source, model and goal of every human family. This spirituality involves: 1) Placing God at the centre of one's life by



cultivating an intense and continuous relationship of love with Him in order to live in “union with God” in daily life. 2) Remaining grafted into Christ by virtue of Baptism, placing at the centre of one’s spiritual life and apostolic action a convinced devotion to Jesus present in the Eucharist, allowing oneself to be inserted into Him. 3) Being docile to the Spirit: to live the spirituality of daily life with generosity and gratuitousness in concrete dedication to the welfare of people. This belonging commits us to honour Mary, helper and mother of the Church, participating in Don Bosco’s youthful and popular mission, especially in increasing and defending the Christian faith among the people.

Our family is also **Apostolic** insofar as in it the Holy Spirit creates an inner dynamism that drives to gift and service for the good of souls. The members of the Salesian Family live a “missionary communion” that promotes the Preventive System of Don Bosco’s pedagogical wisdom: 1) Reason, which emphasises the values of Christian humanism (search for meaning, work, study, friendship, joy, piety, freedom coupled with responsibility, harmony between human wisdom and Christian wisdom); 2) Religion

which means making room for the Grace that saves, cultivating the desire for God, fostering the encounter with Christ the Lord; 3) Loving-kindness, which expresses the need of young people not only to be loved but to know that they are loved, in order to initiate an effective educative relationship; it is a particular style of relationships and it is a loving-kindness that awakens the energies of the young heart and makes them mature to the point of self-giving. Privileged recipients are the young, God’s gift to the Salesian Family and the field indicated by the Lord and Mary to Don Bosco, the working class and the family.

Finally, our family is **Marian**, because all its spirituality and concern finds in Mary the shining example of self-giving. Love for Mary was - along with love for Jesus in the Eucharist and for the Pope - one of the three passions that marked Don Bosco’s spiritual and apostolic life. The whole Salesian Family is and feels like a Marian family, born out of the maternal concern of the Immaculate Help of Christians. The ADMA in the Salesian Family has the task of underlining the particular Eucharistic and Marian devotion lived and spread by St. John Bosco, which expresses the fundamental element of the Salesian charism. In this perspective, ADMA participates in the youth and popular mission proper to the Salesian charism, in the commitment to the safe-guarding, increase and defense of the faith among the people of God, and sees, in the present times, the family as the privileged recipient.

Renato Valera,  
*ADMA Primaria’s President.*

Alejandro Guevara,  
*ADMA Primaria’s Spiritual Animator.*

## FORMATIVE PATH

# MARY, THE HANDMAID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHES US TO DO EVERYTHING WITH LOVE

Since the creation of the world and throughout the salvation history, God has communicated his love to humanity through the action of His Spirit and the redemptive participation of His Son. The saving grace granted to us has a worthy representative in Mary; with the generosity of her FIAT, Mary, representing the entire human race, accepted God's plan in her heart and, through the action of the Spirit, conceived the Saviour in her womb. Meditating on the text of the Annunciation, we find ourselves in the mystery of God's covenant with humanity; He does not do His works arbitrarily. He does not suddenly burst into history to realise His plans. He is God who respects our freedom; His style is not one of imposition but of love that moves and conquers the human will.

Mary's "fiat" remains, therefore, totally committed and unconditional. It is spontaneous to compare this 'fiat' uttered by Mary with the 'fiat' that resounds in other crucial moments of salvation history: with God's 'fiat' at the beginning of Creation and with Jesus' 'fiat' in the Redemption. All three express an act of will, a decision (Cantalamesa, 1990, p.11).

Mary's 'Yes' is the continuity and renewal of the Covenant. Before the miracle of incarnation takes place biologically in her body, Mary freely embraces and adheres to the divine will. Thus, by her obedience in faith, she enters into God's covenant of love with humanity. *"Mary's 'yes' is not only a human act, but also a divine one, because it was prompted by the Holy Spirit Himself in the depths of Mary's soul"* (ibid.). We say that she is the spouse of the Holy Spirit because she allowed herself to be conquered by God's love and, in this logic of free self-giving, she fully accepts His will.

