(ANS - Rome) - As part of the work of the General Council, the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, had given the title and the guidelines for the message of the Strenna 2017: “WE ARE A FAMILY! Every home, a school of Life and Love”.

This year the Rector Major, in line with the Pope and the whole Church, aims to reflect on the theme of the family. “We are a Family”, is the statement that opens the Strenna 2017: the family as a place of life, the family as a school of Life and Love.

The choice of the theme of the Strenna of 2017 is the result of a request coming from the Council of the Salesian Family, which unanimously asked to elaborate on the topic of the family, looking to the challenges it faces in the new trends, to the reflections of the two Synods and on the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope “Amoris Laetitia”.

The Strenna of 2017 does not claim to be a reflection that closes the discussion, but rather intends to propose important highlights that allow members of the Salesian Family to further develop the theme in their respective contexts.

The Rector Major makes a Salesian reading of the theme, takes up the main titles of the Pope’s Exhortation and then suggests the reflection lines, based on the Frame of Reference for Youth Ministry.
The presentation will already indicate the commitments that would emerge from the Strenna of 2017: in the first place within the families related to the Salesian context; and then in the mission of the “Salesian Family in the light of the Preventive System of Don Bosco: making of the world a home, like a big family playground of friends, of apprenticeship of life, of encounter with God.”

The full text of the presentation of the Strenna 2017 is available on the sdb.org website.

The Poster of the Strenna of the Rector Major for 2017, which has been illustrated beautifully by the artist Mauro Borgatello has been presented for the first time today. It presents the Family, in real and concrete terms, in all its different facets, that it is not an abstract and an idealized model. It depicts the human family at large, which holds the preservation of life right from its very conception; the family, which is the Church; the family, which is created in every courtyard or playground of a Salesian House.

The poster of the Strenna is an aid, which aims to powerfully present through various images, the core of the message that the Rector Major presents to the Salesian Family at large. Already in July 2016, Don Ángel Fernández Artime, keeping in line with the reflection presented by the Pope for the universal Church at large, had proposed the theme of the family as the core message of the Strenna.

The theme chosen was: “We are a Family! Every home a school of Life and Love”.

“The idea that guided my hand is compressed in this one simple and effective sentence,” - explained the artist, the author of the poster: The school is a challenge which encourages us to improve and form us for the life ahead in the future. The Family is not only a place of meeting but is also the ground for training, for formation towards good living. It is also the anvil: it exists and is a true base only if there is an attitude of welcome, respect and enthusiasm to overcome difficulties of life. The Family, is made up of persons of different age groups, using heterogeneous costumes and may be even be spread across far away countries. The pain, the handicap, the diversity of cultures... and yet, the Family is thus a diversity but made up of union of hearts, which sees the plurality as an enrichment, as a further way to more completeness and happiness in the journey of life made together.”

Thus, the dimension of the Family is not in any way excluding us, the Salesian Family, but still serves as a fundamental dimension and environment for us who are inspired by Don Bosco, who shaped the family spirit as the background for his educative system.

Mauro Borgarello, the author of the poster, is a professional illustrator and multimedia animator since 1995 and has worked over these years with various publishing and film production houses. In 1998, he won the title during the “Torino Film Festival” for his animation film, which also fetched him numerous awards nationally for his other works as well. Attracted by the versatility of the emerging newer media, he has been using drawing as medium to convey concepts and ideas - via an app for multimedia, interactive comics, microcontent and animated infographics. Since the year 2000, he collaborates with Don Bosco Missions in Valdocco on various editorial and communications projects.

The poster for the Strenna 2017, prepared in 7 languages, is available on ANSFlickr. The .psd file with layers open itself up for newer editions in other languages and it will be available on the sdb.org site and upon request via email to ans@sdb.org
For the consolidation and the fecundity of Project Europe in every Province of the Region of Europe Centre – North.

