

# Lay people

## Under the same roof of Nazareth



**Brothers of the Holy Family**

Rome 2023



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**COVER:** *“The Holy Family and the Trinity”*. Painting by Brother Edgardo Campos at the Maison Gabriel Taborin in Belley (France), 2022.

The scene depicts Jesus, Mary and Joseph in the house in Nazareth. Mary in prayer and at work as a lay woman, Joseph, *“pater nutritius”*, who provides the food and carries out domestic tasks. Jesus, in an attitude of welcome and hospitality.

The open door behind Jesus reminds us that this was a family in relation to the world. Outside you see houses and people of different colours suggesting the diversity of the world we live in and that they are also part of this family.

The hand of the Father blesses Jesus *“this is my beloved Son, listen to him”* (Mk 9: 7). The familiar scene is surrounded by a blue halo evoking the Creator God of the universe. His mantle of mercy embraces all, alluding to St Paul *“In him we live and move and have our being”* (Acts 17: 28).

The two doves recall the offering in the Temple. The basin with the towel hints at the command *“you also ought to wash one another's feet”* (Jn 13: 15), the spirit of service which is an essential element of family spirit.

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## Foreword

*Lay men and women Sa-Fa.* This document is addressed to all lay men and women who are in contact with the Brothers of the Holy Family, whether as leaders, collaborators or recipients of Sa-Fa educational works in various parts of the world, or as people who share their spirituality. It is a simple document, intended to outline the profile of a lay man and woman who wish to live their human life in the light of the Gospel according to the charism handed down by Brother Gabriel Taborin and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit in every culture and at this moment in history. It is a help offered to all, to those who have faith, to those who seek, to those who simply wish to live humanly well. In fact, the Gospel is a gift for all to live their lives with hope and responsibility.

*Under the same roof of Nazareth.* The title of the document quotes the words of Brother Gabriel Taborin, Founder of the Brothers of the Holy Family. He invites us to refer to the family of Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The expression “*under the same roof of Nazareth*” indicates the country and the house in which they lived, where Jesus, the Saviour of the world, grew up. It is not only a historical and geographical reference, but an invitation to live the Gospel in our daily, personal and family life, with the simplicity, faith and human richness that identified the family of Nazareth. The fundamental characteristic of the Nazareth way of life is a spirituality of the everyday, an incarnational spirituality that cares for and attends in a special way to the bonds between us and with others. It is a way of life that is possible for everyone.

*An intercultural document.* The document was born from the collaboration of some lay men and women of the Sa-Fa Family from different parts of the world: Argentina, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Spain, Italy and Uruguay. For this reason, it preserves the style, characteristics and sensitivity of the people who contributed to its drafting. The text has no ambition to be a model of literary perfection, but it has the merit that it was born of synodal work, of long mutual listening, respecting cultural and gender differences. It has been written by simple people, who live the charism of Brother Gabriel and now make it available to all, as a fraternal gift.

*An open text.* Our wish is that, more than a document, this text should be an opportunity and a space for dialogue, listening and sharing. In this sense, we want it to be an “open text” that will grow over time. For this reason, we invite each and every one of you to share the reflections and thoughts that arise from reading it, sharing your contributions with the rest of the Sa-Fa Family.

This common reflection will help us to face our life with confidence, knowing that we share it with so many brothers and sisters scattered around the world.

May the Holy Family of Nazareth, ever attentive to the inspirations of the Spirit, help us to allow ourselves to be led by Him on this journey.



# 1. Lay people in the Sa-Fa Family, called to live in the same spirit

***“Where your treasure is,  
there your heart  
will be also”  
(Mt 6: 21)***

***“For he who does the will  
of God is my brother  
and sister and mother”  
(Mk 3: 35)***

Lay men and women, first and foremost, we are human beings, children of God, his creation; a creation as good as it is unfinished, which is called to grow in likeness, since we have the imprint – the image of God – and the point of arrival – the Son of God.

Even so, we can be indifferent to our brothers; hence God's question to Cain still stands today: *“Where is your brother?”* (Gn 4: 9).

On the other hand, we are relational beings called to fraternity; Jesus reminds us that, if our “treasure” is things, *“Where your treasure is, there is your heart”* (Mt 6: 21); we will live in competition for them, but, if they are others, we will be on the way to living “the family spirit” highlighted by Brother Gabriel Taborin.