Contemplating Mary's example, we learn the style of Christian docility. Whoever accepts to be part of the covenant with God enters into a dynamic of faith that does not exclude the use of human reason. Mary asks the angel how God's plan will be realized. She is aware that, according to what is announced to her, something will happen in her

that is not humanly possible. Mary is a concrete and realistic woman. Her attitude is not that of someone who questions herself in an unbelieving and non-conformist manner but questions herself and reasons in order to better enter into God's plan; nevertheless, facing the divine mystery, she perhaps does not fully comprehend. She recognises that the Lord, to whom she has offered her life, asks her for profound trust and a faith rooted in love.

### Mover by love

The action of the Spirit fills Mary's heart, clothes her with His grace, making her a dwelling place for the Saviour. In the communion of love that unites her to the Trinity, Mary is moved to reach out to others. The visit to Elizabeth, an icon of service and charity, is interpreted as an expression and continuity of Mary's generous 'yes'. **The Love that dwells in Mary's womb is not just an intimate experience but a grace that is given and communicated in deep joy.**

When Mary learns that her cousin Elizabeth is expecting a child despite her advanced age, she makes a faith-filled reading of the facts: nothing is really impossible for God; and although God's power is great, He counts on our adherence to His plan. Mary senses that Elizabeth, like her, has also given a generous response that probably involves some sacrifice. So, she hurries to meet her relative.

The evangelical references are well known: the intimate relationship (not only because in the Lucan text, it comes immediately after) between the experience of the Annunciation and the journey that Mary undertakes 'in haste' to visit and serve her relative Elizabeth. What is more: the 'sign' that the angel Gabriel gives the Virgin is not so much a convincing theoretical confirmation, capable of tempering her trust in God as it is an invitation to mission, to 'set out', to bring Elizabeth and the family (including the unborn John the Baptist) to the One who brings joy, Jesus (Chávez, 2012).

Mary places herself in a single movement of love: towards God and towards her neighbour. She recognises that the Lord asks his/her contribution to salvation history. The charity of the Mother of God is rooted in faith and is projected in concrete gestures of hope.

There is a striking detail in the text of the visitation: 'Mary went out in haste'. This expression makes us think of the strength and intensity of the love that dwells in Mary's heart and that it not only moves her inwardly but also urges her to go out to meet others. Hers is the readiness of a woman who loves; her active availability to what the Lord asks of her is understood in this perspective: she loves because she believes and she believes because she loves.



The certainty of God's love is expressed in the joyful proclamation of the *'Magnificat'*. The gratitude she proclaims in this touching song is in harmony with the generosity of her daily *'Fiat'*. Mary praises God because He looked upon her simplicity, because He saw in her a docile and fruitful soil in which to work His salvation.

### Everything by love, nothing by force

We contemplated the example of Mary who, allowing herself to be embraced by God's grace and love, lived her life in joyful adherence to the divine will.

This conviction of Love that touches and transforms lives was well expressed in the words and testimony of St Francis de Sales. As we celebrate the 400th anniversary of his passage to heaven, let us draw on the wisdom of his message to enrich our reflection. With the same certainty that God continues and updates his covenant with humanity, Francis de Sales points to a starting point.

*"In order to take the first step into God's love, it is necessary that He, by manifesting Himself to man as God-Love, attracts him and solicits his freedom. But it must be made clear that God's role goes even further. He is not content with inviting our heart to choose but also helps it in this choice... Man's choice of love is an act of the human heart and the heart of God".*

(Saint Francis De Sales)

To the extent that we are attracted by God's love, the desire grows in us to discover what He asks of us and to assume an increasingly evangelical lifestyle. Each person, feeling personally loved, makes his or her free choice of love in the style proper to the vocation to which he or she has been called. Precisely because fidelity is patiently woven into everyday life and because it is not always easy to live in true harmony with God's will, the response we give to God must be built on the foundation of faith and in a constant renewal of love.

