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Audience with members of the San Paolo Italia National Association

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the *San Paolo Italia* National Association (ANSPI), on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of its founding.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters!

I welcome you on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the *San Paolo Italia* National Association, known simply as ANSPI. It is an anniversary that helps rediscover in the roots the vital lifeblood to continue to commit yourselves, with passion, to the human and Christian formation of young people, through the activities of the oratories and youth clubs in your parishes.

Your network was born in the conciliar context at the behest of Msgr. Battista Belloli, supported by Archbishop Montini, to whom the naming of the association after the apostle Paul was linked, and who in 1963 was elected Pope. In those years of renewal of the catechesis, Msgr. Belloli had the happy intuition of giving life to an association that would qualify the pastoral care of oratories in the light of the conciliar magisterium, enhancing the contribution of the laity and giving shape and soul to integral education. His project was prophetic: do not tire of carrying it forward, with courage and creativity! The Church needs it; and Italian society does too. In a time at which the world is caught in the grip of violence, of feelings of prevarication and hatred, do not stop working for *education*, to support the *family*, to communicate the beauty of *fraternity*.

Your recreational, cultural and artistic proposals are always aimed at the integral education of children and young people. We must have at heart the entire person, in all his or her dimensions: emotional, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, physical. Saint John Bosco used to say that it was necessary to form “good Christians and honest citizens”, well aware that it is not possible to educate in sealed compartments, and that a positive or

negative future for society depends on the good or bad education of the young. Ecclesial and civil are two sides of the same coin; there can be no antithesis, because both contribute to the good of the individual and the community. I like to repeat an African proverb that encapsulates a great truth: it takes a whole village to educate a child. Today, more than ever, there is a need to create alliances “to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity” (*Message for the launch of the Global Compact on Education*, 12 September 2019).

From this perspective of education, the network of your oratories and groups then plays an important role in support of families, completing and integrating civil practices for the wellbeing of citizens in their areas. Think, for example, of the summer activities that involve the youngest during the holiday period, enabling their parents to continue to work; or the after-school clubs that, thanks to volunteers, constitute a safeguard against dropping out of school, as well as a welcome and integration workshop. You offer “bridges” with families, with the area, with the Church community and with society. Keep your doors open, but above all your arms and hearts: it is not easy, but we know that others are always a treasure, to be treasured and valued.

Finally, I am grateful because you keep spaces open for gratuitousness and joy. Saint Filippo Neri loved to repeat, “be cheerful, be cheerful”. Christians cannot be sad; the Gospel is joy, hope, light, the announcement of salvation. And this is linked to the experience of gratuitousness, giving and self-giving. In the spaces of gratuitousness one smiles, one bears witness to the joy of the children of God... and one makes that good noise that does not cloud, but liberates! The noise of young people is the sound of their dreams, their enthusiasm, their desire to be protagonists and to change the world, their capacity to transform the discordant note of this time into music. This noise is good for us; it awakens us from the torpor of false certainties and comfortable habits.

Dear friends, your patron, Saint Paul, wrote: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (*Phil 4:4*). I entrust to him, and to the Holy Virgin, your association, your young people, educators and families. Thank you for your visit, and your work in the service of the Church and the community. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me”.