At the same time, it is necessary to underline God's wish: *"You are all brothers and sisters"*, since the Lay men and women of the Sa-Fa Family are part of the "People of God" that is the Church, which is called to be a servant of the world, attentive to its development and its needs. The Sa-Fa Family is part of the pilgrim Church in history, called together by the charism entrusted to Brother Gabriel, who wants to live faith, hope and love. A people who walk with other charismatic families following Jesus, who is *"Way, Truth and Life"* (Jn 14: 6). From his daily life in Nazareth to his death in Jerusalem, he reveals to us the true way, that is to say, the way of full humanisation, the way of abundant life for all *"I have come that all may have life and have it abundantly"* (Jn 10: 10).

A Sa-Fa Layman, a Sa-Fa Laywoman, is someone who, together with others, (not alone), follows Jesus with an emphasis on one aspect: family life in everyday life, as discreet as it was fruitful and transforming during his thirty years in Nazareth.

In these difficult times of the 21st century, in different contexts and cultures, we contemplate the loving Mystery of God revealing Himself in that small village. There, Jesus, the Son of God, living as one more, nourished by the faith of his people in a Saviour, was discovering a new face of God. In silence and attentive to the reality of the suffering of the most fragile, children, women, the poor, the sick, he was maturing a special relationship with his *Abba* and the hope of a new, more human and fraternal world, of "all brothers and sisters". Brother Gabriel left us this charism which we are called to offer creatively to others.

For the Sa-Fa Laity, Nazareth is our charismatic reference point, our home, school and workshop. We are Christians

conscious of our identity as children of God and, therefore, brothers and sisters in the faith of all those around us. That is why we live deeply our humanity as members of the Church when we relate fraternally with others, seeking the common good and caring for the gift of creation. We live and share the joy of the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth (Lk 4: 16-30), as he lived it as a family with Mary and Joseph.

We value the heritage of life passed on by Brother Gabriel Taborin. We accept his legacy and work to ensure that it continues to bear fruit, walking side by side with the Brothers of the Holy Family today, always supporting each other with that gift of the Spirit, which enriches the human community and which we call the “Nazarene-Taborinian charism”.

In Nazareth, Jesus, Mary and Joseph are a family that experiences many transforming experiences: from the falling in love of Mary and Joseph to the death of each of its members. Their bonds and values in living together speak to us of the “*esprit de corps and family spirit*” that Brother Gabriel describes in Circular 21 at the end of his journey as a Brother:

*“The esprit de corps and family spirit is born of charity and, consequently, of God who is charity itself. All the members of a Congregation in which this spirit truly exists are of one heart and one soul; they love and help one another, they share in each other’s joys, sorrows, successes and failures; reciprocal attentions and an endearing fraternity unify the most diverse spirits and characters. [...] May each one of you make every effort so that this spirit may be introduced more and more into our dear Congregation, and thus we will enjoy in advance the happiness of paradise, towards which we are striving with all our strength”* (Circular 21 of 1864, the year of his death).

In Nazareth we discover a true “school of humanity” that is illuminated by a motto that unites us as a true family to the Brothers and to all the Sa-Fa Laymen and Laywomen: In Nazareth people prayed, worked and loved.

## 2. In Nazareth we learn to love

***“You are all brothers”***  
(Mt 23: 8)

***“Inasmuch as you did it unto one  
of the least of these my brethren,  
you did it unto me”***  
(Mt 25: 40)

As lay men and women in the Sa-Fa Family, we are called to live fraternal love, among ourselves and with those around us. Brother Gabriel is the concrete example to which we refer and who urges us to be *“one heart and one soul”*, loving and helping each other; sharing joys, sorrows, successes and failures.

Respect and love for each person is the fundamental value that guides us: *“inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”* (Mt 25: 40).

So how can we lay people approach Sa-Fa spirituality by making this Gospel intuition come alive in our daily lives?

The Holy Family shows us the bonds which united them and which led them to care and concern for each other: *“your father and I were looking for you in anguish”* (Lk 2: 48).

