

**SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES
SALESIAN HEADQUARTERS
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FR FRANCESCO MARACCANI
Salesian priest

Pavone Mella, 30.10.1936

Rome, 24.01.2020

LIFE AND PROFILE

On the evening of 24 January, the Feast of St Francis de Sales and the day of the monthly commemoration of Mary Help of Christians, God called to himself Fr Francesco Maraccani, SDB, former Secretary General and Procurator General of the Congregation. His had been a life lived in intelligent and generous dedication to the service of the young, and to Salesians and the Congregation.

Fr Maraccani was born on 30 October 1936 at Pavone Mella (Brescia). During his elementary school years he grew up around the Salesian oratory, where the Rector of the community and the one in charge of the oratory was Fr Michele Benedetti. The latter had a considerable spiritual and apostolic influence on him and other young men who then became Salesians. All the youngsters and the people called Fr Benedetti their “father”.

When he had completed his elementary schooling, and not yet knowing well what direction to take in life, Francesco asked his parents’ permission to spend a year as a volunteer at the oratory in Pavone; they gladly gave him permission, seeing a sincere search on his part for a possible vocation to Salesian consecrated life, something he was fascinated by. In those years, 11-year-old youngsters were able to make choices regarding their future. Fr Benedetti was happy to take him in and trusted him to carry out any number of tasks; young Francesco took part in the community life of prayer and often also joined the confreres for meals. The “father’s” accompaniment, Salesian community life and the volunteer experience at the Oratory would remain as unforgettable memories for the rest of his life; even many years later he was happy to tell confreres about this experience. And other vocations to Salesian life would be engendered in this oratory atmosphere in the little town of Pavone.

At the end of his year of volunteering and discernment he decided to go to the aspirantate at Chiari; his parents supported this because they trusted him and Fr Benedetti. In addition to his exemplary life of prayer and his commitment to study, we can recall some interesting episodes: unable to play football because of lower limb problems, he took up refereeing; he enjoyed going out to recreation with the others, but once, after a challenge match between boys and superiors when he had “let the boys win”, and after protests from the superiors, he left the refereeing and dedicated himself to being the master of ceremonies during celebrations. This was the beginning of his passion for the liturgy, something he cherished for the rest of his life.

He attended middle school and high school at the aspirantate and this was followed by a year of novitiate in Montodine and postnovitiate in Nave. He made his first profession on 16 August 1954. He then did his postnovitiate in Nave (Brescia) during which he finished his high schooling (*liceo classico* or classical lyceum as it was called). Fr Bruno Roccaro, his maths and physics teacher, remembered him as one of the best students. He did his three years of Practical Training at Parma from 1957 to 1960, during which he attended a two year engineering course. He then made his perpetual profession on 14 August 1960. He transferred to Sant’Ambrogio in Milan from 1960 to 1963, where he completed university studies with three years of engineering at the Polytechnic; he passed his exams brilliantly and gained exemption from academic fees. The university booklet shows a score of 30/30 or 30/30 with honours for almost all courses. In 1963 he graduated in Electronic Engineering in brilliant fashion.

Fr Francesco was invited to do Theology in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1963. He was ordained priest on 18 March 1967. In June of the same year he gained his Licentiate in Theology, again at the Pontifical University. His Roman experience gave him a strong sense of Church which he would maintain for the rest of his life; he had a strong sense of “sentire cum Ecclesia”. These were

the post-Conciliar years and the early years of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI, for whom he would always have great esteem, appreciation and grateful remembrance. He also developed who he was as a Salesian priest who would live like Don Bosco in all circumstances. As a priest he liked to recite Pope Paul VI's prayer for the parish priest, characteristics of which were reflected in himself:

*"Lord, thank you for giving us a man,
not an angel, as shepherd of our souls;
enlighten him with your light, assist him with your grace,
support him with your strength.*

*Let failure not dishearten him, and success not make him proud.
Make us docile to his voice.
Let him be to us friend, teacher, doctor, father.
Give him clear, concrete, possible ideas;
give him the strength to implement them, and to us the generosity to collaborate....*

*Let him lead us by love, by example,
by word and by deed.
Let us see, love and esteem you in him.
Let him not lose any of the souls you have entrusted to him.
Save us together with him."*

The Apostle Paul reminds us that God has a plan for everyone and that we are all called to "conform to the image of his Son". This is the vocation of Jesus' disciples: to be configured to Him, to follow Him, to assume His thoughts and feelings. This in particular is the consecrated life which Fr Maraccani embraced as a Salesian priest.

After his priestly ordination, he was Principal of the "Don Bosco" Industrial Technical Institute in Brescia for 12 years, from 1967 to 1979. In 1974 he also became Rector of the Salesian community, an office he held for five years, until 1979, not to mention his 25 hours of school per week and evening classes at the Vocational Training Centre. When the Provincial asked him to reduce his school hours, he replied that teaching did not weigh on him and that it was the way to be close to young people; he told the Provincial: "what would I do all day in the office?" These were the best years of his life, spent with young people. From this came his closeness to the Brescia Past Pupils; as long as he remained healthy, he would not miss any of their annual Conferences and would maintain correspondence with them.

He liked to teach, and did so with a passion and clarity that the boys recognised and for which they appreciated and liked him. He remembers the year when he discovered, to everyone's amazement, that the electronics task in the high school final year exam was wrong and could not be solved; the other teachers were amazed, and after trying to solve the exercise, they realised that Fr Maraccani was right; the Ministry was immediately informed and subsequently sent the correct exam to all the exam centres in Italy and Italian schools abroad.

From 1970 to 1979 he was a Provincial Councillor in the Lombardo-Emiliana Province. On several occasions he was the Moderator of the Provincial Chapters. Elected by the Chapter Assembly, he took part in the 20th Special General Chapter. With regret, but accepting of the obedience, he left teaching when he was appointed Provincial. From 29 June 1979 to 23 October 1984 he held the office of Provincial of the San Zeno Province, with headquarters in Verona. The confreres of this Province remember him for his closeness, familiarity, humanity, and his readiness to listen and dialogue in every circumstance. He always spoke well of this Province. His experience as Provincial greatly

benefited him in his task as Secretary General: he could thus understand the most important needs and difficulties of the Provincials, as well as the functioning and organisation of the Provinces. In the same period he was elected President of the Conference of Major Superiors of Triveneto.