The profound and rapid social and cultural changes in Europe often cause discouragement and lack of confidence. We pray that Europe may not forget its Christian roots and continue its missionary and evangelising commitment with optimism, hope and beauty rooted on Christ.
We started our second full day of World Youth with great hope that we would be able to attend our first catechetical session. The day began with a beautiful opening prayer led by the World Youth day representatives from Zambia, which involved dancing, singing, clapping, and moving around, praising God and thanking Him for another day. As a non-morning person, I was pleasantly brought out of my usual slumbering mode to be ready for a new day full of adventure. I did not know that Morning prayer could be so lively and prayerful. It was a privilege and a treat to experience such energy. We were ready for our first catechetical session of World Youth Day 2016! When the session began, however, I was asked to be available for confession. I found myself vested and ready in a nearest confessional shortly after the Bishop had begun to speak. Once again, I missed a world youth day catechetical session. As I was told later, the Bishop told a beautiful story of a certain violin to demonstrate the greatness of the mercy of My God. My “catechetical session” was of a different nature. As I listened to those sincere penitents, I could not help remembering my own sins and my need for God’s mercy. Their stories and my own make me realize how sinful acts cause a great deal of pain and damage (to myself and others) and how easily it was for one sin to
lead me to another. A lie, for example, can seriously hurt a friendship, which is built mainly on truth and the ability to trust. A lie, moreover, is rarely an isolated act: in order to protect the original lie, I would need to lie multiple additional times. This is how sin worked. It creates a condition that, at once, weakens my ability to live authentically a Christian life and enable me to commit more sins, which, in turn causes further pain, suffering and damage. Soon I will be so caught in the web of sin that it become inconceivable to escape. These lines of thought led me back to an experience in Advent of this Year of Mercy.

One day, toward the end of Advent, after returning home from a long reconciliation service in a parish in the evening, I had to walk from St. John Bosco High School back to De Sales Hall. It was dark. I must admit that, with a very vivid imagination, I was afraid: in the dark, a trash can looked like an animal waiting to attack; a rustling tree branch resembled some ghostly entity inciting fear by its mere presence; a tree trunk appeared a nefarious character or a criminal ready to strike at the moment I least expected. In the dark I failed to see things as they are. This failure leads to irrational fear and reactions: I was reacting to things that were not even remotely present. In the dark, I cannot walk normally for fear of tripping and fall. In the dark, I can never function to my full capacity. In the dark, fear dictates my action, not my rational mind. In the dark, I react to the figment of my imagination rather than to the truth. In the dark, I cease my activities and forget to move on. I imagined that, if the darkness were prolonged, I could see how miserable I would be living in such state. Having just returned from a reconciliation service, it was easy for me to draw a parallel between sin and darkness.

Earth axis is tilted about 23.5 degrees from the vertical line. In the winter time the Northern Hemisphere leans away from the Sun. This makes those in the Northern Hemisphere receive less light and their counterparts in the South and, consequently, days in the Northern Hemisphere are shorter than nights in Winter. In the continental United States, dependent on one’s location, a night can stretch as long as 15 hours in Winter. On the Winter Solstice, which occurs around December 21 and 22, night reach its maximum length. It is significant that we celebrate Christmas at around the darkest time of the year, when night is longest and the effect of darkness is most intensely felt. It is as if to say that God, in his great mercy, chose to come when sin has the upper hand and the effects of sin are at their maximum strength. He chose to come when, from our perspective, all hope seems lost and the night is thought to prolong forever. Meditated on His coming, I appreciated deeper the words of God through the prophet Isaiah,
“the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned” (Isaiah 9: 12). The lyrics of my favorite Advent and Christmas Hymns became more relatable, “Oh come Immanuel and ransom captive Israel.” God’s coming was not a mere visit. It is rescue operation. His coming is necessary. “Long lay the world, in sin an error pining til’ He appears and the soul felt its worth” (O, Holy Night). God’s coming, as the light shining in darkness, help me to see the truth again, the truth about my worth, and those of my brothers and sisters, in God’s eyes and the truth of His infinite mercy, which knows no limit and has no boundary.

