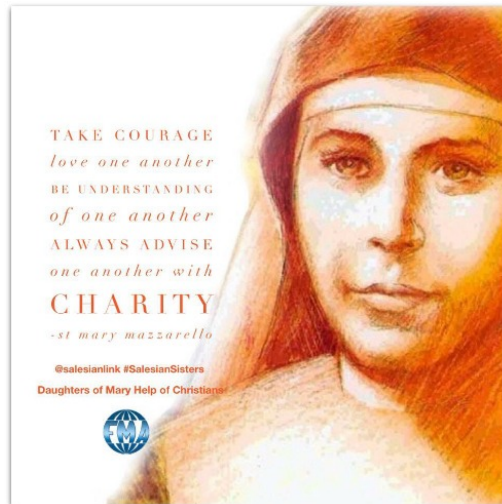




# St Mary Mazzarello - Vocation

## Salesian Footprints



### Discerning the way ahead in the events of everyday life

Born in 1837, Mary Mazzarello grew up in a hard-working, God-fearing peasant family in northern Italy. She was a normal teenager of her times—intelligent, enterprising, hard-working, fun-loving and always in the height of local fashion.

As she grew into young adulthood, she began to sense that God was calling her to belong totally to Himself and she responded by consecrating herself completely to Him. She did not understand immediately what this meant or how it would unfold. It was a response of unconditional love.

Mary was often impulsive but in the matter of discovering a direction for her life she sought advice from those who knew her well and whose judgement she trusted. Her father was a great source of homespun wisdom and the leader of the apostolic group she had joined was a woman of spiritual insight and intelligence. She confided, above all, in Fr. Pestarino who had guided her for several years and who knew her inside out. Slowly she came to distinguish the way ahead in the events of everyday life.

She weighed up her inclinations and physical strength, took stock of situations around her and considered what she might do to share Christ's passion for the world.

### A crisis brings a turning-point

An event that had a particular bearing on her life and future mission came in the form of illness. When assisting some sick members of her family during the epidemic of typhoid fever that struck her village in 1860, Mary contracted the disease. After several months hovering between life and death she recovered but no longer had the strength to work in the fields and vineyards as she had formerly done.

## A wondering but joyful 'Yes'

What was she to do? At twenty-three she had her life before her but lacked skills beyond those acquired in helping her father on the farm. Together with her closest friend, Petronilla, she set about learning dressmaking from the village tailor so as not to be a burden to her family and with the declared aim of setting up sewing classes for the village girls. Once their training was finished, the pair did indeed begin their work for the good of the girls, teaching them a life skill and encouraging them to live their Christian life joyfully.

Hers was not initially a choice for religious life, but one of a life consecrated to God by vow while living and working in her village environment. Associations of young women sharing the same desires and aims as Mary were appearing in several parts of northern Italy at this time and Mary became part of one of them, receiving support from others to live the life she had chosen.

But God had further plans for her. She met Don Bosco and they perceived in each other a shared passion for the good of the young. Here was a woman who experienced his apostolic ideals for the young and who was the perfect choice to become the founding member his new religious congregation of the Salesian Sisters. Mary did not hesitate but once again said her wondering but joyful 'Yes' to God—wherever that would lead her.



*The view from Mary's window at Valponasca, from where she would look at the church in the distance and spiritually join the congregation when she couldn't be at Mass with them.*