Fr Maraccani practised obedience as a sense of being guided and accompanied. In obedience he found peace, serenity, happiness, joy. His life was a succession of increasingly demanding tasks, fulfilled through obedience.

In October 1984, he was called to Rome by the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, who entrusted him with the office of Secretary of the General Council, a position he held continuously for 18 years until 2002. For 13 years, from July 2002 to November 2015, he also held the office of Procurator General of the Congregation at the Holy See and spokesman of the Rector Major.

He took part in 8 General Chapters, from 1971 to 2014. In 1990 he was the Moderator of the 23rd General Chapter. From 2015 until November 2019, despite his advanced age and failing health, he continued to work tirelessly in the juridical office of the Salesian Congregation. Until the end of his earthly pilgrimage he led an exemplary religious and priestly life.

Being close to the Rector Major and the General Council, to the life of all the Provinces and the personal situations of his confreres, his love for Don Bosco and the Congregation grew and he did his best to fulfil Don Bosco's words to Fr Barberis.: *"You will complete the work that I have begun; I am making the rough draft, and you will apply the colours. So then: I am now making a rough draft of the Congregation and I will leave it up to you who come after to make the good copy. Now we have the seed."*

In 2007, the fortieth year of his priestly ordination, in what was almost a summary of his vocation, he recalled his years of priesthood, thanking God as follows:

"I want to thank You, O Lord, first of all for the gift of life, in a family (Dad, Mum, Mari) that has led me to love You.

Thank you for the many gifts with which you have enriched me and especially for the gift of my vocation which grew at the oratory in Pavone, with the wise and loving guidance of Fr Beneditti

Thank you for having always accompanied me, also with the help of your Mother, Mary, in my studies and training (Nave, Parma, Milan, Rome), where I was also able to experience Salesian work among young people (school, assistance).

How can I not recall the most beautiful stages and moments: the professions (the first in Montodine and perpetual in Missaglia) and above all my priestly ordination, 40 years ago, in the church at Pavone.

You consecrated me priest, dispenser in your name of your grace and love, you gave me the power to make you truly present, with your Body and Blood, for the salvation of your people, especially the young, like Don Bosco, and in the style of Don Bosco.

I have tried to be faithful during the years of direct ministry among the young and the people in Brescia, in the school, the oratory, the parish, and then as Provincial, with my confreres; and again in the tasks entrusted to me in Rome, even if no longer directly among the young.

Unfortunately, at times I have been weak in my union with you, in my unconditional love, total dedication and humble service. Forgive me and help me to take up the task again every day with confidence and courage, despite the difficulties, even physical ones.

Today I want to renew my response to your gift, to be a Salesian priest, truly all yours and at the service of your love, for the good of my brothers and sisters. With Mary and with Don Bosco."

Fr Maraccani is a beautiful, transparent, joyful, intelligent figure. It is difficult to illustrate his profile, given the many facets of his personality. He is a multifaceted figure with many interests: from the liturgy to the history of the Church and the Congregation, to ecclesial events, science and current affairs. He loved the Sacred Heart, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, the saints and blessed of the Salesian Family. He had been trained to work tirelessly. Work was the visible sign of his apostolic passion. In the Lombardo-Emiliana (ILE) Province they had coined an expression: "Working like dogs is demanding enough, but working like Maraccani [a play on the word 'cani'=dogs] just doesn't compare." I imagine that in Heaven he will go to St Peter to ask for some work to do; what Don Bosco said: "We will rest in Heaven" will not apply to him. Work in its various forms is the hallmark of the Salesian: apostolic work, manual and intellectual work, work sanctified by union with God. For him, Don Bosco's words were a refrain: "Work, work, work". His desk with its many papers was a sign of the work he had in hand. Illness and physical ailments never prevented him from neglecting his duties; he knew how to live peacefully with illness. Above all, he was a man of prayer, and the many tasks and the great time dedicated to work did not prevent him from a life of confident, prolonged and contemplative prayer.

He was simple, and there was something nice about the way he let himself be "teased", especially by dear Fr Giovanni Fedrigotti who always dedicated a playful verse to him in songs during some community gatherings. And it was also like this at the meeting of the Rector Major and General Council with Pope Benedict XVI, after his resignation. Seeing Fr Maraccani the Pope said to him: "But are you still here?" Fr Maraccani would recount this joke with a smile and was pretty much pleased that the Pope recognised him for his long service to the Congregation he loved so much.

He loved the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Mother Yvonne, Superior General, said of him: "We are close to you in praise of the Lord for having given your Congregation and the Church the rich and brilliant figure of Fr Francesco Maraccani. With complete dedication, deep intelligence, passionate competence and love he has served the Congregation as an authentic son of Don Bosco."

His departure means we have lost a Salesian characterised by great love for Don Bosco, the Congregation and the young. I keep a grateful memory of him personally; I was honoured by his friendship and confidence. From the age of 18 I was with him at the seaside in Cesenatico with the boys. As Moderator of the Provincial Chapters he then chose me as his secretary. When I was Provincial I always benefited from his advice and invited him to the most important moments in the life of the Province, for example the opening of the new work in Lugano. It was such a pleasure to enjoy his company, which was always enriching.

Fr Francesco Cereda sdb

Some testimonies follow regarding Fr Francesco Maraccani by those who knew him in the various periods of his life: testimonies that reveal his character and profile through details and episodes.

TESTIMONIES AND MEMORIES

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major of the Salesians

I am happy to add my simple testimony to this letter in memory of our dear Fr Francesco Maraccani.

Having to be brief, I choose to share just a few things. I will begin with a more superficial and enjoyable one, and then I will refer to the more profound experience of living with him.