In the afternoon of the second day we were about to welcome Pope Francis to World Youth Day. Immediately after lunch we began our rapid walk to the famous Bolonia park, a 48 acres open field near the historical center of the city of Krakow. I was unprepared for the enormity of the park, which has been divided into sections, decorated, and extended as far as the eye can see. This vast open space was about to be covered with about 2 million people coming together as one church praising God and thanking him for his bountiful mercy. Thanks to the expertise of Bro. Al who had gone to several World Youth Days, we quickly settled down on an area against the fence of our section, next to the path the Pope would pass by. For more than three hours we waited, praying, singing, and making friends with our neighbors, undeterred by the heavy rain. We made good use of the raincoat provided for us in our World Youth Day package. We shared our food with others and took plenty of photos with total strangers who, strangely enough, felt so familiar to us.

Finally, on enormous screens positions around the park, we spotted the sight of Pope Francis traveling through various parts of the city toward the Bolonia. This time his method of travel included public transportation. He chose to come to us on a tram along with the home-less, the disabled and the elderly. When the Pope entered the Bolonia, the rain stopped, the sun peeked out from behind the cloud and the whole park was erupted with joy. Flags waved frantically. People extended their hands toward the Vicar of Christ in hope of touching him or to be blessed by him. Cheers for the Pope could be heard from far away. True to our expectation, the Pope did pass by our section, merely feet away! His gentle smile, welcoming presence and gesture of blessing were almost too much for us to take. An intense feeling of joy swelled up within us. This was he, the representative of Christ and he was on a few feet away! Tears of joy rolled down our cheeks and we could not help calling out, “Papa Francesco, papa Francesco, papa Francesco…” Christ was indeed among us, in this gentle shepherd who was himself a great apostle of mercy.

To be continued
HOW CAN WE promote a culture of vocations?
HOW CAN WE promote family spirit?
HOW CAN WE promote life?
HOW CAN WE promote fraternity among within and among our community members?

Let us reflect on these 10 Constitutions and dialogue within our communities as to how this is taking place.

C. 5 Our Society within the Salesian Family
Within this family, by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: to preserve unity of spirit and to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration for our mutual enrichment and greater apostolic effectiveness.

C. 16 Family Spirit
Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The Salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart. This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the Salesian vocation.

C. 22 Personal Vocation of the Salesian

Each one of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society. Because of this God gives him personal gifts, and by faithful correspondence he finds his way to complete fulfilment in Christ. The Society recognizes his vocation and helps him to develop it; and he, as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks.
C. 37 Vocational Guidance
The family atmosphere of welcome and of faith, created by the witness of a community which gives of itself with joy, is the most efficacious setting for the discovery and guidance of vocations.

C. 49 Importance of Life in Community
To live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation. This is why we come together in communities, where our love for each other leads us to share all we have in a family spirit, and so create communion between person and person. The community is a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity: there we find a response to the deep aspirations of the heart, and we become for the young signs of love and unity. (R 20)

C. 51 Relationships of Fraternal Friendship
St Paul exhorts us: “Put on, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other”. The family spirit is the hallmark of the Salesian community and inspires every moment of its life: work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters. In an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows, and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences.

C. 52 The Confrere in the Community
The community receives each confrere with an open heart. It accepts him as he is and fosters his growth to maturity. It offers him the opportunity to use and develop his gifts
of nature and of grace. It provides for his needs and sustains him in moments of doubt and difficulty, weariness and ill health. Don Bosco used to say to those who asked to remain with him: “Bread, work and heaven: I can offer you these three things in the Lord’s name.”1 The confrere pledges himself to build up the community in which he lives. He loves it, despite its imperfections, and knows that in it he finds the presence of Christ.

