



We the Volunteers of Don Bosco VDB Study Centre (21 January 2022)

*At the origin of every new project, and even more so at the origin of every new vocational journey, there is a **dream**: of God, who gives rise to new responses to the needs of the time, and of human beings who, by mediating the desire of the Spirit, make themselves available to be the founder and accompany the growth of a new shoot sprouting in the Church. This is the case of Fr Philip Rinaldi and the Institute of the Don Bosco Volunteers.*

1917. We go back to Valdocco, a "sacred place" for the VDB. At the time Fr Rinaldi was Prefect of the Salesian Congregation, the Vicar of Fr Paul Albera and the Director of the FMA Oratory. Together with three "Children of Mary", leaders at the girls' oratory, and in the small room beside the FMA Church, Fr Rinaldi began an original experience in the Church and the Salesian Family: **consecrated Salesian secularity**, today the **VDB Secular Institute**. The Church would only recognise this form of life thirty years later in 1947 with the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater*. Fr Rinaldi was a precursor, a man of God capable of understanding and appreciating the role of the laity, especially women, in society and in the Church! It was a response to the needs of the times.

Let us think for a moment of Italy in the 20th century: it had been through the devastating experience of two World Wars and a Fascist dictatorship; it had experienced rapid social change through growing industrialisation, the birth of unions and political parties, and the gradual shift towards a society of wellbeing... In this context Fr Rinaldi was not passive, waiting for difficult times to pass, or for others to offer a response. Instead, at the height of the War he launched a courageous undertaking, following what he had learned from Don Bosco: when there are difficulties, times of crisis and suffering, that is the time to be led by the Spirit and get to work courageously. So, a new bloom was born! He was able to "dream", or better still, grasp "God's dream for the world" and join his dream with God's.

On 20 May 1917, when he began this new ecclesial experience, Fr Rinaldi addressed the first sisters in these words: **"It was truly in the Ven. Don Bosco's mind and planning...and perhaps he would have carried out this plan had the amount of work of his, spreading rapidly in an extraordinary way, not completely absorbed him..."**. "We are beginning this work in obscurity: very simply, no complications. There are only three of you, but it does not matter; **the works of the Lord are born in poverty, in humility and are formed in silence**. It is better that there be few but with good spirit." (QC 2).

Two years later, **"on 26 October 1919, at 9.30 a.m. in the chapel next to the Ven. Don Bosco's room, and in the presence of His Eminence Card. Cagliero, the Veru Rev. Director Fr Philip Rinaldi, the Superior Sr. Rosalia Dolza, the first and solemn ceremony of profession of the first group of seven Zealots of the Society of St Francis de Sales and Mary Help of Christians took place"**. (QC 79). Card. Cagliero stressed the fact that **"The new institution has the good fortune to be born in the place sacred to Ven. Don Bosco, where he himself had received the first vows and first promises sixty years ago (before), of those who gave life and development to the great Salesian work"**... "The cradle of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is in Mornese, where Sr. Mary Mazzarello lived and professed her vows. **You must give importance to this sign of very special predestination.**" (QC 82). This detail, which might seem secondary, was of profound significance for Fr Rinaldi, so much so that professions were renewed in this place in the years that followed.

The VDBs were born out of a passion and urgency for evangelisation, the Salesian speciality of putting oneself on the line with passion to evangelise what we call the "existential peripheries" today. Fr Rinaldi urged the first sisters to be like leaven in whatever setting they found themselves in – in the family, at work, in the neighbourhood – so as to be a sign of God's love, simply and consistently. "Your mission is not only to become saints," he insisted "but to adapt yourself to the needs of life, to the times, in order to do good. In order to be good young people, it is not necessary to associate with them; but to be able to fulfil this mission of good, yes. Saints in the state in which you are and find yourselves." (QC 40-41).

Until then, it was only the religious life, in community, that spoke of being radical according to the Gospel; Fr Rinaldi, on the other hand, indicated the path of holiness in daily life, in the heart of the realities of the world; a holiness lived by laywomen without any sign that distinguished them from other people. He also recommended dressing elegantly, though without unnecessary refinement, and cultivating constant union with God in order to be effective presences among people, because one will succeed in doing good "to the degree with which you remain hidden, united, and love Jesus" (QC 129).

Today, the VDB project of life spelt out by the Constitutions, reaffirms that **"the Volunteers are lay women who, through vocational choice, live in the world to whose sanctification they contribute from within "in the manner of leaven"... It is secularity which characterises the manner of living their consecration, of fulfilling their mission, of expressing fraternal communion and of belonging to the Salesian Family."** (C 4).