Among my "wars" with Fr Maraccani – he was known for this with everyone and only those closest to him could call him, as they did at home, Fr Franco – there was our "dialectical struggle" on the quality of Italian versus Spanish prosciutto. Naturally, I boasted about the good quality of Iberian prosciutto and tried to get him to tell me that it was really the best in the world. Well, I never succeeded! The most I got was hearing him say: "Ours is very good too." The confreres expected the systematic response to my argument, ever the same, ever the same.

Fr Francesco Maraccani was above all a man with a great sense of belonging and fidelity to the Salesian Congregation. He felt himself to be a Salesian and always lived by loving and serving the Congregation, and through it to serve Jesus and the Gospel. His generous work – he was always a tireless worker – responded to this love for all that is Salesian.

I would like to add a second element linked to the last moments of his life, leaving aside many other things to avoid repetition. In the years when his health was failing, and therefore when he felt less able to work and less indispensable, a magnificent version of Fr Maraccani came to light. Every day he accepted our jokes, he felt at ease when challenged, always with a smile on his lips, despite the mischievousness with which he was provoked. And he bore his illness in an exemplary way.

We saw how he was slowly fading. In the hospital, being unable to eat and having blood transfusions, it was as if nothing bad was happening. I was very impressed to see him so calm.

Finally, four days before he left for his meeting with the Father, I was with him in the UPS infirmary. He was very weak. I went to say goodbye to him, convinced that this was the last meeting before our definitive reunion in Heaven, but without letting him understand that. He took off his oxygen mask and, in a whisper, asked me to pray and give him the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. We prayed together with the other people who came with me. I gave him the Lord's blessing with the intercession of our Mother Help of Christians and he spent this moment in an indescribable peace and serenity. I dare say that Fr Francesco Maraccani, without knowing it, lived by preparing himself for that final moment, truly resting in the Peace of the Lord.

On behalf of Don Bosco, thank you dear Fr Francesco Maraccani for being a great Salesian of Don Bosco.



Fr Pascual Chávez
Rector Major emeritus

Fr Francesco Maraccani was a great son of Don Bosco, whom he served in the Congregation with a total dedication of his outstanding intellectual capacity, spiritual richness, specific skills and his ever prompt availability for whatever the Rector Major asked of him.

One could say that he was a diamond of a man, with many facets, all of them sparkling.

We remember him as teacher and Rector of the Don Bosco Institute in Brescia (1967- 1979), where he left a deep impression on all his students who appreciated his qualified competence as an electronic engineer, his strong Salesian sensitivity, his love for the young.

Later as Provincial of the San Zeno Province in Verona, from where he was called by the then Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò as Secretary of the General Council (1984-2002), a task he carried out for 18 years.

At the end of this task he was appointed by Fr Pascual Chavez, the then Rector Major, as Procurator General of the Congregation and Representative before the Holy See (2002-2015).

Although he was a multifaceted figure, what shone out most was his authenticity and unity of life, so typically Salesian, fruit of his identification with Christ and His Gospel, with Don Bosco and the Salesian Constitutions.

May Mary Help of Christians, of whom he was a very devout son, introduce him to the Father's House. May the Lord Jesus, who had called him and consecrated him for himself, let him share in the Joy, Peace, Light and New Life of his Resurrection. Now he will be able to contemplate God face to face, to be in communion forever with his dear ones and Don Bosco and all our saints.

Fr Stefano Martoglio sdb
Vicar of the Rector Major

I thank you very much for the possibility of offering a testimony about the life of this great Salesian, Fr Francesco Maraccani.

The first personal memory I have of Fr Francesco practically coincides with the beginning of my Salesian life: the first time I met Fr Maraccani I was a novice and he was Provincial of Verona, and finishing his service to begin service to the Congregation at Salesian headquarters.

In the years spent together with Fr Maraccani, first at the Pisana and then at Sacro Cuore, I was always very impressed by his sense of Congregation, which was really strong. A sense of Congregation that meant he identified with the Congregation itself and with service to it. I was very impressed by this over the final years of his life, mixed in with health problems and with age. I better grasped the essence of this man, not identifying with the role, but a true generous and competent attachment to service of the Congregation. He had truly and totally married the Congregation and made it his own so that he identified himself with it as the very meaning of his life.

I keep this memory with me, a precious memory of him, because I consider his identification with the obedience received truly remarkable, all-embracing. A magnificent example of vocational identification to the end.

In the last season of his life, when he was troubled by health and walking difficulties, I was always struck by the Fr Francesco's willingness to be present at all community initiatives and occasions; a beautiful testimony of belonging to his community, of being present with his confreres even given his failing health. To all of us this has highlighted his humanity, his desire to be with his confreres at the level of everyday life.

May the Lord keep him in his fullness of life and gifts to us, and may we remember the witness of life of Fr Maraccani and his love for the Congregation as a stimulus for our daily journey.

Bishop Gaetano Galbusera sdb
Bishop emeritus of Pucallpa (Peru)

I came to know Fr Maraccani in the distant '70s, in the community in Brescia where we collaborated closely for some years in the activities of the high school of which, as electronic engineer, he was teacher and headmaster.

I remember him well because a friendship with him formed that endured, despite the different paths we followed due to our different obediences. That is why, despite various difficulties, I wanted to be part of the funeral celebrated in his community of Pavone Mella. As well as the large attendance of fellow townspeople, I met a large group of former students: they were moved as they took part, and grateful, offering a final farewell to their old teacher after forty years.

Fr Francesco was a strict and demanding teacher, but recognised and appreciated by his pupils not only for his learning and the clarity of his teaching, but also for the transparency of his ever consistent behaviour, for his “exaggerated” dedication to duty, and for his educative concern.

What always struck me about Fr Francesco was his religious observance, simple and sincere piety, his ability to handle work and his great availability for helping the confreres. He was fraternal: it was

always possible to joke with him and even when the teasing was a little exaggerated, he never bore any resentment.

He was a man of great scientific and religious learning. Yet despite this he was discreet and humble. An intelligent, able and accommodating confrere, he soon became a rector and then provincial and was then called to the General Council because of his competence and versatility... and I always “took advantage of” his competence, as provincial then bishop, in juridical and governance matters. But what I always appreciated about him was his love for Don Bosco and the Congregation.