C. 53. Sick and Aging Confreres
The community surrounds its sick and aged confreres with care and affection. They in their turn, accepting their condition and serving the community in whatever way they can, are a source of blessing for it; they enrich its family spirit and deepen its unity. Their life takes on a new apostolic significance: as they offer their limitations and sufferings in a spirit of faith for their brothers and for the young, they are united with the redeeming passion of the Lord, and continue to share in the Salesian mission.

C. 56 A Welcoming Community
With simplicity the confreres lead a life of self-giving and sharing, by welcoming others and offering them hospitality. By their kindness and cheerfulness they are able to draw everyone into the Salesian family spirit. Nevertheless, to foster mutual respect and expressions of brotherly communion, every community should reserve for the confreres alone certain parts of the religious house.1 (R 21, 45) 1 cf CIC, can 667.1

C. 61 Fraternal and Apostolic Love
Don Bosco frequently points out how the sincere practice of the vows strengthens the bonds of brotherly love and makes our apostolic work coherent. The profession of the counsels helps us to live a life of fellowship with our brothers in the religious community as in a family which enjoys the presence of the Lord.1

And Let us continue to pray and work for Vocations to the Salesian and Religious Life.

“Every Catholic an apostle” … “Every Apostle a Vocation Promoter”

Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Matt. 9:38)

Fr. Jose Lucero, sdb
Vocation Director
St. Mary’s Float for the 83rd Annual Guadalupe Procession

The Guadalupanas group and Fr. Joe were in charge of the float this year. The theme was “Protector of the Family”. The lead banner was carried by Fr. Joe Farias, an alumnus from Salesian High School, Mario Lopez, and a student from Cantwell-Sacred Heart High School, Luis Valle. We were the only group with a Walking Mariachi.
Mr. Jonathan Medina, principal at St. Mary’s Elementary, carried the school banner accompanied by our students.

The top panoramic photo shows the crowd from St. Mary’s that followed the float. Our brother school, Salesian Mora High School walked alongside the blessed paintings of Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego which came from Mexico City on pilgrimage.

The Salesian High Lettermen assisted in bringing Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Juan Diego into the stadium at East Los Angeles College. Also, the Lettermen were in charge of standing guard over both paintings.

For the mass, priests from all the regions came to celebrate. Fr. Jim, S.D.B. (pictured at right) and Fr. Jesse Montes, S.D.B. also concelebrated. The mass was celebrated by Archbishop Jose H. Gomez, with Bishop David G. O’Connell (our region), Bishop Robert E. Barron, Bishop Joseph V. Brennan, Bishop Edward Wm. Clark, and Bishop Oscar Solis.
Celebrating Families of the Community

The Salesian Boys’ and Girls’ Club invited the families of Boyle Heights to a small dinner for the upcoming holidays. The Salesian Community welcomed the families as they entered the auditorium. Fr. Joe, Fr. Beto, Fr. Jesse, and Br. Steve Stardard, all Salesians, sat with different families during the dinner.

The dinner was prepared and organized by the Salesian volunteers: Sarah Monico, Armando Prieto and Pedro Cantos under the leadership of Juan Carlos Montenegro, the Executive Director and staff.

We would like to thank the Salesian Boys’ and Girls’ Club for allowing St. Mary’s to be a part of their celebration.
Year of Mercy Closes at the Los Angeles Cathedral

FR. JESSE MONTES, S.D.B. TOOK SEVERAL PARISHONERS TO THE CLOSING OF THE HOLY DOORS FOR THE YEAR OF MERCY. GROUP POSED UNDER THE TAPESTRY DEPICTING SAINT JOHN BOSCO AND ST. FRANCIS DE SALES.

SATURDAY ORATORY: A NEW VENTURE

Saturday Oratory, at the Salesian Boys’ and Girls’ Club, opened, serving both St. Mary’s Community and the Boyle Heights area.

Fr. Jesse Montes, S.D.B., and Parish Community, supports, visits and has donated a substantial amount of monetary funds to the center.