In faith, we see in the family union of Jesus, Mary and Joseph an inspiring ideal of wholeness, balance, development and true

love. For the Layman Sa-Fa, every experience of family relationships can be inspired by the union of the family of Nazareth, because all love carries within it something of the fatherhood, motherhood and filiation of God. Respect for the mystery of love that we find in every expression of family life is an impulse to encourage every family that frequents the Sa-Fa Family centres to draw inspiration from the Holy Family of Nazareth as a desirable and accessible ideal.

We are invited to walk... Let's keep walking. What is promised to us is always more. Let us not despair at our limits, but let us not give up seeking the fullness of love and communion promised to us (cf. *Amoris Laetitia*. 325).

Brother Gabriel specifies that the task of the Brothers is to engage in “*all kinds of good works*” for the love of God and neighbour. We imagine that when we ask Gabriel: What do we have to worry about? he would look us in the eye with his intense gaze and answer: “*Let us take care of everything and everyone! Let us cultivate good relations between laypeople and Brothers, as well as between parents and children, teachers and pupils, catechists... to become Brothers attentive to all forms of poverty*”.

As men and women, let us take time to learn to love each other with the awareness of being fully ourselves, each with our limitations and qualities. To learn to love, it is necessary to understand that we are often the least of our brothers and sisters, the ones most in need of love. By living unconditional love for others above ourselves, as in the family of Nazareth, we will be able to bring Love to all that we do and to everyone we meet.

As spouses, we draw inspiration from the Trinity, which is a relationship of deep love, of continuous exchange of tenderness, understanding and creativity that generates unity and strength in diversity. Let us accompany each other, respecting each other's time and space, and give each other a deep and intimate understanding in which to experience the joy of being a couple.

As parents, we can look to God, who is the love of a father and a mother, and to Mary and Joseph, who experienced it concretely in their daily lives. With motherhood and fatherhood we discover that pure and true love for children is joy and full life, it is growth made of falls, forgiveness and rediscovery. It is purifying, rediscovering what is essential; children can help us to know pure love: unconditional love, full of light, full of beautiful and true emotions.

As teachers, educators, catechists or in any other mission, let us try to be attentive to everyone in order to help them grow *“in wisdom and grace”* like Jesus of Nazareth. Love for the other commits us to create processes in reality that are humanising and to be *“salt and light”* for the world in which we live.

As Sa-Fa Laymen and Laywomen we share the experience of fraternity with others, because it gives us the possibility to understand and experience the *“taste”* of love; not only because we learn to look at others with a loving gaze, but also because we often recognise ourselves and grow in the loving gaze of others towards us.





### 3. In Nazareth we learn to work

***“Is not this the carpenter's son?”***

(Mt 13: 55)

Jesus, like us, *“worked with men's hands, thought with men's understanding, acted with men's will, loved with men's hearts”* (GS, 22).

In Nazareth, work is conceived as a daily dedication where each one puts his or her gifts at the disposal of the needs of others. As humble as it may seem, the simple work of Mary and Joseph allows Jesus to go about *“his Father's business”*. In Nazareth, work humanises and favours the growth and development of people. Their work allows the family to live and to contribute to society.

It is not ambition or prominence, but the little virtues (simplicity, humility, justice, peace, joy, patience, courtesy, serenity, affability, attentiveness in service, compassion...), which must guide our work as Sa-Fa Laymen and Laywomen. These virtues will make the difference. The hidden years in Nazareth reveal to us that it is not so much the impact of the work or its social recognition that matters, but the love with which it is carried out.

We Sa-Fa lay people put ourselves at the service of the world, building bridges of fraternity wherever it is necessary: knowing how to work as a team, seeking to transform the world into a

true family of God, promoting the idea of belonging to a single people, placing God at the centre of all relationships.

In a very significant way, the Sa-Fa Laymen and Laywomen do not work “on our own”, therefore, we offer ourselves to the Church and to the Sa-Fa Family to collaborate in education, catechesis, liturgical animation, solidarity and in “*all kinds of good works*”.

Moreover, we carry out this work in the professional sphere, where each one of us is situated, seeking justice, honesty, the common good of society and dignified labour relations, associating work with the possibility of being able to transform the world and society into a great fraternal family in solidarity. From this perspective, work becomes a mission in favour of the “*Kingdom of God and his justice*” (Mt 5: 33).

Work becomes, therefore, a privileged occasion for witness, acting in accordance with the same Gospel values that, without noise or pretence, made a place for themselves in the carpentry of Nazareth. We Sa-Fa lay men and women are called to convert our means of life into the means of Life, opening up “spaces of Nazareth” in their working environment.