Francis de Sales reminds us that the spirit of freedom, proper to those who love and have placed their trust in God, is the criterion that inspires our obedience and makes us truly docile for a mission: *"We must do everything with love and nothing with force. It is better to love obedience than to fear disobedience. I leave you with the spirit of freedom, the spirit that excludes coercion, scruple and agitation".*

The experience of feeling personally loved by God and the constant attention to what He asks of us, introduce us to the dynamic of self-sacrifice and charity. It is from there that the task of human fulfilment begins, a reality in which an authentic spiritual journey has its fulfilment. Love *"is the movement, journey and direction of the heart towards good"* (F. De Sales). If God loves us, it is through the concrete practice of good, through the constant exercise of charity towards our neighbour that we can best express our love for him. We will be able to serve, educate and live our mission in the world if we open ourselves with docility to His will, inspired by the way God himself loves us.

## Formative path

Following Mary's example and drawing from the sources of our Salesian spirituality, we are invited to re-read our lives and to confront ourselves with the response of love that we try to give to the Lord every day. Our daily 'fiat' is a free choice, the fruit of an experience of love that has overcome our will and becomes a visible sign for a world that seeks the light of the Lord.

### For personal prayer and meditation

1) 1. Do I feel personally loved by GOD?

2) Do I perform concrete acts of charity, following the example of Mary?

3) Do I open myself with docility to God's will, an expression of understanding how He loves me?

4) Is my daily response to the Lord, the fruit of feeling deeply loved by Him?

### Monthly commitment

I will try to give thanks every evening for a small or a big good thing that has happened that day.

## ENTRUST - TRUST - SMILE

### LETTER OF RECTOR MAJOR, FR. ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME JOURNEY OF 150 YEARS



Pope St. John Paul II emphasised that Don Bosco is *"the promoter of a special devotion to Mary, Help of Christians and Mother of the Church (...). He is, in a sublime way, the exemplar of a preferential love for the young, especially the needy."*

Our beloved founder responded to God's call to give rise to new forms of apostolate. So, exactly ten years after the birth of the Salesian Congregation, on 18th April 1869, he founded the Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians.

The words that Don Bosco wrote are beautiful: *"Mary continues from heaven with great success, the mission that she had begun on earth as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians. It speaks to us of a present mother, alive among us, who continues her maternal mission as mediatrix of grace for all her children throughout the centuries."*

*Don Bosco lived his life and brought his work to fruition in the certainty of the 'personal', daily and concrete presence of Mary. Several times, he affirmed that she is the 'Foundress' and 'Sustainer' of the Salesian Congregation.*

The Rector Major, in describing Don Bosco's awareness of being an instrument of God through the mediation of Mary, offers us some traits of the journey of faith that he himself experienced. In 1862, Don Bosco felt the need to have a bigger church because the original one of St. Francis de Sales was too small for the Salesians and the boys of Valdocco; in the same year, his meeting with Mother

Mazzarello paved way for the beginning of the expansion of the Salesian charism to the world of women. Later 'ADMA' and the 'Salesian Cooperators' were born.

With the construction of the Basilica, Don Bosco experienced the active presence of Mary who, despite adverse situations, built *'her House'*.

It is moving to read the narration of these events: Don Bosco, as a good Piedmontese, had secured the financial commitment of some influential people who, as often happens, did not honour their promises. On that occasion too, Don Bosco was left alone but, at that point, the spontaneous offerings of the faithful alone made something unimaginable possible.

Don Egidio Viganò, Don Bosco's seventh successor, summarises:

*"From the existence of this Shrine onwards, 'Mary Help of Christians' is the Marian expression that will always characterise Don Bosco's spirit and apostolate. His apostolic vocation will all appear to him as Mary Help of Christians' work, and his many and great initiatives, particularly the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Institute of the FMA and the great Salesian Family, will be seen by him as a foundation desired and cared for by Mary Help of Christians".*

Andrea and Maria Adele Damiani

## FORMATION OF ADMA ASPIRANTS

### ADMA: WHAT IS OUR ORIGIN?

ADMA is an Association of lay people who, faithful to Don Bosco's charism, make their own commitment to live their daily lives imitating Mary and placing themselves as children under her mantle. The paths of Christian formation, prayer, apostolate and service proposed by the Association are simple, characterised by a family style and open to all. Sharing these paths can gradually lead the people who approach them to grow in their desire to join the Association. They are inspired to welcome this as a gift to make their own commitment to take Mary home to live with her help the itinerary of faith to follow Jesus. It is not something formal or superficial but something convinced and intentional. The aspirants are offered a period of preparation which, in the various local realities of the world, takes on different forms and timescales.

