



ACTIVITIES AND WORKS OF SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

CHAPTER

VII

*“I have chosen you ...
that you may bear
fruit”*

(Jn 15:16)



We carry out our mission chiefly in such works and activities as make possible the human and Christian education of the young, such as oratories and youth centres, schools and technical institutes, boarding establishments and houses for young people in difficulties. In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation. In specialized centres we make available our pedagogical and catechetical expertise in the service of the young. In retreat houses we provide for the Christian formation of groups, especially of young people. We dedicate ourselves also to every other kind of work which has as its scope the salvation of the young”

[C. 42]



On that evening as I ran my eyes over the crowd of children playing, I thought of the rich harvest awaiting my priestly ministry. With no one to help me, my energy gone, my health undermined, with no idea where I could gather my boys in the future, I was very disturbed. I withdrew to one side, and as I walked alone I began to cry perhaps for the first time. As I walked I looked up to heaven and cried out, ‘My God, why don’t you show me where you want me to gather these children? Oh, let me know! Oh, show me what I must do!’”

[Memoirs of the Oratory, second decade 1835-1845, no.23]

We propose some reflections on the most important features of the works and services in which one carries out the Salesian Youth Ministry outlined in the Educative and Pastoral Project. First of all there are the most organised and traditional works: the Oratory-Youth Centre, School and Vocational Training Centre, the Salesian presence in Higher Education, the parish and sanctuary entrusted to the Salesians, and the works and the social services for youth-at-risk. Then there are other works and services through which we reach out to young people and respond to the new challenges they pose. Many of these new educational and pastoral presences among young people can be carried out also in the traditional services; it would be a sign of the effort at their renewal and pastoral advancement.

1

An ordered and systematic ministry: unity in diversity

The various activities and interventions in youth ministry are carried out with a single purpose: the all-round development of the young and promotion of their world, overcoming a fragmented youth ministry project. This is achieved **by converging around the over-all purpose, the criteria for action and the preferential choices made in pastoral work** to create unity and interrelation among them.

Such a convergence is demanded by the young person to whom the various proposals are directed; by the Educative and Pastoral Community, which must share the ultimate goals and the lines of action, and by the need for complementarity between the multiplicity of activities, experiences and pastoral models.

This ordered and systematic unity of Salesian Youth Ministry is accomplished through:

- **the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan**, which at various levels defines the criteria, objectives and processes that orient and foster convergence in the Educative and Pastoral Community and unity in practice of the multiplicity of activities, interventions and persons;
- **an organisation of animation and pastoral governance of the province and works** that guarantees communication and coordination of all aspects of Salesian life focused on the objectives of education and of evangelisation of the young (cf. GC23, nos.240-242).

2

The various sectors and activities

We use the term **sector** to indicate the educational and pastoral structures in which the Salesian mission is carried out following a specific educative and pastoral proposal (cf. *Glossary*: Pastoral or Activity Sector). Each of them creates its specific atmosphere and relationship style within the Educative and Pastoral Community. A Salesian apostolate may include multiple sectors which complement each other for a better manifestation of the Salesian mission.

2 1

THE ORATORY-YOUTH CENTRE

2 1 1

The original nature of the Salesian Oratory

The Oratory of St Francis of Sales at Valdocco was the first established apostolate, the one that inspired all the others. The educational environment initiated by Don Bosco in the Oratory was a pastoral response to the needs of adolescents and older youth especially the neediest, in the city of Turin. It offered them healthy recreation, together with catechism, elementary education and employable skills for life. Don Bosco knew how to provide Christian formation to young people who were faced with pressing educational challenges.

Don Bosco's personal touch initiated at the Oratory originated an **effective praxis which was to be the lasting criteria for prevention applied down through the years:**

- ▮ from a basic catechism lesson to a *presence and participation in the life of the young* with special attention to their needs, problems and opportunities;
- ▮ from a part-time festive (weekend) oratory *to a full-time home* extending throughout the week through personal contacts and other complementary activities;

- ▮ from the teaching of catechetical content to a systematic *educative and pastoral programme*, the Preventive System;
- ▮ from services thought out for the young to a *family style presence of educators in the midst of the young* in their recreational and religious activities;
- ▮ from a referential institution for adults to *community living with young people*, youthful involvement, a community open to all;
- ▮ from the primacy of the program to the primacy *of the person and of interpersonal relationships*;
- ▮ from a parish focused on worship and devotion to *the missionary impulse of a youthful community* open to young people who neither know nor find any reference in that parish.

This enthusiasm of the Preventive System aroused in young people the desire to grow and mature, passing from the immediate needs of entertainment and education to more systematic and deep commitment to human and Christian formation. They learned from their involvement in activities how to take a leading role in activities, be animators in an educational environment at the service of their companions.

