

II. SCHOOL AND BOARDING HOUSE AT MORNESE NIZZA MONFERRATO - FMA (1873-1878)

The Programme—also called Regulations—of the school in Mornese was printed by Don Bosco at the Oratory Press like all the other Regulations for Salesian houses. The text copies many of the items in use at colleges he founded⁵⁵.

There are details in it about the educational purpose of the boarding section and terms of admission, as well as the principal tasks of the pupils. At a didactic level the programme is divided into three areas: literary teaching, domestic chores, religious teaching. The curriculum, which follows the same lines as government schools, includes the four elementary classes and envisages optional classes of drawing, French and pianoforte, other than public speaking, writing letters and good manners.

The woman which it aims to form should not abandon the traditional housewife role, but added to this formation in a harmonious way are moral and religious dimensions and the essential cultural ones so a girl could be part of the family and society.

The Regulations of the educative community of the boarding section at Nizza Monferrato comprises 12 articles and the daily timetable for a girl admitted into the boarding section. The text offers a summary of the institution's identity, how teaching and formation were set up, the composition and style of community life totally at the service of the boarders. The Regulations were sent in November-December to the inspector for schools to gain approval for the school. In fact this was one of the documents that was essential for explaining how things worked.

⁵⁵ Cf. for example, the *Regulations* for the boarding college at Valsalice opened in 1872 (cf. MB X, 411-414) and the college at Varazze (cf. MB X, 223-225).

178. Programme. House of Mary Help of Christians for girls' education in Mornese

AGFMA 051 01-4-01. Printed copy in *Programma. Casa di Maria Ausiliatrice per l'educazione femminile in Mornese*. Torino, Tipografia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1873.

Mornese, 1873

A house of education for girls has been opened in Mornese, a pleasant and very healthy town in the diocese of Acqui. The aim is to offer moral and academic teaching which leaves nothing to be desired for a girl from an upright Christian family⁵⁶.

Literary teaching

The curriculum covers the four elementary classes, a complete course in Italian, calligraphy, arithmetic, the metric system, accounting, and keeping books for domestic use. Public speaking, special practice in letter-writing are also part of the curriculum. There are also lessons in drawing, French and pianoforte; but the pupils' parents must make the request.

Domestic chores

Domestic chores consist in making their own clothes according to the circumstances of the pupils, knitting, making socks, shirts, curtains, mending, ironing, and doing all the ordinary chores of an upright family.

To prepare the girls for home chores those older than twelve will take their turn at serving in the refectory, helping in the kitchen and working in the garden, inasmuch as this fits in with their other duties. Management of these chores is up to and on behalf of the Institute.

⁵⁶ They were aiming at forming women of the ordinary classes and therefore had to avoid anything that smacked of affectation and luxury. In fact the first text of the Constitutions said: "They can also admit to the house girls of middle class status but they will never teach them the learning and arts that are typical of noble and aristocratic education. All their efforts will be to form them in piety and everything that would make them good Christians and good mothers of families" (*Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice [1872-1885]*. Critical texts by Cecilia Romero F.M.A. Roma, LAS 1983, p. 43, art. 3°).

Religious teaching

Given that religion and morals are a fundamental part of good education, the textbooks for religious teaching will be the Catechism and Bible History with reflection and application. There will also be lessons in good manners.

Terms of admission

1. On entry each pupil should have her Baptism certificate, vaccination or smallpox certificate, and have completed at least her sixth year. .

2. The monthly boarding fee is 20 francs to be paid quarterly in advance.

3. The house is open throughout the year. If they so desire parents may grant the pupils some days of holidays from 15 September to 15 October but there will be no reduction in the quarterly payment for that time. Outside this time and other than for reasons of illness pupils are not allowed to go out with their parents.

Parents, or someone in their stead, may visit their daughters once a week.

These visits may be more often in case of illness.

4. Every care will be taken to see that foodstuffs are healthy and suitable for the age and condition of the pupils.

In the morning they will have bread, coffee and milk, or fruit.

For lunch, bread if they wish, soup, a main course with wine.

Bread for afternoon snack. At supper, bread for those who want it, soup, main course or fruit with wine⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ There is a clear difference between the menu established for the pupils and the poverty of the Sisters' fare. There are many testimonies from the FMA that recall the scarcity of food and the hunger at Mornese (cf. the testimony of Sister Emilia Mosca in the first *Cronistoria* of the Institute published in Ferdinando MACCONO, *Santa Maria D. Mazzarello confondatrice e prima superiora generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, I. Torino, Scuola Tip. privata 1960, pp. 234-235). We need to note just the same that the austerity of the religious community was not experienced by the girls who were given what was necessary, also by asking help from families.

Whoever wishes better fare can have it with an appropriate understanding with the superior.

5. Every quarter the parents will receive information regarding the health, behaviour and benefit gained by the pupils in their respective classes.

At the end of each year there will be a final exam with distribution of prizes and honourable mentions.

Italian will be spoken in the boarding house.

6. Vocal music, medical and surgical care, laundry, ironing, ink, lighting and heating for winter will be covered by the Institute, but 20 francs will be paid for this at the beginning of the year. Nothing of this will be given back even if the girl stays at the Institute for only part of the year.

