

“Beyond School”: Past Pupils, Mission Places.
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It is June 24, 1870 when some ‘old artisan students’ of the Valdocco Oratory, guided by the Head Bookbinder, Carlo Gastini, come to publicly express their gratitude to Don Bosco on his feast day. Their gift is a small coffee service.

Thus, began the rise of the first Unions in Italy, and then abroad, until in 1908, under the impulse of the General Prefect of the Salesian Congregation, Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the idea was born of an International Federation of Past Pupils by preparing a special Statute.

In the same year at Turin, the first group of ‘old students’ of the FMA was born with the aim of favoring among themselves rapports of solidarity, and the will to commit themselves to the social promotion of the woman. For them too, the same Fr. Philip Rinaldi who was the director, drafted the first Regulations, followed by the Constitutions of the Directive Council that made the Association official under the name of PAST PUPILS UNION.

It is interesting to note that the first past pupils founded an association of mutual help in which the members contributed a monthly amount to create a fund to use in the event of illness. At that time, there was no state social security insurance.

The Association grew in Italy and abroad, creating the need for an instrument to connect the various realities. There was the insistent call for a newspaper, a periodical, which would be the visible link among them. It would carry the Council's directives and news of the various Sections, gathering together memories and thoughts, and reflecting in a short and succinct way, all the actions of the Past Pupils, thus keeping alive attention to its purpose, and its fundamental, non-negotiable values. Thus, was born the periodical UNION that is still a valid link today.

A lay Association, the World Confederation of Past Pupils is open to all people of every age, culture, religion, social state, in every part of the world. It participates in the educational mission of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and of the Salesians, in the environments in which they live and work in the Salesian lay style. It works for the promotion and education of the woman, in the defense of life and of the family; the support and defense of human rights and of peace. It supports the building of youth protagonism through the promotion of initiatives and activities in favor of the young, especially those who live in disadvantaged situations. It enters into dialog with the social/cultural reality and values processes of social communication. It is open to intercultural and inter-religious dialog and favors it. It keeps updated and tends to the ongoing formation of the associates according to the educational values received. It lives, promotes, and supports solidarity among its members in fidelity to the origins. It is present in the territory and, in respect to its finality, collaborates with the civil and ecclesial organizations, above all in the educational and social sectors.

The logo of the Past Pupils is *“Hands in the world and roots in the heart”*. *Hands in the world* indicates its activity, the ability to intervene in history and society. *Roots in the heart* is the ability to constantly draw from the source of the Salesian charism.

In full autonomy of management and in close communion of spirit, the Past Pupils belong by statute, as well as effectively, to the Salesian Family. Even the spirituality of the Past Pupils is in

fact based on the Preventive System of Don Bosco which is expressed in the trinomial of reason, religion, loving kindness - system-based charity, in a climate of hope and joy that promotes and enhances the good that exists in everyone and in society and which, therefore, also responds today to the most authentic aspirations of the person: the search for truth, the need for God, the openness to relationship. It is a spirituality enriched with the charismatic elements of the life style and action of St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello who, with 'feminine genius', shared with Don Bosco the same educative project, inspired by Mary: 'Take care of them...'; live daily life with simplicity and joy; fill every small gesture with the experience of God; insert yourself into the territory, witnessing to and promoting the culture of life and of peace.

There are diverse levels of adhesion to the Association in which each one can express their own way of being. The Past Pupils belonging to the various religions are grateful for the educational experience lived in Salesian environments and recognize the style of warmth and of welcome, of accompaniment in the search for meaning in life, in solidarity and proximity.

With the Onlus '*Not One Less*', the Association expresses the Confederation's solidarity that allows the accomplishment of projects of promotion and help in the world in favor of the young, of women, and of families.

For example, in this period there are projects activated to help the populations of Mexico and Puerto Rico that have lost everything in the earthquake or due to hurricanes. They are international interventions, but we can cite some that are recent in time like the floods of Genoa, where the past pupils of Liguria worked in every way to furnish help to the Institute of Mary Help of Christians and to at least 20 families that had lost everything.

This happened thanks to networking among the various local unions but also with other associations that work in the field of solidarity.

In a society that is more and more globalized, among the many gifts and opportunities, there are evident challenges for living: the lack of ideals, conformity to a debased human fabric, in which it is difficult to seek and find a meaning for existence. The members of the Association live inserted in the daily life of this context. They come in contact with the suffering of the young and of families adrift, of men and women who are often disoriented and dejected, and they make the effort to identify, support, and actively sustain the multiple signs of life and hope. They give a voice and consistency to the desire for spirituality, though at times confused, for the many faceted face of young people who often do not fall into the categories in which they are sometimes classified.

There are past pupils who work in after-school programs, in various forms of recovery for children with learning difficulties, in parish and diocesan listening centers, in various catechetical and parochial activities, in youth oratories and centers, in social rehabilitation, in teaching, and in everything that seems to be volunteering but that is far more than volunteering.

The commitment of the Past Pupils is that of joining the numbers of the many men and women of good will who are building the future with special attention to the young, particularly the poorest,

recognizing and empowering the good that there is, letting the words of Pope Francis resound in their heart: “Do not let yourself be robbed of peace!”

As an active part of the Salesian Family, the Association members want to witness to what they believe in and be a significant presence in the area in which they work.

They collaborate with the FMA and the other groups of the Salesian Family in works of an educational and promotional nature, adhering to proposals at the Province level and maintaining contacts with the national and international levels as well.

The Association promotes the formation of the Associates in studying the heritage received, adapting it to the times and the environment in which they live. For a journey of self-formation, the Association annually follows the lines of commitment proposed by the World Confederation. The local association also follows formative itineraries that are gradual, continuous, and well-targeted and are open to non-associates as well. In the monthly meetings, the theme is developed with proposals of religious, moral, and Salesian content. They undertake living their specific mission in every encounter and relationship, giving glory to God for all the good that is sown.

Paul VI said: “Today, human beings no longer listen to teachers, and if they listen to them, it is because they are witnesses”. These words are valid for our times as well. In fact, a life lived with Gospel coherence is the first message that reaches the heart of the people.

This is why it is important for us to know who we are, for whom and for what we live, which are the dreams we cultivate. Returning to the evangelical and charismatic sources is the indispensable condition. In a world in which even important news is no longer news because it comes with the velocity of light and overlap each other, the Past Pupils are called to witness that the encounter with the Lord is the firm rock of life and to demonstrate with actions that it is possible to live like good citizens because they are good Christians.

Where members do not belong to the Christian religion, they seek to live coherently with the educational values they have assumed to improve society through education.

In his discourses, Pope Francis often returns to trust in God and in Jesus who revealed His face to us. In his encounters with the people, as well as in his documents and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he highlights the importance that Jesus once again fascinate us, asking Him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence. We need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life (cf. n. 264).

New life is rooted in the Eucharist where we have the deepest and most intimate encounter with Jesus. This encounter transforms thoughts, words, choices, gestures that become in their turn, a source of life, bread for the journey. In both the happiest, and the most difficult moments when all seems impossible, Jesus walks with us, giving us a new gaze, a new freedom, and a new hope. In so many parts of the world, especially the most martyred and persecuted for the sake of the faith, there are Past Pupils who are ready to give their life to be faithful to Jesus. Most of the Past Pupils are called upon to give their life day by day, in the routine of their commitments lived with love and for love.