As ADMA Primary of Turin-Valdocco, we would like to present, in a series of monthly reflections, a summary of the training path we have adopted and which we wish to share so that each local group can draw from it, ideas to apply in its own context. In

particular, the material proposed is intended to underline the essentials that members should seek to live out concretely in their experience of faith.



The different chapters of the training course focus mainly on the spiritual aspects of the Association, recalling the essential ones regarding its organisation. The focus is mainly on the life of faith of the individual member, since the primary aim of the Association, as Don Bosco wanted, is the defence of the faith of the people and the promotion of a journey of holiness. The path is subdivided into 8 stages, which reflect on the articles of the Association's Rules. Let us begin by proposing the first of these stages.

#### 1) Where we come from

The starting point of the formation path refers to Article 1 of the Rules of the Association, which has as its theme, 'The Foundation of ADMA'.

## Formation of ADMA aspirants

It was Don Bosco himself who founded the Association, on 18th April 1869 and gave it its first regulations. This event must be considered in close correlation with the construction of the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, consecrated and inaugurated less than a year before, on the 9th June 1868. With the construction of the Basilica, Don Bosco literally saw the realisation of his famous dream of 1844, in which the Virgin Mary, in the likeness of a shepherdess, made him see *'a stupendous and lofty Church'* in whose interior there was *'a white band, in which in large letters was written: HIC DOMUS MEA, INDE GLORIA MEA'*. Many people, especially the lay faithful, had contributed offerings to the building of the Shrine as a sign of gratitude for the graces received from Mary Help of Christians. Finding himself faced with this reality, Don Bosco decided to bring together the people who spontaneously expressed their Marian devotion in an Association aimed at *'promoting the glories of the divine Mother of the Saviour, to merit Her protection in life and particularly at the point of death'*.

The name that Don Bosco gave to the Association - ADMA - meant Association of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians. It is therefore necessary to dwell for a moment on the meaning of the word *'Devotees'*. St. Francis de Sales teaches that *'true devotion'* has to do first and foremost with the love of God. Indeed it is nothing other than the authentic love which we receive from God (grace) and which makes us capable of corresponding to his gifts (charity). This is why *'devotees'* are those who *'fly'* on the path of holiness, in that *'true devotion'* perfects in them every action and every work, from the smallest to the greatest, making them more friendly and sympathetic, more courageous and ready to give of themselves, each according to their vocation and mission in the Church.

Don Egidio Viganò, Don Bosco's seventh successor of Don Bosco, as the head of the Salesian Congregation, also explains that devotion translates into attitudes of life and apostolic zeal, and invites us thus:

***"Let us take Our Lady home! In this way, we will be 'beloved disciples' because we will take better care of our baptismal sonship and feel more concretely the beneficial effects of Mary's maternity"***.

The Shrine of Mary Help of Christians did not

represent for Don Bosco only the construction of a larger church for the evergrowing number of boys of the oratory but a fundamental stage in his spiritual and charismatic growth, an experience that contributed decisively to making him *'the great apostle of Mary Help of Christians'* throughout the world. After the construction of the Shrine, the ADMA was born as a simple and practical expression of Don Bosco's entrustment to Mary, recognised in particular as Help of Christians. To the Associates, Don Bosco proposes devotion to Mary as an instrument to deepen and protect the Catholic Faith and to involve them in the apostolic and educative work, valuing popular religiosity and directing it towards evangelical wisdom. In this way, the Associates become a sign of the love of God and Mary, capable of spreading peace and love among people. Faith in Jesus Christ and entrustment to Mary Help of Christians urge them to promote evangelisation in the education of young people, in families and in all spheres of life, with commitment and the witness of life.