Mother Yvonne Reungoat fma Superior General FMA

I had the opportunity for getting to know our dear Fr Francesco Maraccani, especially during meetings of the two SDB and FMA General Councils.

These were very significant moments because between one reflection and another there was always a family encounter during which, once the formalities were over, his personal characteristics spontaneously emerged and between all of these the figure of Fr Francesco stood out.

I was able to see a true son of Don Bosco in him, one who with tireless dedication and competence had put his brilliant and profound intelligence at the disposition of the Congregation, along with his wealth of experience gained through his delicate and varied responsibilities, but all brought together by his love for Don Bosco to which he gave testimony with admirable fidelity at every stage of his life.

I fondly remember his humorous banter, always appropriate and never trivial because it was the fruit of that typically Salesian humour that can lighten and give proper balance to complex situations that he endured just the same with the greatest of discretion.

At time I noted the inevitable strain due to his poor health, but what always won out was his strong wish to be useful and to never given in, faced with the requests that came his way and to which he gave wise and prompt response with the competence that was his characteristic.

A Salesian of Don Bosco, he was a great worker, with a profound inner dimension. One could sense this in his discreet and simple outlook and from the hint of a smile full of sincere warmth.

I recall with pleasure how Councillors, during moments of relaxation, prodded him, provoking reactions that were always pleasing, calm and sharp.

When I became aware that his life was coming to an end, I prayed for him and when it was announced that he had departed for Paradise I thanked the Lord for having given the Salesian Congregation a true son of Don Bosco, a central “pillar” of wisdom, knowledge, love for learning, someone professionally capable of giving the best of himself, always.

A significant memory of him remains alive in me and my General Councillors. With the greatest discretion and intelligent humility, he was able to preserve fraternal relationships with us all. I feel in my heart the need to offer a prayer of praise to God for his life and testimony so totally dedicated to love for the Church, the Congregation and the Salesian charism.

Mary Help of Christians, to whom I saw he had such deep devotion, will have already opened the gates of Heaven to him, accompanying him as he becomes part of the great Family of Don Bosco dwelling in the Father's house.

Sister Piera Cavaglià fma
Secretary of the FMA General Council

To remember Fr Francesco is to remember a competent, precise, faithful and coherent Salesian. At the same time I felt he was a brother, always open to respectful, warm dialogue. Although I knew he was a man of great learning and very authoritative, I was not in any way intimidated when turning to him for advice and guidance regarding my mission as Secretary General. Whenever I turned to him for advice on any legal or administrative matter, I would always find light, guidance and clarity in the process.

On various occasions I invited him to formation meetings for new provincial secretaries and even on these occasions his words were always measured, precise, prudent and wise. I felt that what he shared was the fruit of great experience and a qualified competence that was continuously updated and scrutinised, and in everything he allowed us to see his great love for Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation.

Even at the regular meetings of Secretary Generals held in Rome at the De La Salle Brothers General Curia over past years, he was often invited to give a conference on the theme of the *Nature and function of the Secretary General* and each time his authoritative word was appreciated by all.

At various meetings, Fr Maraccani drew on the wealth of his long experience as Secretary General and Procurator General of the Salesian Congregation and at the same time on his deep knowledge of Canon Law and the Proper Law (of the Congregation).

He used say – out of deeply rooted conviction – that for us Salesians no rule has meaning if it is detached from the fundamental purpose of the vocation and mission of our Congregation.

What was clear in him was the harmony between fidelity to the norm, observance of obligatory principles, and a refined sense of humanity, understanding, and authentically Salesian balance. He communicated this harmony to you almost naturally and it flowed from his keen sense of belonging to the Congregation. To meet Fr Francesco was to meet a Salesian you could fully trust, a son of Don Bosco 100%, which is why his word could always be trusted.

Sister Enrica Rossana fma
Former Undersecretary of the CIVCSVA

There are many things I could say about Fr Maraccani. But I will limit myself to a few notes. When I was in the Vatican I saw him frequently because he came at least once a week to the Dicastery for Consecrated Life to deal with procedures regarding the Salesian Congregation, paperwork that was always put together with precision and exemplary detail. In the name of our common belonging to the Salesian Family, he sought “fast-tracking” to avoid the long queues. Without attracting attention, to avoid protests, I showed him particular care given the state of his health.

Every time I had to take the train to Termini I stopped to greet him for a few minutes and I saw that this visit gave him much pleasure.

The Salesians, especially Fr Bregolin, would happily tease him about our friendship. And yes, we were friends, if by friendship we mean a bond that enriched and offered security and trust.

Many times we discussed the situation of consecrated life in the world, which he knew well. In this respect I can say that he had been one of my “teachers”, and I say this with complete conviction. Before being appointed Undersecretary of the Vatican Congregation, I had in fact worked at the University and dealt with other problems mainly bound up with education.

Dear Fr Maraccani, you were a Salesian “doc”; you left me an example of life that I carry in my heart and that helps me to start out again each day, trusting in God and Mary Help of Christians. It is You, our Mother, who has done everything and continues to do everything for Your sons and daughters.

Thank you, Fr Maraccani!



Fr Pier Fausto Frisoli sdb
Procurator General

I lived in community with Fr Maraccani for 16 years. In the last six years I was in closer contact with him up until a few minutes before his serene passing. I always had profound admiration for him for his exemplary life as a priest and the innocence of his soul. Morning Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary (that he said in its entirety with all 4 sets of mysteries) marked his days. One perceived in him his spiritual depth, his clear choice to "non anteporre nulla" in his service of God. If prayer was the axis around which his days revolved, work was his passion, his "habit" and which he never ceased until the days before he went to hospital. His days were all the same, his timetable known, his movements predictable. I don't recall him ever granting himself pause, not even on feast days; never a distraction, no matter how legitimate. Objectively speaking his workload was excessive, suffocating, and yet he tackled it all methodically, patiently, and with absolute dedication.