As opposed to a merely finalist conception, we recognise and value the humanising sense that work brings, according to the different cultures and places where we are based.

## 4. In Nazareth we learn to pray

*“Mary kept all these things in her heart”*

(Lk 2: 51)

*“Jesus’ parents went every year  
to the Passover feast”*

(Lk 2: 41)

Jesus, growing up with Mary and Joseph, invites us to live an incarnated spirituality in everyday life, integrating all the dimensions of the human person.

We follow the example of the family of Nazareth, “simple and humble”. Christ lived life with Mary and Joseph on a daily basis, with their joys and sorrows, their hopes and disappointments, their responsibilities and frailties.

Under the gaze of God, the Sa-Fa Layman and Laywoman are invited to discover and experience an incarnated spirituality in daily life. Thus, human life is brought to prayer as a daily offering to the Lord who invites us to live it with simplicity and fullness, with abundance (Jn 10: 10) and to bear fruit (Jn 15: 11-16a): those produced by Charity (1 Cor 13: 8).

This Nazarene spirituality invites those who live it to allow themselves to be touched simply by the day to day, in order to make it better and better. Nazareth invites us to live a contemplative attitude in all circumstances of life. In Nazareth

we understand the value of silence as an attitude that helps us to look with the eyes of the soul without distractions, in the style of Mary who *"kept everything in her heart"*.

Mary and Joseph, in Nazareth, had an attitude of presence, of patience; a gaze of faith and love to see the mystery of salvation at work in the different circumstances of their lives. The events that marked the life of Christ from the Annunciation to his death on the cross were not easy to accept for the family in which God became incarnate. Nevertheless, they knew how to contemplate the divine in the human and responded to God's will. Thus Mary knew how to say *"let it be done to me according to your word"*. Joseph set out, *"took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt"*, as the Angel had told him. And Jesus learned to obey: *"and he went down with them to Nazareth"* (Lk 2: 51).

Thus, we Sa-Fa Lay men and women are invited to a life of contemplation, opening ourselves to God and allowing ourselves to be transformed by this Love in order to live the mysticism of spirituality incarnated in the contemplation of the face of Christ in each person and in nature.

Mary, who contemplated God's work with trust and love, *"treasured all this in her heart"* (Lk 2: 51), carrying the Word of God in her womb, becoming the "mouthpiece" of the world. In this we learn that intimacy with Christ is only achieved through his Word.

We nourish our relationship with God by cultivating a personal intimacy that leads us to share the table of the Word and the Eucharist; thus, the Sa-Fa Lay men and women find in listening to the Word of God and in participating in the

Eucharist the real path towards a deep and joyful spiritual life that moves away from ritualism. For spiritual growth, the Sa-Fa Lay men and women share with others the fruits of our intimacy with Christ (Lk 24, 18-35), for without it we can do nothing (Jn 15, 15).

In Nazareth one learns to pray, to live the Our Father, to break bread and to realise the dream of Jesus, his intimacy with the Father and with Mary and Joseph. This is also the dream of Brother Gabriel Taborin.

Not only to pray to the Father with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, but also to invoke their protection. The invocation “*Jesus, Joseph and Mary, enlighten us, help us, save us*” is one of the prayers of trust in our patrons which has accompanied the Institute since its origin.



## 5. In Nazareth we learn to find peace

***“Peace be with you”***

(Jn 20: 19)

Nazareth reveals to us God's dream for humanity. He calls us to be family and to live in good relations with everyone: this is the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus, which sustains our desire to realise a just and caring society, together with all people of good will. But we know the adversities, persecutions and conflicts that this can bring us. This is how Jesus, Mary and Joseph and Brother Gabriel himself experienced it in their ecclesial and social context.

In love, work and prayer, we bring about the Peace that Jesus came to bring to this world (Lk 12: 51), for *“He is our peace”* (Eph 2: 14).

In the encounter with our brothers and sisters we experience the value of peace, which brings the presence of God: *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Mt 18: 20).