All this is only possible by recognising that Jesus and Mary are alive and are present and active in the concreteness of our life, as Fr Viganò reminds us:

***"The Resurrection is a concrete fact which has only been realised, until now, in two individuals of our human race: Jesus and Mary! [...] We, in proposing to imitate the favourite disciple in his 'taking Mary home', intend to deepen with seriousness the strong realism of the Resurrection [...] according to the style of concreteness so much in keeping with Don Bosco's spirit and so characteristic of his devotion to Our Lady under the title of Help of Christians"***.

Gian Luca and Mariangela Spesso



## FOR GRACES RECEIVED

### “SHE IS NEVER TIRED OF LOVING US”

*Brandon Figueroa, sdb.*

We have often heard that Don Bosco used to repeat to his young people: *“Trust in Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are”*. It may be that this phrase is a bit worn out and has lost its original force. Perhaps this was happening to me. But she herself reminded me how close she is to me.

Love for Mary translates immediately into a full love for Jesus. The authentic Christian is Marian and vice versa. The goal is not her but is Christ, her son. What humility! Nevertheless, *she still shows us today, as she showed Don Bosco and so many others, that her love for Jesus translates into love for us. She continually intercedes for her children, sees them with love, listens to them with patience and helps them in times of danger.* It is not for nothing that Don Bosco emphasised the invocation of the ‘Help of Christians’ with his boys. In a prayer, it is said with confidence that she is ‘as terrible as an army lined up in battle’. How much love is translated into strength and protection!

Unfortunately, it can often remain a superficial love in us. But despite this, she loves us fully because she loves Jesus. Jesus loves her fully because He loves us. Some might think that loving Mary too much is to the detriment to our love for Jesus but the opposite is true! We love her because Jesus loves her and who can love more than Jesus?

Over the past few days, I have experienced this great love that Mary has for her children. At CEDES Don Bosco, in Costa Rica, it is customary to take young people on an annual retreat outside the institute, as is the case in most of our houses. Last Friday, 12th May, we were travelling with a group of young people from the school and unfortunately we met with an accident: the bus failed to stop on a downhill slope and to avoid further damage, the driver decided to turn onto the side of the road, causing the bus to overturn. When we realised that the driver could not stop, only one thing came to my mind: *‘María Auxiliadora!’* and I thought of each of the children in the back.

As best as I could, I grabbed onto a tube in front of



**“Thank you Maria! You took care of us”**

the seat and the rest happened in seconds. I was hanging from a seat, with a tube over my head, my thumb upside down and a slight cut on my arm. I thought about the boys. I quickly settled down and made sure the teachers next to my seat were safe. They got up and together we started asking if everyone was all right. And they were. All the students started getting up, helping each other, removing the pieces of glass. Immediately, some bricklayers who were nearby came to help us and we started to get out through the roof of the bus. Then, the whole flow of ambulances, police and interviews began. No hard knocks, no fractures, everyone was fine - with minor bumps and tears, but fine.

In the middle of the rush to assist those most affected, I saw the bus again: it was upside down there. How come it had tipped over like that? And then I saw the children: almost forty, with nothing serious to worry about. How did we get out of there alive? I could only hold back the tears and say in my heart: *“Thank you Maria! You took care of us.”* We took care of what was necessary, went to the hospital and waited for all the students to go home. The other children, accompanied by other teachers, went to the institute and were well looked after and gradually started to go home. It was a heavy and upsetting day.

## For graces received

At home, with some bandages and medicine, I went to the chapel and began to cry. I thought about all the things that could have happened and how that journey could have turned into a great tragedy. The conclusion I always came to after each thought was: **a miracle! We are all well! It was a miracle from Our Lady!** I looked at my wounds and saw the signs of God's love, of Mary's love. Every scar from now on will remind me of that beautiful day when our Heavenly Mother protected us and prayed to God to give us another chance. The question and the challenge now is: why did she give us another chance? The answer is up to each one of us on that journey.