His spiritual depth, uncommon intelligence, his extraordinary capacity for work, his intellectual preparation and vast Salesian experience that could have been cause for boast on his part, had in no way modified the simplicity of his heart which was gentle and innocent. Whoever approached him saw this childlike goodness in him, something that human malice had never succeeded in contaminating. Cardinal Prefects and Secretaries of the various Dicasteries of the Holy See appreciated him for his exactitude and the completeness of his work as Procurator General, but they admired him even more for his upright life.

I will always carry with me the memory of this humble, grand confrere, an exemplary son of Don Bosco, hardworking and faithful, simple and rich in gifts, who put himself completely at the service of God and the Congregation, and now enjoys the vision promised to the pure of heart.

Fr Jean-Claude Ngoy
Rector of the General House community

I offer my testimony on Fr Francesco Maraccani as his last Rector from 1 August 2017 to 24 January 2020, the day of his death. I began my service at the Pisana and a month later moved to Sacro Cuore with Fr Francesco Maraccani. Our confrere Maraccani died on 24 January 2020 at 6.10 p.m. the day of our Patron Saint Francis de Sales and the day for us Salesians and members of the Salesian Family of Don Bosco for the commemoration of Mary Help of Christians. Cause or coincidence? Only God knows.

One could write and say many things about our confrere Maraccani. I shall limit myself to a few. We can emphasize his great sense of belonging to the Congregation through his generous and competent gift of self to the Salesian mission. God gave him many gifts that he put to the service of the Congregation through his tireless work: he we can highlight his valuable contribution to the many General Chapters he took part in, the many invitation letters for SDBs and members of the Salesian Family sent around the entire world for the granting of visas to enter Europe, and so many other activities. This confrere worked for the Congregation till the very end of his life. As witness to that, even in hospital he was always asking for his computer and wanted this work tool brought to him to reply to messages. A faithful servant in daily work... I thank him for everything he was and did for the good of the young and the Congregation.

Fr Francesco loved community life and had a will to live so he could continue to work for the Congregation. During his time in hospital, he always loved company so he could talk about many things. And strikingly, he would always ask you to pray three Hail Marys at the end of the visit. When helping him to eat, he always told me, "This is doing me good and I hope I can return home soon (home for him was Sacro Cuore and he did not want to go to the infirmary at the UPS) to continue working. In our friendly chats, Fr Francesco always spoke to me about his life, and at the end, about his health. He was very concerned about his health, especially his legs which caused him pain. He was a grateful man and always thanked people for their service.

He was my counsellor for many community problems. He did so so clearly for the good of the community, including after the community assembly. However, he never failed to say a word in public to clarify something. The three places he could always be found were his room, the chapel and the refectory. In his room with so many books and documents for work; in the chapel to pray and he was there every day – he wanted Holy mass in the community chapel where he always gave a reflection on the Word of God even when there had already been a homily; in the refectory to eat with an appetite and he was never silent because he had things to say on every topic – what learning! For

me he was a living library... this threefold fidelity made of Maraccani a worker, a religious and a man of fraternity and communion.

Fr Sergio Cuevas sdb
Former General Councillor

As an emeritus member of the Salesian General Council I would like to offer my modest contribution to the memory of our dear Francesco Maraccani for his long years of generous service.

I admired him, when I was on the General Council, as the one in charge of the secretariat sector and for legal advice. He was a simple man, serene, generous; open to changes suggested by the General Chapters. I admired his religious integrity; he was faithful to the guidelines for religious life, especially Salesian life, taken up after the Second Vatican Council. He was a man of strength where work was concerned, and for carrying out work proposed for the good of Salesian communities throughout the world. He always demonstrated a solid competence in the legal field and in the administration of the means of work.

In support of that, certainly, was his relationship with the Lord Jesus, Our Lady Help of Christians and Don Bosco. He always remembered his beloved Province, and especially the work at Brescia

Always generous in maintaining friendships, he was cheerful during times of relaxation in the Council. I also admired his patience and closeness to confreres who came to him for information, for guidelines of the Congregation. Another thing that made a fine impression on me was when, as an elderly man, he allowed himself to be assisted at Sacro Cuore.

He has certainly been well received in heaven and will be near his dear friend, Fr Egidio Viganò. They will share some wonderful memories of so many moments shared in the Council. In Rome I will continue to pray for him and for our work colleagues of that time. Amen.

Fr Giuseppe Nicolussi sdb
Former General Councillor

I shared two years with Fr Francesco Maraccani in the postnovitiate at Nave (not in the same course) and a number of years in the community at the General House. I had a simple, familiar relationship with him in the community, in work and also accompanying him in the circumstances of his health. I always admired him, and am very grateful to him for the help he offered me and even now I feel that he is very close. I am not able to express at this moment in a few words, with that perspective that Pope Francis suggests in "Gaudete et Exsultate", how I saw "the totality of his life", "his entire journey of growth in holiness", or what I contemplate when I try to "grasp his overall meaning as a person" (Cf. *Gaudete et Exsultate* 22). I limit myself to two brief emphases.

Fr Maraccani had the last room in one of the long corridors at the General House; given his health circumstances, the distance separating him from his Secretary General's office became a long and at times laborious journey for him, however it was always one he took praying, with rosary in hand, often interrupted with a brief visit to the Blessed sacrament in the chapel ... this was the same attitude he adopted during long hours of waiting, as he did relatively frequently in hospital waiting rooms... Fr Francesco prayed while he walked, prayed while he waited, prayed while he worked ... he was a confrere who truly lived in union with God

He liked being in Brescia (where he happily returned for the Past Pupils Day) as rector, principal and teacher of the boys, and with the lay helpers, all of whom admired his competence and his goodness. He recalled with affection and almost with nostalgia his years spent in the Verona Province. At the General House, whoever entered his office would see him behind a mountain of documents, preparing dossiers, writing up minutes, correcting drafts, etc. Always ready to welcome you, offer information, offer help. Fr Maraccani had a great sense of the Congregation and its mission; in whatever role or task (after his priestly ordination he had wanted to pursue theological studies, but they asked him to study engineering ...) he knew for whom he was working and did so with complete dedication and according to the “da mihi animas”. It is enough to think of the numerous, well-timed and well-founded contributions he presented during the General Chapters, especially with reference to the text of the Constitutions.

