

# Giornate di Spiritualità della Famiglia Salesiana

16 - 19 gennaio 2014

## Question Luisa Bertiato wants to ask the Rector Major.

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Good afternoon, Fr Pascual Chávez and you my brothers and sisters in the Salesian Family!

My name is Luisa Bertiato and I was born at Mestre on 2 April 1981, the same day as Dominic Savio's birthday. My parents are Gianni and Sandra, both Salesian Cooperators. I am the eldest of 4 children, the others being Francesco, 31, Maria, 27, and Angela, 23.

I have a degree in Education and Social Work: I am a teacher and social worker. I work for a private Foundation which mainly looks after children whose parents have died and who were doctors, pharmacists and veterinarians had contributed to the Foundation. Specifically though I look after students from 0 to 30 years of age in the north-east part of Italy known as Triveneto: there are about 600 of these students. It is a very Salesian kind of work even though in a secular field.

I look after these students both for the bureaucratic aspects of contract and yearly contribution, and helping them choose their high school or university. I try to support them in difficult times and in relationships with family, teachers or friends. I do try to give particular attention to families with differently-abled children or when a parent is widowed and left with small children: for example I often call around by phone during the quieter times of the year when I can find some time to talk to these more vulnerable families. They find that even a simple phone call provides relief and give them a chance to air their difficulties. Twice a year I visit the provinces in Triveneto to meet up with families in loco: it is really nice when the kids come looking for me even if just to say hello, or to talk something over or to say thanks for the help and advice... I often see myself as a big sister they can count on and confide in, part of a larger family that goes beyond blood relationships. And it is not hard thinking of that since I have a clear example before me which is the Salesian Family!

I have been part of Cooperator gatherings since when my brother and I at 1-2 years of age were running along the corridors at Astori di Mogliano or walking through the fields in Colesin to Cencenighe while our parents were attending meetings. Our Salesian of reference, my 'Don Bosco', was dad's former French teacher, Fr Bruno Martelossi, whom dad had known since my grandfather had a serious accident at work and he was sent with his two other 2 brothers to boarding school with the Salesians at Castello di Godego.

Fr Bruno and Fr Gianni (Filippin) were the first Salesian priests I met as a child. I was always struck by their availability, the affection that showed through especially in their actions and the Salesian environment I experienced as a child was very attractive for me...so much so that even then I was thinking that I'd want to be a Cooperator when I grew up (even though most children at a very young age want to follow in their parents' footsteps).

Then later, because dad was always on the move for work reasons, the family moved too... and besides the fact the family was growing, after the birth of my sister Maria, it meant they could spend less time with the Cooperators either because of distance or because our tribe of 6 had to be looked after.

My passion for young people and leadership was so strong that at 15 I became an ACR leader in the Parish at Prozzolo di Camponogara (VE) (- I was in Third year at school, after Confirmation, but they said I was too young :o). But I used enjoy more being the leader than being led! There was no Salesian house or oratory in the area we lived in near enough to be part of the action there so I decided to bring 'Salesianity' to the activities for young people whom I could reach in the parish and the vicariate we belonged to.

I did my junior secondary schooling at the FMA “Don Bosco” school in Padua.

I began senior secondary school at Marchesi di Padova and finished the final years at Tiziano in Belluno.

At Belluno we came across the Salesians again: as I indicated earlier, moving 6 people around was difficult and so being part of the Cooperators was not easy for my parents. At Belluno there was a Salesian parish and school where they were able to be part of things once more and I began attending catechism even though it was not the parish we belonged to. For years I took part in the Youth Festival at Belluno and when I was 17 and 18 I did a leadership course organised by the SYM and then put it all into practice in the parish!

In 2000 I began university at Padua where I enrolled in the Education Faculty. In 2004 I then began a second degree in Politics and Social Work which I finished in 2007.

During the holidays leading up to Easter, on 27 February 2001, I went looking for Fr Bruno at his invitation because he was curious to know of my experience as a volunteer at World Youth Day during the Jubilee Year in Rome the summer before.

I hoped to begin my preparations to be a Cooperator; instead Fr Bruno spoke to me about a group of young people who would be visiting the places of St Francis de Sales and the Don Bosco places around Turin – organised by the Province.

That summer my adventures with the Past Pupils began! First in France and then Turin, then Lourdes and Barcelona the next summer, Then Vice president of the Mestre union in 2003, 2007 Provincial Vice President and finally National Youth Vice President from 2009 until now.

From 2002 to 2013 I was Youth Vice President first locally (2003-2007) then nationally (2009-2013): it has been an enriching experience because I have been able to experience the greatness of the Salesian charism in various places around our region and in Italy and the joy young people I have met experience at home and in the oratories they attend..., but I have also found some difficulties in the association when it is too focused on structures rather than mission... and that makes it hard for some young people to see themselves as part of the association, where their absence becomes a cause and effect of ageing in the association. Just the same, it never fails to show its filial love for Don Bosco!

I found myself visiting all Italy (and not only Italy!) accompanied and supported (and sometimes just put up with ;o) by the then national delegate, Fr Enrico Peretti: we worked at creating greater awareness of the role of the Past Pupils and doing practical things! I grew, and have gained much experience especially in organising and discussion... but I have not put aside thinking of becoming a Salesian Cooperator one day...

Until 24 January 2011, after the experience of the Spirituality Days, at the invitation of the Vice Provincial, Fr Jean Rebellato, I have been part of the evening meetings of Salesian Cooperators in Padua... which has led me to 31 January 2013, the day I will make my promise!

I could not imagine my life without the Salesian style, and my work as a social worker also shows that (something I love doing and that I can do with and for the young people): I have been part of Catholic Action, active in the Padua Diocese, with the Jesuits... but it is only in Salesian houses that I really feel at home! From the Salesian house at Mestre to the Salesian house in Santo Domingo or Santiago in Chile,, or from Belgium to Slovakia!

I am very proud of being a daughter of Don Bosco and I get emotional when I think that I belong to the Salesian Movement that I feel such a keen part of as a member of the great Salesian Family!

How can the Salesian Family help the Past Pupils to “regenerate” overcoming bureaucratisation in structures and being more focused on ‘acting as family’?

Starting directly from life’s experience, dear Fr Pascual, what concrete suggestions, maybe with some little useful anecdotes, could you give the Salesian Family to overcome conflicts and differences the various SF groups feel and that sometimes make it hard to live and share together ?