Looking at the context of this incident, there is no doubt that everything took place in a purely Marian atmosphere: in the month of May, on the eve of the celebration of the centenary of Our Lady's apparitions in Fatima, almost at the beginning of the novena to Mary Help of Christians. Everything pointed to this: **Mary is our help!** So, the following Monday, with all the students, I prayed the Hail Mary with a devotion I had rarely done before. I saw the faces of those on that bus and asked Mary to continue to guide them in their lives, to help them understand that Jesus loves them infinitely.

Brandon Figueroa, sdb

*If you have received a grace, send a short testimony accompanied by a photo to [adma@admadonbosco.org](mailto:adma@admadonbosco.org)*

## FAMILY EVENTS

### Timor Est: ADMA of the Vice Province of East Timor had its third National Congress



#### Fatumaca, Timor Est –November 2022

The Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) of the Vice Province of East Timor held its third National Congress from 18th to 20th November, at the National Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in Fatumaca.

The Congress, which was attended by 350 ADMA members, was centred on the theme **'Like Mary, we walk with Jesus'**. Fr. Manuel Da Silva Ximenes, the Spiritual Animator of the ADMA of East Timor, and Sister Lucrécia, Responsible of the Salesian Family, welcomed those present.

During these three days of the Congress, there were numerous conferences, especially one by Sr. Esmeralda Soares, FMA, on the Strenna of the Rector Major and another by Fr. Apolinário Neto, SDB, focusing on the charismatic identity of the Salesian Family. The third speaker was the Superior of the Salesian Vice province of East Timor (TLS), Fr. Anacleto Pires, who recommended the participants to promote devotion to Mary in their daily lives through words and deeds.

Elections for the new leadership for the period 2022-2026 were also held during the Congress. **João Brito Gusmão Ximenes** was elected President, **Maria Lourdes Sousa** Vice-President, **Ana Mafalda S. da Costa** as Secretary and **Domingos Belo** as Treasurer.

## Costa Rica: Sixth Central American Congress of ADMA: “*Mary Help of Christians, model of Christian Life*”



San José, Costa Rica - October 2022

The Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA) celebrated its Sixth Central American Congress, on the 7th and 8th of October, on the theme ‘*Mary Help of Christians, model of Christian life*’, in a mixed mode - direct and virtual.

Costa Rica, as host, gathered its members in the Shrine of Don Bosco in San José. For their part, the rest of the region’s delegations experienced the meeting through the Zoom platform and live on the page of the Salesian Family of Costa Rica.

The meeting, which aimed to celebrate and promote devotion to Mary Help of Christians as a model of holiness for the Salesian Family, began with words of welcome and the recitation of the Rosary, led by members from each of the participating countries. Afterwards, the participants deepened the theme of the meeting, reflecting on the topic ‘*Mary, believing woman*’, addressed by Fr. Julio Navarro, Sdb. This was followed by a plenary session and Eucharistic adoration led by Fr. Guido Maroto, the Salesian Delegate of ADMA in Costa Rica.

The ‘*Salesian Good night*’ was given by Fr. Ángel Prado, provincial of the Salesian Province of Central America (CAM), who underlined the need to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians, aware of the principle from which Don Bosco started: “*Being members of ADMA means listening to a call to spread a teaching that asks us to constantly look at the Church in its Eucharistic and Marian dimensions*”.

**WE ARE ASKING EVERYONE TO SEND US AN ARTICLE, A PHOTO OF A FORMATION MEETING, THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 24TH OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, A VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY BEING CARRIED OUT.** The article (.doc format, max. 1200 characters without counting spaces) and a maximum of 2 photos (.jpg digital format and no less than 1000px wide), with a title and/or brief description, must be sent to [adma@admadonbosco.org](mailto:adma@admadonbosco.org). It is necessary to indicate in the subject line of the e-mail “**Family Events**” and in the text the author’s data (name, surname, place of the shot, affiliation Adma, city, country).

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