He gave all of himself without respite, faced with the tasks proposed and the services requested of him. He never sought anything for himself, never made a great deal of his own qualities, never held back because of health restrictions. With regard to the latter, which were with him for a long time, he accepted them with simplicity and patience (even when he wanted to teach the doctors a thing or two!). He tackled them with courage and without allowing them to control his life, he transformed them into an offering.

In the delicate tasks as Secretary General and Procurator he served always with great competence and precision, respect and discretion, especially preparing many cases for dispensation, knowing how to combine human understanding, clarity of criteria, and the search for the best possible good for every individual, the Congregation and the Church. It was one of the tasks he kept permanently in his prayer as an expression of his love for his vocation. That Salesian priestly vocation that gave meaning to his entire existence and that made him happy with his life at every moment.

Fr Giannantonio Bonato sdb

Former Provincial of Veneto West (IVO) Province, Verona

Fr Maraccani came to the West Veneto Province (IVO) from Brescia where he had been Rector, but not only, since he was also principal and, for a while, parish priest; it was a curriculum vitae that gave him the reputation as a tireless worker; a reputation confirmed by the hasty gathering of information from confreres in Brescia contacted immediately the appointment became known. The joke that ran around the houses was this: “if Fr Martinelli (the previous provincial) made us work like dogs, now we have to work like ‘maraccani’”[the play is on the word ‘cani’=dogs] which sounded like it was something more than the original, and caused some apprehension and compromised a cordial welcome. And the prophecy was fulfilled from the first weeks of his service, because of the dynamic acceleration impressed on the province and the individual houses.

To this was added the impact of a personality with a rather closed character, who did not easily smile, was not inclined to joke, even unable to grasp the meaning of certain humorous allusions, not for want of intuition but by natural inclination to seriousness, something he gave to all his relationships and everything else. So at first he did not make a good impression on most of the confreres, arousing some mistrust here and there and giving substance, for some, to the belief that things might not go well.

What loosened the knot was the discovery of his “Achille’s heel”, a certain tendency to hypochondria, such that to attract his attention, loosen the tongue or get him involved in a fraternal moment, one needed to question him about his state of health, allowing him to pour out a whole string of woes afflicting him, at least in his opinion. Woes, let us understand, some of which were real because so

evident, others that might have been so, but magnified and multiplied by his incurable self-pity. And it was this weakness that brought him back among us “poor mortals” recognising him as strong and superior in many aspects, but fundamentally as fragile as the rest of us. This was the ground on which it was possible to meet to build together a project in favour of the vitality and growth of the province. The figure of Fr Maraccani began to become very “likeable”.

But also much more appreciated as the gifts that he came to offer became more evident:

an uncommon intelligence, such that he could immediately grasp the nature of a problem, breaking it down into its parts (an engineer’s professional deformation?) to get to the nub of the issue and focus attention on it (the style with which he led the meetings of the council was proverbial: getting to the point of issues without digressing);

a pronounced tendency to not so much theorise (research, investigation, idealisations, discussions, doctrinal summaries) but to bring about concrete things, revealing a mentality more of the impresario than the teacher; and this forced communities to overcome the by now tired post-conciliar stage of debate over major issues, to applying themselves to bringing about the innovations proposed both by the Church and the Congregation; and there was real need for a push in this direction;

a capacity for work that, while it amazed some and intimidated others, stimulated the industriousness so characteristic of our spirit. And work for him was not just what belonged to his function as a superior; work was and continued to be of a professional kind: “I will be absent for a few days because I have to go to Rome to patent a few items I have created in the area of surgical engineering”; where he found time for this was and remains a mystery, raising questions about how much time he gave to sleep. The problem was that he expected the same kind of energy from his collaborators, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, so much so that one feared becoming the object of his special attention regarding one or other task, because one already knew how it would end up;

a healthy indifference to past problems and a wise projection into the future: one thinks of the decade immediately prior to his service, that sad period of vocational crisis with its consequent departures that brought sadness and dismay to communities, or to those avant-garde experiences not understood by many and, in some cases, badly realised, or the uncertainty regarding theologies, disciplines, ascetics and community structures perceived as obsolete, or the tough abandonment of a triumphalistic mentality and the acceptance of a painful situation of poverty and uncertainty. Here and there regrets, discouragement, rejection, ferment, all inviting us to look backwards, deserting the present and defying the future. Fr Maraccani conceded nothing to this slippery drift by committing the province to what was possible in the here and now, with the healthy realism of those who calculate the forces available and the opportunities available, but also of those who carry within themselves the conviction that it is precisely the present that generates a different future if, lived in faith and charity, it opens the way to the action of Providence that never abandons those who know how to recognise and welcome it;

A fully exemplary practice of religious life; it is enough just to think of poverty: according to the testimony of the provincial economist of the time, when he needed some item of clothing he asked if there might be something available in what was left over of the personal effects of deceased confreres, and with complete ease he would use that if it fitted him. But it was also his fidelity to community prayer (despite nights spent on the road or in urgent work) and his rather rigid kind of reservedness that made one think he obeyed the laws of duty rather than of pleasure but that perhaps was a kind of ascetics chosen by someone who knew himself well and pursued the essential;

a serene humility in his manner of being and doing that recalled the profile more of a worker than of a professional and that was evident when Fr Fedrigotti’s humour (he would be his successor)

prodded him mercilessly by highlighting some of his limitations or ridiculing some of his stances, obviously arousing the hilarity of those present (which, to tell the truth, happened a little too often); Fr Maraccani shrugged his shoulders, specified or corrected what he thought was distorted and then went on undaunted as if nothing had happened; which is to say that, even though he was gifted with abilities and skills that were very much enviable, he did not consider himself a superman nor did he avail himself of the respect due to his authority;

order buried in disorder: whoever entered his office was dazed by the sea of dossiers, paper, bundles of papers, notes, thrown together on the table apparently haphazardly; and yet if you asked for something precise, there on the spot he would put his hand into the pile and select what was asked for; this had us convinced that the chaos of that disorder was contrasted by an inner order as if mentally the real was catalogued according to very clear patterns, the result not only or not so much of a natural predisposition, but more the case of a faithfully cultivated spiritual discipline; which sounded like an invitation to people, like most of us, dazed by the external chaos of the present moment, with no minor repercussions on the internal clarity of both the psyche and the spirit.