Other accessory expenses such as books, paper, medicines, clothing, trips and similar are to be borne by the parents.

Half payment is requested if the month has already begun; other than this half the rest requires full payment. There is no reduction for anyone who remains outside the Institute for fewer than fifteen days.

7. Pupils must not keep money with them for small pleasures, but if they receive it from their parents they must deposit it with the Sister in charge who will distribute it regularly.

Clothing

The Institute provides an iron bedstead and a pallet. The pupils must provide a mattress, pillow, blankets for winter and summer, 4 sheets - 6 shirts - 6 pairs of socks - 4 petticoats two of which are white - 1 woollen skirt - 4 slips - 4 white handkerchiefs and four coloured ones - 6 towels - 6 small towels - 4 changes of underwear - 3 nightshirts - 4 white aprons and 3 of various colours - 2 combs - 6 collars and ties for winter - 3 pairs of shoes - 4 vests of any kind and a uniform one.

There will be one uniform [*sic*] for summer and winter provided by the Institute but paid for by parents. On request it will also provide other

wardrobe items. Each item of clothing must be marked with the number provided at admission⁵⁸.

Directions

The easiest way to get to this town is Novi Ligure, Castelletto d'Orba, Montaldeo, Mornese or the stations at Serravalle Scrivia, Gavi, Parodi, Mornese. Soon there will be an Omnibus which will regularly bring passengers and their luggage from Serravalle to Mornese.

Requests can be made to Fr Domenico Pestarino, or the Directress of the house at Mornese, and also to the Very Rev. Don Bosco, Director of the Society of St Francis de Sales, Turin.

179. Regulations for the boarding house at Nizza Monferrato

School Archives of "Our Lady of Graces" Nizza Monferrato, orig. ms⁵⁹.

Nizza Monferrato [1878]

1. Classes and the boarding house depend on the superior who has special responsibility before the school and civil authorities and the parents of the boarders.

2. Teaching will be done by two teachers, one for the upper course the other for the lower course, both with registration.

3. If the number of pupils increases, other teachers will be added in proportion to need, always with previous authorisation from the competent authorities and in conformity with the law.

4. These teachers, conveniently helped by assistants, will also provide supervision of the girls when dining, in recreation, on outings and when sleeping.

⁵⁸ From what we see in the *Cronistoria*, which collects the memories of three Sisters, we learn that the FMA learned from the Sisters of St Anna the usual practices relating to organising a boarding school: admission of the girls, clothing needs, relationships with the girls' parents, writing letters etc. (cf. *ibid.*, II, p. 21).

⁵⁹ It is not easy to identify the author. Probably it is sister Elisa Roncallo who was the directress of the school for a short period.

One teacher for female chores will offer a course for three hours a day for girls occupied in chores appropriate to their age and condition.

5. Material administration is entrusted to a bursar who will see that everything is in order, clean and with a view to economy.

6. There will also be someone looking after the wardrobe taking care of linen and the girl's personal effects.

7. A cook and assistant cook will provide food for the boarders and personnel of the house, taking great care to see that it is healthy, hygienic and of the necessary quantity.

8. There will also be service people in charge of the cleanliness of various parts of the house.

9. The curriculum will fully follow the programmes and regulations of the government for elementary schools.

10. The educational system at the Institute is based essentially on religion, morals and respect for constituted authority.

11. The approach followed in the application of this system is paternal, taking the way of the heart rather than hardness and strictness, and this, little by little, introduces the girls to doing good spontaneously and sincerely⁶⁰.

12. Remember that school is not to be separated from life, and the Boarding house has to present an image of a well-ordered family. The educators will take every care to see that the pupils are formed to live as housewives, simple and dignified at the same time, which is one of the most beautiful values of feminine social life.

⁶⁰ This brief reference to the educational method of the Institute mirrors some elements of Don Bosco's preventive system. He also uses the term "paternal" when addressing school authorities to indicate the spirit animating his institutions (cf. G. BOSCO, *Scritti sul sistema preventivo...*, pp. 473-549).

Timetable

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|-------|-----|--------------------------|
| Hours | 6 | Rising |
| “ | 6 ½ | Prayers and Mass |
| “ | 7 | Study |
| “ | 8 | Breakfast and recreation |
| “ | 9 | School |
| “ | 11 | Study |
| “ | 12 | Lunch and recreation |
| “ | 2 | Women’s chores |
| “ | 4 ½ | Snack and recreation |
| “ | 5 | School |
| “ | 6 | Study |
| “ | 7 ½ | Supper |
| “ | 8 | Prayers and bed |

N.B. Every day there will also be educational gymnastics⁶¹ and singing. For outings the timetable varies according to season.

⁶¹ Teaching of gymnastics in classes is made obligatory by law on 7-7-1878 and the regulations approved in December the same year (cf. L. 7-7-1878; R. D. 16-12-1878, in *Raccolta ufficiale delle Leggi e dei Decreti*, n. 4677). Within five years of promulgation of this law, teachers had to be prepared. (Presentation of documents 178 and 179: Sister Piera Cavaglià FMA).