

□ Reading time: 6 min.

“How exciting... a year ago Fr Angel was with us!”

This is how we began our Community celebration on Sunday 8 May 2022. Just one year ago, our Rector Major was with us in Turin, at *Michele Rua* to celebrate 100 years of the Work. And with him was also the Mayor of the City!

Yes... 100 years!

It was the summer of 1922 when a large group of young people, the Fathers Union and the Committee of Patronesses, led by Fr Lunati, inaugurated the *Michele Rua Oratory*, with its halls, church, courtyard, nursery school run by the FMA and sewing school. The building was made possible thanks to the help of many volunteers and also the support of many benefactors, first among many, Pope Benedict XV with his generous donation of 10,000 lira. Since then, the Work has never stopped and expanded immediately afterwards with the Theatre and in 1949 with the Industrial Training School, so as to prepare young people for work.

In 1958 the Community became a Parish, a just recognition of the religious and social work that the Salesians have been carrying out in Borgo Monterosa for forty years; in the following years the Vocational School became a Middle School.

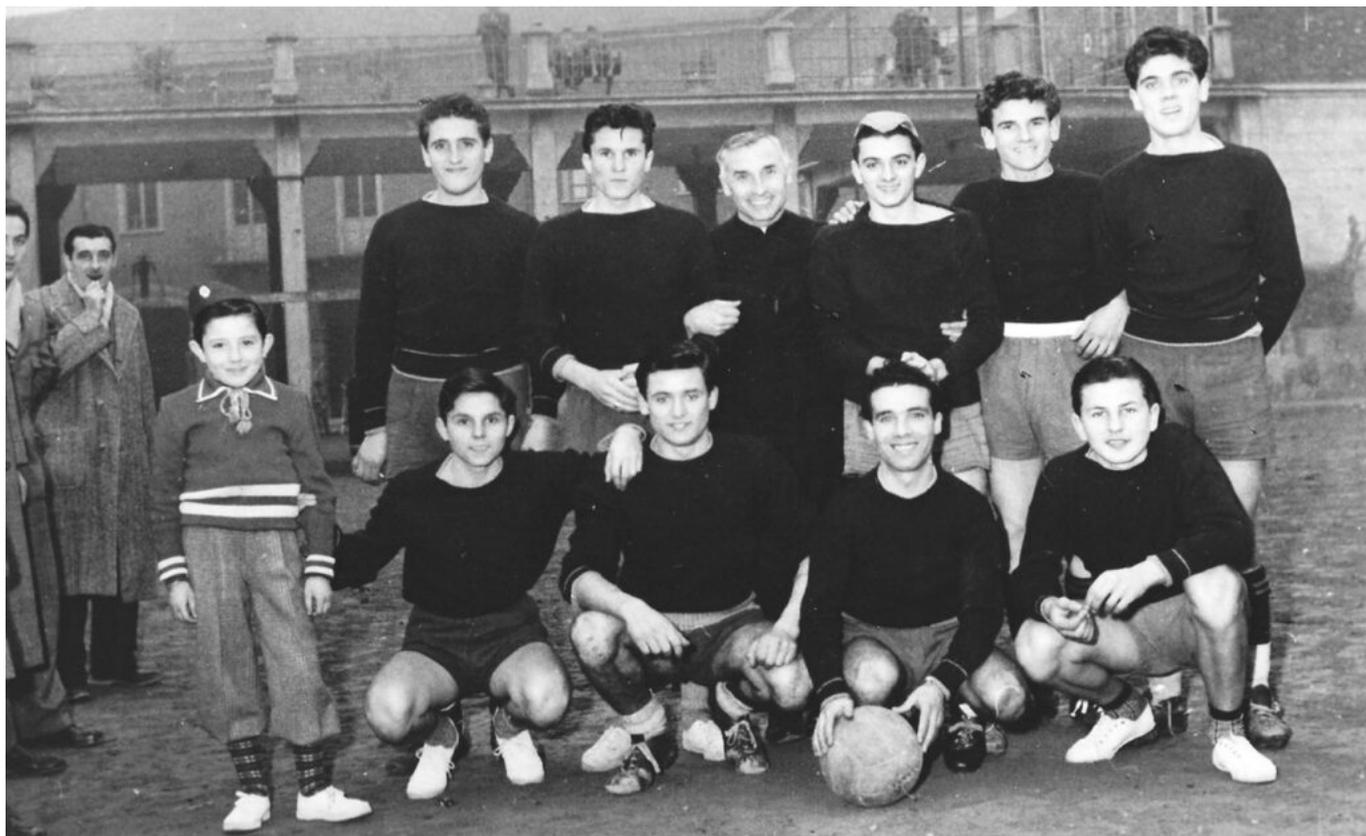


Monterosa Salesian Home, 1960s. Outside the playroom

Thanks to various contributions, and to the willingness and sacrifice of young people and volunteers, in the 1970s the Nursery School arrived, and in 1991 the Gymnasium and the new football pitches. In 2008, with the valuable presence of the FMA, the Primary School was added and the group of the Friends of the Crib and the Mamma Margaret Workshop expanded. So many avenues opened up and ensured that the children and young people of the neighbourhood found a safe and welcoming place, even during the most difficult times starting with the war, fascism... until the lockdown due to pandemic in 2020. And even during the lockdown, our Salesians and FMA made their presence felt with online meetings, rooftop singing and games organised on digital platforms.