So it was that when (prematurely, in the fifth year of his mandate) he left the province to take up the role of Secretary General, the regret was not so much displayed as deeply felt. Fr Maraccani, though someone who had difficulty in expressing the more immediate warmth and vivacity typical of people from Veneto, had earned not only the respect but the sincere affection of the confreres. This is sure proof of a ministry that bore good fruit.

His frequent return to Veneto for visits to the doctor, for surgery and post-operative care, speaks of his attachment to our area but also of his desire to strengthen the bonds with some of the confreres and people close to our Salesian work. His appearance in one or other house in the province was always welcomed with much pleasure and made it possible to consider him, over the many years, as “one of us”.

Mrs Elena Mor
Niece of Fr Maraccani

Dear Uncle Don Franco,
your prayer accompanied our life on a daily basis, during all our important moments, at every final greeting, and is part of all our memories.

We grew up with you, you blessed us at our baptisms, you gave us our First Communion, were at our Confirmation, you married us, baptised our children and saw them grow up. We thought we would have you forever.

Your thoughts in the Lord that you loved to send us for every occasion, made us stronger throughout these years. Today we have to farewell you from this life and allow another of our angels to go to Paradise. You are in eternal light, together with the ones who are dearest to you: with our mother, your sister, your parents, our grandparents, with all your family who you loved so much here. Embrace them all for us.

Accompany us always with your prayer; we trust in you. We will remember you in the Lord who welcomes you today. He has called you to himself so that you can rest in his home, together with your dear ones, and near Don Bosco.

We thank you God our Father for having given us the gift of Uncle Don Franco, of his affection and his faith.

Embrace him for us in your Paradise. Thank you Lord for having given us the gift of the Salesian Family.

Fr Francesco Motto sdb

In Fr Francesco Maraccani, with whom I spent thirty years in the same General House in Rome, I recognise a Salesian priest who stood out for his love for the Church, for Don Bosco, for the Congregation: a person gifted with a brilliant intelligence, an exceptional memory, an incredible capacity for work. As such, and despite poor health since he was a teenager, he was able to carry out successfully the many roles of responsibility entrusted to him for more than forty years, almost until his death. To the Salesian Congregation, and in particular to its governance after Vatican II, he brought a very considerable contribution of thought and action, for which he was unanimously recognised in life and which history will confirm. All of this places in the background the human limitations of this “first in the class” whom he always was and that he himself recognised with a smile: an uncommon certainty regarding his own opinion, a tendency to work a lot and well but “on his own”, a degree of difficulty in understanding those who carried out other roles.

Fr Ferdinando Colombo sdb

I got to know the young Francesco Maraccani when we entered the novitiate together at Montodine (CR) in 1954. A simple lad, always smiling, but with a prodigious memory, capable of repeating a page from the first word till the last, and this together with an intellectual capacity and a taste for precision which was fully in the years of study for the *Liceo classico* at Nave (BS).

We were also able to glimpse the richness of his spiritual life from the attitudes he had and the seriousness with which he lived his sacramental and prayer life. We were all convinced that his simple smile masked a union with God that was beyond the normal and we were all convinced that he was able to enjoy visions directly from the Lord and from Mary whom he honoured with a simple but very affectionate devotion.

Instead his frailty was even then evident in his poor health and in some difficulties with walking. In particular, when, in his spirit, there was a conflict between his solid choices of union with God and the inevitable physical impulses of adolescence, or fantasies linked to contingent situations, he manifested nervous disorders ("tics") that agitated him and that he did not hide, but offered to the Lord as an opportunity for humiliation, always smiling even when we, at times, made fun of him.

During his final high school years his attendance at classes was very often interrupted by lengthy absences needed to regain his health, but this never diminished the intensity of his spiritual life, his readiness to help anyone who needed "tutoring", nor his scholastic results, surpassing all of us and, at times, even the teachers. He was requested not to ask for explanations in class, but to go to the teacher privately, because every time he raised his hand the teacher was sure he had said something that was not quite correct.

In 1958 at the high school leaving examination, as an external candidate in a climate that was certainly not favourable to clerics in cassock, he obtained full marks in all subjects. The examiner who examined him in Greek, when marking his paper, felt that he might have brought in a book with him

and copied material, because as he translated the text, he made a note referring to pages of the Gandiglio-Pighi grammar. But when it came to the oral examination, the examiner was able to see his prodigious memory, and the depth of his knowledge, and described him as the best he had ever had.

Over the years that followed I never had the good fortune to share life in community with him, but word came back to me that simply confirmed the seriousness of his Christian and religious life and the competence and seriousness with which he carried out the roles entrusted to him.

One final episode: I met him in the St Augustine community in Milan in tears after one of his final exams at the Polytechnic. When I asked him why he was crying, he told me he had not been given honours, like in all the other exams. It was not his pride that was wounded but his displeasure at not having given of his best in service of the Congregation.

When I met him, by now old and really rundown in health after countless surgeries, he always kept his good smile and that light of faith in his eyes which strengthened me in believing that his meeting with the Lord and with Mary Help of Christians was enriched with gifts which he never confided to anyone.

Fr Gianluigi Pussino sdb

For various reasons, I had dealings with Fr Francesco Maraccani over a period of more than thirty years. I always found him endearing as a confrere for his simplicity, despite the important roles he had been called to exercise on occasions, and notwithstanding his learning and memory. He was always warm and fraternal amidst his many tasks. He was a tireless worker. In particular I found a confrere who was passionate about life and the history of the Congregation, in which he saw Don Bosco alive and current. He offered a wise interpretation of daily life based on faith, even when my reason for coming to him was an event filled with human suffering. Fr Francesco was sustained by an indomitable love for life, and was capable of that healthy sense of humour that led him to smile even at illness and his own human limitations.

