

## Saint Maria Mazzarello



<http://www.salesiansisters.org.au/node/6>

Maria Mazzarello was born on 9 May 1837, in a hamlet of Mornese called I Mazzarelli, in Northern Italy. She was the first of ten children. Maria learnt from a young age how to be a caring and efficient person in the home to her young sisters and brothers.

When she was seventeen years of age she joined a group of young women who helped the parish curate, Fr Dominic Pestarino, in various activities of the parish. Through these experiences Maria was empowered to be a leader amongst those she encountered in her everyday life.

At the age of twenty-three she was stricken with typhoid fever and nearly died. From this point on, the physical strength she always possessed was gone forever. She was not sure what she could do in life without her former energy and vigour. With her closest friend, Petronilla Mazzarello she decided to start a professional school for girls in her locality. Maria's motivation for initiating this venture was to assist youth to be able to earn their own living in society and develop christian values that would be lived out throughout life.

Maria started the first educational boarding school which would multiply as the years went on. While the professional classes and boarding facilities developed, on Sundays Maria gathered many of the girls around the district and offered them the opportunity to play and pray together.

In 1864 Don Bosco came to Mornese. He saw the great work Maria and her friends were doing for youth and was very impressed with what he saw. Over a period of eight years the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was formed and Maria Mazzarello became the first Salesian Sister and leader of the new congregation. With other religious women Maria founded houses in Italy and France. Forthright in temperament but reserved in manner, Mary Mazzarello possessed ardent faith, fortitude, and good judgment in spite of her very limited education; she was a woman of the fields with a natural dignity that commanded respect. Although according to Pius IX, she knew how to rule, it was easy to obey her, because, as one Sister said, she exercised the office of superior like a true mother with genuine concern and without pretense. Firm as well as persuasive all obeyed her without resentment.

Weakened by the typhoid Maria had contracted when young, and weakened too by her hard work, Maria's health began to deteriorate. Finally on May 14th, 1881, she died. Maria Mazzarello was just 44 years old.

On June 24th 1951, Maria Mazzarello was proclaimed a Saint by Pope Pius XII. In the meantime, that small group of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians has developed into the second largest Congregation of women Religious in the Catholic Church.

<http://www.scr.vic.edu.au/our-school/81/p/saint-maria-mazzarello/>