From the VDB Const. and 8th GA

The Volunteers are lay women who, through vocational choice, live in the world to whose sanctification they contribute from within "in the manner of Leaven". The specific quality of their vocation is secularity which characterizes the manner of living their consecration, of fulfilling their mission, of expressing fraternal communion, and of belonging to the Salesian Family. (Const,4).

We are called to live in the world, while imitating Christ who, through His Incarnation, inserted Himself in the social-cultural environment of mankind in whose midst he lived as one sent by the Father. We participate in the evangelizing task of the Church by the testimony of our life and fidelity to our consecration; through the exercise of the common priesthood of the faithful and the Christian animation of temporal realities; through the service of the ecclesial community and the spreading of the Salesian charism in the world. (Const,13)

To realize our mission, we are open to all the authentic values in the world, with respect to the just autonomy of every created thing. In our work we share in the toil of mankind, in solidarity with mankind's effort to make the world more just and more human; we wish to be more actively and responsibly present, in keeping with each one's ability and possibility, in the environment in which people live and work; and we are open to receive the riches of various cultures. (Const,13)

"Our mission is "to give meaning" to the world and to history; it is bringing forth Christ and his Spirit, with the humility and passion that stems from an intimate union with Jesus in contemplation, so as to have the same sentiments of Christ. Like Him, we love with tenderness, mercy, and purity. Like Him, we live poor amongst the poor, sharing with them what we have and who we are. Like Him, we heal life. It is about being a Church in love with God and passionate about man! Our specific vocation is "to be inside" the world, sent to be attentive, to listen, to sympathize, to rejoice, and to accept the challenges presented by society. (8th General Assembly, 11)

Our secular spirituality "has its roots in the mystery of the Incarnation; our life is consecrated not simply to "be in the world", but to "INHABIT THE WORLD", loving it as Jesus did in Nazareth, sharing the life of his people... Our commitment, then, is to encounter the world as it really is. "To inhabit it" and act in a way that does not risk "losing the sense of being human", that does not lose its focus on the individual...; inhabiting it in order to establish new styles of relationship like Jesus did; inhabiting it by being companions on the journey and a prophetic presence; inhabiting it to bring God to every human being!" (Cf. AG/8, 14).

It is about "being mission" 24/7. Wherever there is a VDB there is an expression of mission in the Church and in the world. Paul VI described us as "the advanced wing of the Church in the world"; and we wish to bring the Church to the heart of the world and the world to the Church.

2022. The Year of St Francis de Sales

This year, 2022, marks the 400th anniversary of the death of the holy Bishop of Geneva. The Salesian Family of Don Bosco joins the Visitation Order and other groups in the Church who have St Francis de Sales as their reference or patron during this celebration. Together we are promoting the "**Sales Year**" with one clear objective: to make known, further explore and live the spirituality that arises from who he was, how he acted and how he accompanied people.

The figure of St Francis de Sales inspired the Rector Major's Strenna for 2022: "*Do all through love, nothing through constraint*". He presented this during the Spirituality Days held at Valdocco in Turin from 13 to 16 January. The thousands who enrolled in the Days online, and those who were in Valdocco, were able to enter into the spirit of the Saint, led by people who are experts in his spirituality. Also, on 17 January a "**Display**" was opened at the Don Bosco House Museum. This display presents his life, his writings, various portraits, and valuable items that brings us closer to him.

Therefore, this year offers a good opportunity to focus our attention on St Francis de Sales and to embrace his teachings, especially those addressed to the lay world, proposing practical paths for a holy life centred on Love.

Risorse per l'Anno Sales

In the occasion of Sales' year, beside the republication of the fundamental books of Saint Francis, vari works have been published and several audiovisual resources have been produced with easy access, some of them in different languages.

Fundamental among St Francis de Sales' works are the *Introduction to the Devout Life* and the *Treatise on the Love of God*. It is not hard to find them on the Internet in various languages.

Among the works that present his biography and comment on his spirituality are Salesian SDB authors: Gianni Ghiglione, Paolo Mojoli, Morand Wirth, Joe Boenzi, Aldo Girauda, Eugenio Alburquerque, Giuseppe Roggia, Michele Molinar... and Jesuit André Ravier.

Among audiovisual materials: 6 videos (30 minutes) intended for retreats:

<https://vimeo.com/489786551/a13d36f9c3j>;

5 videos (10 minutes) for Goodnights or spiritual encouragement, prepared by Michele Molinar.

For further information: [web famiglialesiana.org](http://web.famiglialesiana.org), [web sdb.org](http://web.sdb.org).