Fr Gianmario Breda sdb

Fr Maraccani always had a very special relationship with Verona, because it was here that he always felt accepted with sincere Salesian friendship. He left a fine memory of himself during the time he was provincial. He knew he was accepted by us.

In recent years among us he had made particular reference to his many physical ills. And he had an infinite number of them! At times we used to laugh about it, but with more honesty, many of us saw things more clearly and sincerely: he really was weighed down by so many diseases, but we never saw him complaining about them. There was no disease he didn't have! With his extraordinary intelligence he knew all about them, followed their progress almost as if he were a doctor and wanted prior explanation as to the kind of surgical intervention he was to undergo and what the consequences might be.

I remember Professor Enzo Trinchi, who operated the first time on his hip, telling me when he came out of the operating theatre: "One operation like that is enough for one year! We found that he had no acetabulum [socket where the hip bone rests] and with the end of the femur which we detached,

we built a socket there and then. Don't send me any more patients like this!" this was only the beginning, because later there was another acetabulum. Both hips were done.

One evening when I went to see him in intensive care while the doctor on duty with the nurse was visiting the patients, Francesco asked that he be given a particular medicine. The nurse immediately intervened saying that it is the doctor who orders the medicines here. After some discussion on the operation he had recently undergone, the doctor told the nurse to give the patient the medicine he had requested. Although we were in intensive care, Maraccani was laughing! He knew everything! For every surgery I had to endure the long discussions he wanted with the doctors who were to operate on him. He wanted to know everything beforehand!

Despite his serious work commitments, at Christmas and Easter he always anticipated my greetings by adding thanks for the attentions that we thought would be obvious for a confrere in need of care.

Fr Claudio Rossini sdb

News of Fr Francesco Maraccani's death spread almost in conjunction with the beginning of the general interest in an epidemic then only in China but which then spread worldwide, one we all have come to terms with, and still today it has not been eliminated.

Only slowly have memories relating to him and his characteristic stance come back to me. First of all, the early memories that had faded and were lost in the mists bring me back to our time at the studentate in Nave (1973-76). To us young Salesians who attended high school at home and then commuted to the seminary in Brescia, came echoes of the rector who was also a teacher of technical subjects such as electronics and related subjects. But nothing more.

Later, from 1979, he became the superior of the Verona province. That was how I met him when I was doing Practical Training in Trent, and then theology in Turin and finally when he sent me to the UPS to start studying pedagogy for school, since later he would assign me to work with Fr Luciano Borello's Pedagogical Centre.

A memory I have of Fr Francesco is the attention he gave to us confreres in formation at the Crocetta. In our three years of theology, other than the occasions tied up with the Curatorium meetings, he had started the tradition of a visit close to Christmas: he left the provincial house with a vehicle filled with *pandori* [*pandoro* is a traditional Veronese sweet] which were distributed in equal portion to the communities (and a separate lot for the groups of clerics from the province) at Nave, Turin and Pinerolo. The trusty driver, Mr Gianni, provided stocks of classic Veronese wines for toasts at table. It happened that the Turin stage would coincide with supper, and that meant that later there was time to chat and bring us up to date with what was happening in the province and for us to update him on our commitments. I recall that this aroused the envy of our other companions who did not see similar treatment by their provincials.

Another characteristic I regularly noted in Fr Francesco every time I went to the Pisana, was his ability to bring you immediately into his own world and all the concerns he was caught up with at the time: after the usual pleasantries and a list of his illnesses, he would capture your attention and transport you to the problem he was wrangling with. It might be the computer or software program that wasn't doing what he wanted it to do, or the legal case for which information from provincials or provincial secretaries had not arrived in time, or corrections of drafts of a document or of the small Salesian liturgical calendar (the last time I recall meeting him). Then you'd hear him complain about the lack of care taken by the particular printer (compositor) at the time. Even after a long time without

meeting him, a moment was enough to enter his world of commitments, deadlines, responsibilities at the service of the Congregation. And this until the end of his days.

Thank you Fr Francesco for your uninterrupted service of the Congregation, one of commitment and sacrifice.

Fr Paolo Baldisserotto sdb

For me Fr Maraccani was one of the Provincials that I felt most to be a father, support and guide, like someone who respected you but also pointed out the road ahead the means for pursuing it. And not so much with words, but especially through his example of prayer. Here was a man of God: this is what I understood from the beginning. He was both human and nor did he hide his illnesses, the infirmities that he knew better than the doctors did.

I was a young student of theology and Italian literature then. I was not yet a priest. During the summer, like all my peers, we were leaders at the vocational school camps. Fr Francesco was there too spending a day with us. I had much confidence in him, so much so that I would use the second person “tu” form to address him. At some point on the edge of the field, while the boys were playing, a very personal question arose. Not only did he not avoid it, but he replied by trusting me with many things. It is something of him that I hold onto like a precious pearl, because it contains a piece of his soul. This interview left a profound impact on me especially years later, when I too had some responsibility in the community.

When I once asked him what weighed most heavily on him in carrying out the provincial’s role, he answered without hesitation: “Loneliness. You know certain things about the confreres but you cannot share them, you and no one else have to make certain decisions, and often you do not feel the support of your superiors. Other times you do not have the full backing of the provincial council, but you do have the criticisms of the confreres, and you have a sense of the abandonment that Jesus felt.”

Fr Luigi Fedrizzi sdb

I recall Fr Francesco Maraccani, when he was provincial in Verona, for his human trait of always being kind and respectful to anyone who had a relationship with him. He was fluent and friendly in conversation, such as when talking of various topics in the various circumstances in which he found himself as a provincial (meetings with confreres, "goodnights", exhortations, addresses, contributions to meetings, ...). He spoke assuredly and competently, along with wisdom and balance: a clear manifestation of the gift of wisdom with which he was endowed, given also his high standing as a human being and a religious.

