 Reading time: 4 min.

A secret to be found
It is well known that Don Bosco's reputation for getting things done had spread throughout Italy. Since he succeeded in so many enterprises, many people asked him for advice on how to do the same.
How to find the funds to build a church? Mrs Marianna Moschetti of Castagneto di Pisa (today Castagneto Carducci-Livorno) expressly asked him in 1877. Don Bosco's answer on 11 April, in its brevity and simplicity, is admirable.

Starting point: get to know the situation
With the practical wisdom that came to him from his family upbringing and from his experience as founder-builder-realiser of so many projects, Don Bosco took up his pen and wrote, intelligently, that "there is a need for us to talk to each other to examine what projects can be done and what probability there is of being able to carry them out." Without healthy realism the best projects remain a dream. The saint, however, does not want to discourage his correspondent right away, so he immediately adds "[carry out] what seems good to me in the Lord."

In nomine Domini
He begins well, one might say, with this "in the Lord". In fact, the first, and therefore the most important advice he gives to the lady, is to "pray and invite others to pray and go to communion often, as a most effective way of deserving his graces. The church is the house of the Lord, who will not fail to bless a church project if it is advanced by those who trust in him, pray to him, live a Christian life and make use of the indispensable means. A life of grace certainly deserves the Lord's graces (Don Bosco is convinced of this), even if everything is grace: "If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do the builders labour in it."

Collaboration with everyone
The church is everyone's home; certainly the parish priest is primarily responsible, but not the only one. Therefore the laity must have a sense of shared responsibility, including the most sensitive, the most available, perhaps the most capable among them (those who today could be part of the pastoral council of each parish). Here then is Don Bosco's second piece of advice: "Invite the parish priest to put himself at the head of two committees with as many members as possible. One of men, the other of women. Let each member of this committee sign up for a donation divided into three instalments, one for each year."

Note: two committees, one male and one female. Of course, at the time the men's and women's associations in a parish were normally separate; but why not also see it as fair and loyal "competition" in doing good, in managing a project with their own strength, each group "in its own way", with its own strategies? Don Bosco knew how much he himself was financially indebted to the female world, to the marquises, countesses, aristocratic women in general: they were usually more religious than their husbands, more generous in works of charity, more willing "to help the needs of the Church". It was wise to rely on them.

Widening the circle

In fact Don Bosco immediately added: "At the same time each one should seek donors who will give money, work or materials. For example, invite those who will have an altar made, the pulpit, the candlesticks, a bell, the window frames, the main door, smaller doors, glass etc. But only one thing each." Beautiful. Everyone had to commit to something that they could rightly consider their own personal gift to the church under construction.

Don Bosco had not studied psychology, but he knew – as all parish priests, and not just them, know – that by tickling people's legitimate pride one can also achieve a great deal in terms of generosity, solidarity, altruism. Moreover, throughout his life he had needed others: to study as a child, to go to the Chieri school as a young man, to enter the seminary as a cleric, to begin his work as a priest, to develop it as a founder.

A secret

Don Bosco then acts a bit mysteriously with his correspondent: "If I could speak to the parish priest I could suggest another means in confidence; but I hesitate to entrust it to paper." What was that all about? Hard to say. One could think of the promise of special indulgences for such benefactors, but it would have been necessary to go to Rome and Don Bosco knew how much difficulty this could cause with the bishop and other parish priests also involved in similar building projects. More likely it was a confidential invitation to seek the support of political authorities so that they might support the cause. The suggestion, however, would be better made *viva voce*, so as not to compromise himself before either civil or religious authorities, at a time of fierce opposition between them, with the historical Left in power, more anticlerical than the previous Right.

What more could he say? One thing that was important to both: prayer. And indeed this is how he bids farewell to his correspondent: "I will pray that everything goes well. My only support has always been to have recourse to Jesus in the Blessed

Sacrament, and to Mary Help of Christians. God bless you and pray for me who will always be with you in J.C.”.