To be at peace is to be at peace with oneself, it is a process of interiority where each one encounters God, it is like the step that is proposed to us in order to live in fullness with others. It is built by experiencing community life, in small gestures, by going out to meet others. It is lived every time we meet to pray together, to celebrate life or to work for others; it is built by

sharing what happens to us, joys and sorrows; by seeking solutions together, and by supporting one another in a sincere embrace. Peace manifests itself as an inner good and can be found in respect for differences, interculturality, interreligiousness and social justice.

Peace is lived by enjoying the simple things such as the prayer of blessing the table, by feeling the tender gaze of Our Lady when we enter a temple, when we contemplate our family and nature, and enjoy them. We build peace when we are not indifferent to injustice and take it upon ourselves to do something about it by getting involved. Peace is also found when we forgive those who have wronged us.

Peace is felt in contemplative prayer, in silence, in communion with loved ones who are already in the house of God the Father. As a family and in community we help each other to make sense of fragility, the death of a loved one, the lack of health, the paths of pain...

Peace is the nature of the profile of the Lay Sa-Fa. There are places and people that bring us peace: the missions, fraternity meetings, sharing the Word in community, the daily Gospel, reading the Word in family...

The way to find peace is the encounter, personal and communal, with Jesus in prayer and witnessing life in abundance.



## 6. In Nazareth we learn to grow in humanity

*“And Jesus grew in wisdom  
and stature, and in favour  
with God and man”*

(Lk 2: 52)

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness”*

(Mt 6: 33)

The growth of the person is based on intellectual and cultural growth (“*in wisdom*”), physical growth (“*in stature*”), and spiritual growth, discovery and knowledge of God (“*in grace*”). Jesus teaches this integral growth through his own person. In Nazareth this growth is fostered.

Nazareth is a humanising school. It is the place where Mary and Joseph learn how to respond to the mission entrusted to them: Mary learns to be a woman, mother and wife; Joseph develops his heart as a father and husband.

*“True wisdom presupposes an encounter with reality”* (Fratelli tutti, 47). Everyday life is a privileged place where we are formed humanly and Christianly in that wisdom which helps us to live in society and in the world and to know how to adapt to circumstances. We cannot run the risk of eliminating that part of reality that bothers or displeases us, isolating ourselves from what is happening around us.

In the image of Mary and Joseph, we Sa-Fa Lay men and women are called to grow, to develop our vocation within the reality in which we live; to read the signs of the times, to respond creatively and responsibly and to turn every problem into a new opportunity.

From the school of Nazareth we learn that the encounter with others, listening, serene reflection, dialogue and fraternity help us to “*grow in wisdom*”, although sometimes we run the risk of allowing ourselves to be carried away by a formation that saturates us with information and does not help us to grow.

In Nazareth, Jesus is maturing towards the fullness of son, brother and adult person. In his image, we Sa-Fa lay men and women can commit ourselves to grow in critical thinking, to take on new responsibilities in the transformation of society and to train ourselves to carry them out.

Growing up implies advancing along a path of formation and maturation. In the school of Nazareth we feel impelled towards a formation that makes us more and more human and allows us to grow spiritually. This maturing enables us to interpret our whole life, the reality of people, society and the cultures around us in the light of the Good News of the Gospel.

As Sa-Fa lay men and women “*we are called to grow as evangelisers*” (EG. 121) and to offer our witness.

As Sa-Fa Laymen and Laywomen we are committed to the formation and growth of faith in the family, therefore, we have to create spaces of evangelisation in which to communicate Jesus.

# Prayer of the Sa-Fa Layman and Laywoman

Lord and **Father** of mankind  
that you summon us under the same roof of Nazareth  
to be more and more attentive to the question  
***“Where is your brother?”*** (Gen 4: 9),  
urge us to create a more just and fraternal society.