Morning Coffee & Community Building

Fr. Jesse, S.D.B. and Fr. Joe, S.D.B. invited parishioners for coffee and sweet bread after mass on Monday. This begins a trial run for a once a week gathering. The first breakfast was on November 30, 2016 after the 8am mass.
When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

Matthew 11:2-11

Reflection by Meghan Dietzer
Former Rostro de Cristo Volunteer, Current Coordinator of Local Service Programs, Villanova University Campus Ministry

In this gospel, John questions whether Jesus is truly the one that he and countless others had been waiting for. In many ways, what John has heard about Jesus does not quite match up with the kind of person he had expected Christ to be. I look back to my year of service and remember thinking similar thoughts while living among the poverty and great suffering that so many of our neighbors faced.

I went to Ecuador in hope to always see the face of Christ in others and to do my utmost to be the face of Christ to all those I encountered. In many ways, I had started my year thinking that recognizing and encountering Christ meant finding joy and goodness, no matter how difficult the situation. However, as we journeyed through our year, my community and I experienced many situations when Jesus seemed unrecognizable and completely hidden. We came to know so much injustice, hurt, and suffering in the lives of our friends there that at points I, like John, also questioned who Jesus was.

After some time passed, much prayer, and many discussions with my community, I came to understand that Christ was in fact looking at me, straight in the eye, each day. For the first time, I recognized that He was Jesus Christ on the cross. That Face of Christ that suffers with us, that knows pain and sorrow, but also that face that rises from the dead and brings us unimaginable hope of the kingdom of heaven and eternal life with Him.

Focus on: Community

Living in community can be hard and so challenging at times (generally, most of the time)! Unfortunately, if we are struggling with our faith or other such things, we, unlike John, cannot simply send a member of our community out to go ask Jesus the big questions and return with answers. However, we must remember that by praying together and journeying with one another, Christ is in fact there guiding us along each step of the way. For, He told us, “Where two or three are gathered, there am I in their midst.” Living in community with an openness to be vulnerable, to lean into discomfort, and to pray together holds so much potential for encountering some of Christ’s purest love.

Service Suggestion

Think about John the Baptist in this Gospel. He was in prison and unable to go out and find Jesus himself. Without the gift of his friends, he may not have been able to know if Jesus truly was the Christ. This week, let us recognize those in our community who don’t seem to have anyone to bring them Christ’s love and peace. Do your best to be like those friends of John and bring that person the good news of Christ. Whether that means visiting the sick or imprisoned or sitting down with a co-worker who is having a hard day, there are countless people who need the gift of a friend that can share with them the love of God.

Prayer

Dear Jesus,

As I anticipate your humble birth in that small stable in Bethlehem,

Help me to further humble myself and to give with a selfless heart.

Grant me the openness to receive you into my heart in a new way this Christmas that truly transforms me.

Guide me as I continue on my journey in community with others, grounded in love.

Help me to recognize you in those that I serve, even when it is most difficult.

Let me truly hear your words of healing and hope, and enable me to spread your message to those who need to hear it most.
Reflection by Danielle Goddard
Former Rostro de Cristo Volunteer, Current Resident Minister at John Carroll University Campus Ministry

When I was young, I thought there was a script of how my story would unfold. It was combination of the life I had known growing up, along with the expectations others held for me, and the dreams I had for myself. I clung pretty tightly to that plan; that is, until I spent a year in Ecuador with Rostro de Cristo. My world was shaken and turned upside-down as I fell in love and shared life with people who were vulnerable and on the margins. I realized that although the plan I had for my life was very good, God’s call for me to respond to the needs of the world might be even more important.

It is because of these experiences that I resonate with Joseph in today’s gospel reading. He is a righteous yet caring man, determined to make the “right” decisions for his life based on other’s expectations and his plan for his future. Yet through a dream, he has his world turned upside-down by the realization that God is working through his life in ways he had not seen before. In his dream, the angel tells him “do not be afraid” to put God before the “righteous” decision.