Re-reading the history of our Oratory sends a shiver down our spine... a shed, a courtyard then a larger shed made available by a benefactor in a working-class area, where children would gather in the streets looking for someone to look after them and love them. It was there that the Salesians decided to remain to be there

in that situation so close to that of Don Bosco. And then again: Mamma Margaret's Recreation Centre, the number of children increasing and the roof that is no longer enough, the availability of so many fathers and mothers who offer their skills and abilities.



Monterosa Salesian Home. Bandina football team, 1952

It all started in 1922 and so in 2022 we celebrated our first 100 years. It has been a valuable year in so many ways. Looking back at history and seeing how many similarities there are between the past and our daily lives has given us a wonderful boost of enthusiasm. Today, as then, the children are looking for those who can love them, who with their daily presence can testify to them how important they are, how valuable they are. And so at *Michele Rua* we have the Infant, Primary and Secondary Schools; we have the Theatre and the Multifunctional Building; we have the Day Care Centre in collaboration with the Social Services of the City of Turin; we have the Catechism and the Formative Groups. So much for young people and teenagers, but also so much with and for families: Family Group, Baby Rua, Young Marrieds, Evergreen Group, Mamma Margherita Workshop and Friends of Michele Rua.

It all works because those who pass through it experience it as a Home, as their Community. And this is why, on the occasion of the Centenary, the Educative and Pastoral Community has decided to embark on a synodal journey, interpreting their area and analysing its needs to try together to give answers and offer proposals to the many young people who today cross the threshold of our courtyards.

A journey, that of the Centenary, which, with feet firmly planted in the present and the history of the past clear in mind, has challenged us regarding the future. We identified the key words of our being in this neighbourhood and decided to let ourselves be guided by: family, welcome, work, formation, evangelisation and youth. Around these cornerstones, we laid the foundations to restart and get everyone back on track for the good of the young people who pass through the Oratory's door. In the "new" *Michele Rua* there is now a Maker Lab for tailoring, carpentry, robotics and videomaking, where children and young people can have a workshop experience, so they can learn by doing. In the workshops set up on the first floor, experienced volunteers offer their time to help the children express themselves, trying to work together on a piece of wood, with the woodburner or hacksaw, or on a piece of fabric with a needle and thread. But that's not all: there are also outdoor classrooms and an educational vegetable garden offering green beans and tomatoes to the kids who take turns tending their seedlings. In a multi-ethnic and diverse neighbourhood like ours, the priority has always been the poorest families, and so, with our parish, in addition to the usual charity services to pay gas bills or offer a shopping bag, two important new projects were born: *Amico Click*, to offer useful tools to those who find it difficult to enter the digital world such as creating an email or booking a doctor online, and *Amico Speak*, so that all new arrivals can know and use the Italian language well.

And, with the momentum of the Centenary, we have not stopped at reinventing today; we are on the move to the near future. We are rethinking how to restructure the premises of the former Bocciofila, which has been disused for some time, to be an increasingly active presence in the area, responding to today's needs. We would like to take up the 1949 idea of the "Industrial Start-up" and study a modern Work Hub for young people who are unable to follow structured and continuous paths; we would like to be there for all the children who are unable to "fit in" at school, particularly because of the effects left on them by the lockdown periods, and thus create a professional after-school centre offering study methods, accompaniment for families, and individualised services. And, as Don Bosco wanted, we are determined to relaunch all the activities related to our theatre: music, dance,

acting. We will start by staging a new Musical that will enthuse the children and bring out their talents.

Today in our courtyards there are more than 100 children playing every day, we have more than 500 children enrolled in sports activities and 200 in oratorian training activities. We have the Catechism children's groups and at least 50 children a week who come for after-school activities. We have more than 520 children enrolled in our schools and 20 who attend our Day Care Centre every day. When we get together to eat for the Community Feast, we prepare more than 500 dishes of polenta and stew... and then many enrolled in the Children's Summer programme, summer camps at the seaside and in the mountains.

All this is made possible thanks to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who are tirelessly there, each serving with their own distinct contribution and availability. Thanks to countless youth leaders, volunteers who inhabit our courtyards as if they were their own homes and are never absent to perform a huge variety of services. Thanks to the employees who believe in their vocation and do not cross the threshold just to do a job.



Monterosa Salesian Home. Activities with the boys, 2023

Thanks to the local institutions who advise, suggest and network. Thanks to the many benefactors who do not fail to support the many expenses. Thanks to the families who continue to believe in the educational alliance that can be created between adults for the good of the children. Thanks to those who have left us but who continue to watch over us and guard our activities.

Above all, thanks to Mary Help of Christians, St Dominic Savio, Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello who guide us, bless us and fill us with grace.

On the occasion of the centenary, we asked those who had passed through here to tell us a piece of their lives at Michele Rua, and 100 beautiful stories came in, full of emotion and passion. Well, in all of them there is the memory of someone, priest, nun, animator, catechist... who offered a piece of their life for others in our Work.

This is why *Michele Rua* is like this, a living presence in the *Barriera di Milano* neighbourhood.

Returning to the first sentence of our story, on Sunday we celebrated the Community's feast on the 101st anniversary of the foundation of the Work, and as our Provincial said, we have a lot to celebrate again... and like the Dalmatian in Walt Disney's story, charged up and enthusiastic, we set off for the CHARGE of 101!

*A volunteer.*