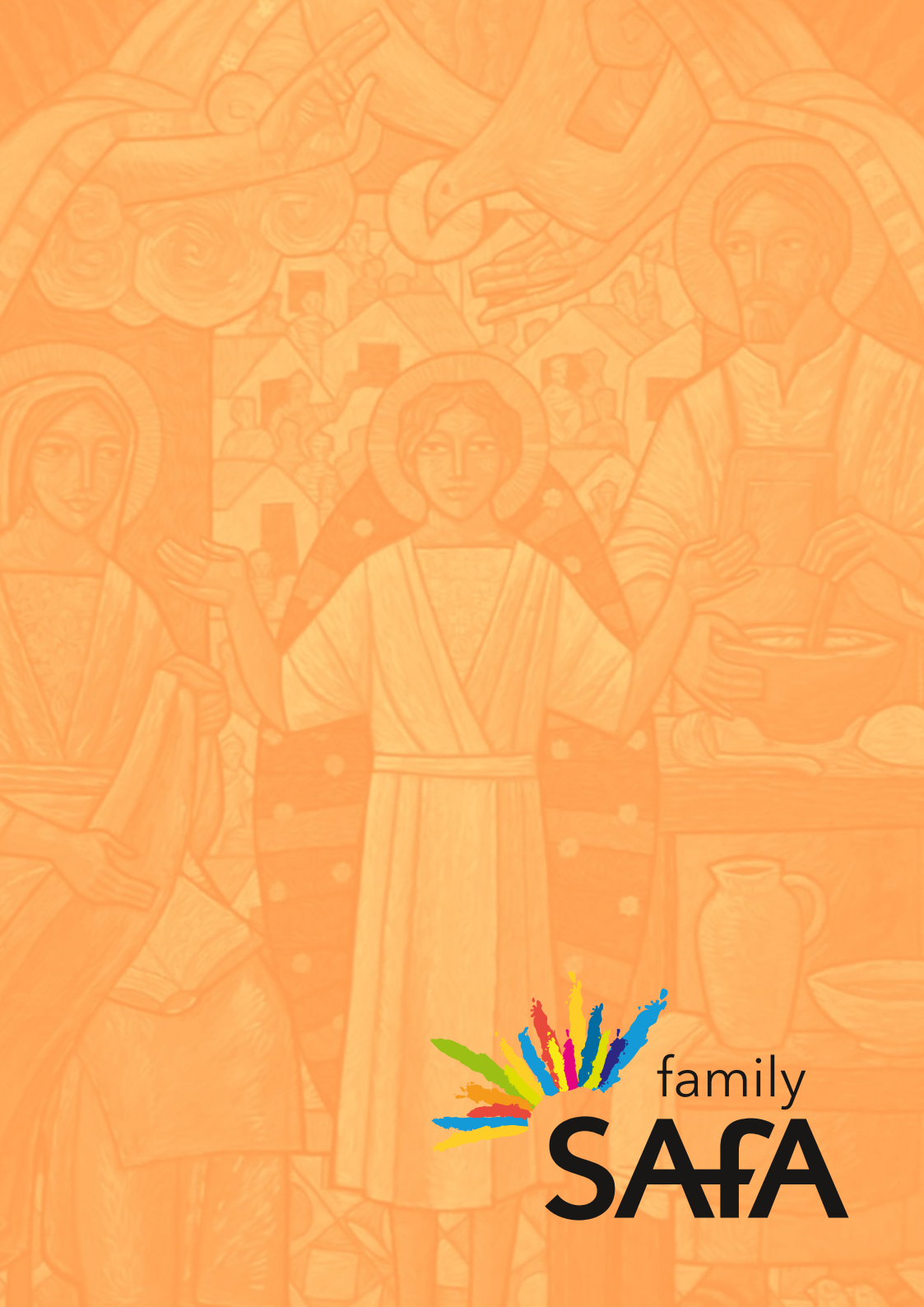
Lord **Son** of God Incarnate  
that you instil in us that deep conviction:  
***“He who does the will of God is my brother,  
my sister and my mother”*** (Mk 3: 35),  
open our hearts to all the peoples of the earth.

**Holy Spirit**, the breath that transforms us,  
And it reminds us of Jesus' words:  
***“You are all brothers”*** (Mt 23: 8),  
pour into us that Love which makes us  
behave in solidarity with one another.

Holy **Family of Nazareth**, gathered around Jesus,  
recognised as ***“the carpenter's son”*** (Mt 13: 55)  
***and Mary, who “kept all things in her heart”*** (Lk 2: 51),  
give us the Peace you promise us with your Easter greeting:  
***“Peace be with you.”***

Dear **Brother Gabriel**  
who teaches us to grow in humanity  
from the everyday life we live,  
continues to show us the way that enables us to follow Jesus  
who in us continues to ***“grow in wisdom,  
in stature and in favour with God and man”*** (Lk 2: 52).

**AMEN**



family  
**SAFA**