This reading challenges us to not be afraid of the ways God is working around us and through us. Joseph gives us an example of trusting God’s will above our own plans or expectations. It urges us to listen to God speaking through those most vulnerable, or through the stirrings of our own heart. And it is a reminder that no matter how lost we feel, God is with us.

Focus on: Simplicity

I think of simplicity as putting God first. To me, this means putting Love before material things, before our own agenda, or before what others think we should do or say. It means listening to God’s voice stirring in our own hearts despite fear, just as Joseph responded to the angel in his dream. God calls us to love others, because all people are made in God’s image. This is what Jesus came to proclaim: “Emmanuel, God is with us.” So by putting God first, we strive to prioritize and choose to celebrate the Love alive in the people surrounding us, and in our own hearts. This is simplicity: letting go of the things, ideas, and distractions that create barriers between us and others, and ultimately between us and God.

Service Suggestion

Our lives are full of distractions, especially in the holiday season. Challenge yourself to embrace simplicity. Intentionally drop the barriers you create between yourself and others: focus on people instead of technology, material things, or expectations you put on yourself. Take time to engage with family and friends, or spend time building relationships with those on the margins in your community. Most of all, don’t be afraid to engage with your own heart in prayer to hear how God is stirring within you.

Prayer

Dear God,
We thank you for the ways you surprise us and challenge our expectations.
Help us to simplify our lives in order to draw closer to those around us, and to ultimately grow closer to you.
Give us courage to hear your call, spoken through those around us and from our own hearts.
Give us peace to know you are with us, through the gift of your son Jesus, Emmanuel.
Amen.
The Perks of Losing the Driver’s License

By Sheila Kun, Cooperator

“Are you kidding me? Having my license taken away is a good thing? I am old, but I am not senile!” These are the sound bites of our aging seniors when their driver license is revoked either by the Department of Motor Vehicle or by their families. Most of the reason for taking such a drastic step is due to a car accident or a near-missed situation that could result in a serious consequence. The emotional reaction when that time comes is real – it is a death sentence of independence.

There might be many arguments and debates if the family decides to take this major step forward. The humiliation of losing your independence is devastating. It is the solid proof that now you are old, you are worthless, and you are not even able to master the basic skill that you had for the last 50 some odd years. You struggle to debate your point. Eventually that day would come because indeed it is unsafe for you to drive anymore. You don’t need to be in a bad accident to prove your point. Accepting that you are no longer sharp in your vision, your reflex and your judgment is the beginning of preserving your dignity at a different level.

I have a question for the younger family members: “How should you overcome such a major crisis in the senior’s life?” My answer came this morning when I watched Fareed’s segment (CNN Sunday) on how the Japanese lead the world in working with their seniors.

Japan has 36% of seniors over 65 years of age. (In America, it is 20%). Their car accident rate is increasing alarmingly. So what should society do? Being a nation of innovation, Japan came up with the solution. On one hand your driver’s license is revoked, and on the other hand, many perks come to you.

Examples of perks: seniors without their license can enjoy discounted noodles and meals in restaurants, they can take their spa at a much cheaper rate, and many other business entities begin to chip in. This is a bold move and a huge victory.
for the nation. In their respect for the elderly, while taking away their license is a must, their cultural value promotes dignity and reward in a tangible way. With this precedence in mind, I am proposing a new reward system for our elderly SDBs who lost their license. I am not picking on our SDBs, but if you look at the statistics, 65% of our SDBs are over 65 years of age. It is a dilemma that faces each community.

So on the day when the license is revoked, the senior should be given another license – the license of unlimited attention. Here are a few of the ideas. The senior should be given:

- The license to be attended to in his daily activities – remember the loss of license symbolizes the need for further care.
- The license to be driven to medical appointments without begging.
- The license to social activities without working around someone’s schedules.
- The license to get an Uber transportation with the Provincial’s approval.
- The license to be treated with compassion and respect.
- The license to live in a safe and happy community.

Your homework assignment from the Care Ministry this week: What other perks should we include?

The Care Ministry welcomes your comments/suggestions: kunlouis@gmail.com