Don Bosco's Oratory is at the very origin of all the Salesian work and constitutes its prototype. It inspires all the different evangelising projects and services of the Salesian mission (cf. C. 40).

The historical development and spread of Don Bosco's work has not changed the basic principles nor the characteristics of the Salesian Oratory. However, **new socio-educational scenarios and the phenomena that mark the situations of youth, necessitate renewal.** There is a new concept of leisure, a much-valued reality in our society as a space open to all sorts of social and cultural experiences which enhance social relationships and develop personal skills. New educational environments and stake-holders have emerged which are open to youth empowerment.

In a situation where free time for the young is filled with many activities and often also by civil institutions with substantial resources, the Oratory welcomes requests for activities with an oratorian heart, in style and in quality,

convinced that in time and with the cooperation of families, our educational aims will be successful. The Salesian Oratories have been able to adapt to new situations, in different ways, also assuming different names. In some contexts, the term “**Oratory**” means a programme, weekday or weekend, designed especially for children and pre-adolescents, but also open to a broader group, promoting various forms of leisure and religious gatherings. A “**Youth Centre**” means a structure, especially for adolescents and older youth, open to all, with specific aims of growth to full maturity, pursuing group dynamics for a human and Christian formation. By “Oratory-Youth Centre” we should understand not just an oratory but also a commitment to more mature young people (cf. C. 28; R. 5, 7, 11-12, 24; GC21, no.122).

Many works of the Congregation are currently Oratory-Youth Centres which carry out various educational projects with a greater number of beneficiaries, capable of involving and arousing interest in the young. **They take on many forms and characteristics depending on the diverse geographical, religious and cultural sets of circumstances.** There are, for example, evening oratories, mobile presences for youth-at-risk, area or neighbourhood oratories well connected with each other, oratories that offer unemployed and marginalised young people the opportunity to gain basic education and thus prepare themselves for some work; there are yet others that try to rehabilitate young people faced with serious social dangers.



The Educative and Pastoral Community of the Oratory-Youth Centre



The importance of the EPC of the Oratory-Youth Centre

Wherever it exists, the Oratory-Youth Centre is organised as an EPC made up of the young, their leaders, families, co-workers and the Salesian community. **Everyone feels called to active participation and shared responsibility, according to each one's role.** Like Don Bosco with his youth and his collaborators at Valdocco, it calls for making every Oratory-Youth Centre a real home with a well-defined family atmosphere, a shared SEPP and an adequate accompaniment of groups and individuals.

The Oratory-Youth Centre is a *welcoming space* open to a wide variety of children, adolescents and older young people, especially those most in

need. It has a social influence and impact in the area. At the same time, it is an educative and pastoral space specially adapted to *welcome and care for persons*, beyond purely functional relationships. The Salesian educator, from the first meeting, knows how to engage in a personal dialogue with the young to motivate and involve them more and more, gradually challenging them to share responsibility in all activities and in the group processes they take part in. Youth empowerment has been a characteristic in the EPC of the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre since Don Bosco's time.

The EPC in the Oratory-Youth Centre experiences the life of young people; it shares their worries, their problems and expectations, and opens up spaces where it can be with them and engage itself in their world. Managed in a *flexible and creative way*, it is able to adapt to the diversity and spontaneity typical of an oratorian education. It is certainly an educational presence and significant pastoral reference in the world of the young.

B *Membership of the EPC of the Oratory-Youth Centre*

Young people are at the heart of the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre EPC.

They are at the centre of its choices and its future plans. This means that young people should be accompanied to be able to judge and decide on matters that affect them. They are made aware of the opportunities offered them for this purpose and that they have access to the necessary resources. They are part of the overall organisation of the Oratory-Youth Centre, in consonance with the educational aim, while respecting the levels of decision-making bodies.

The Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre EPC is a work-in-progress and needs people who will animate its project, help align its educational initiatives.

Youth leaders imbued with the Salesian charism take up the educational proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre and actively put it into practice.

Animators/leaders are educators who walk with the young, dialogue with them and know how to firmly and enthusiastically propose new goals of personal maturity. They have themselves experienced an animating educational process, a process that responds *to a vocation and plan of life that makes them grow as individuals*. They are conscious, whether inside or outside of the Oratory-Youth Centre, that they are animators and leaders and therefore live by the values they are proposing. They are aware that the life of the Oratory-Youth Centre depends largely on them:

for their guiding and organising role and for the fact that they are called to be a dynamic force in the life of the oratory. Therefore, they must be the object of special attention, support and care by those in charge of the Oratory-Youth Centre.

The service of animation is developed in the *style of a free and voluntary service*. Given the circumstances of the locality, there may also be a need to formalise roles so the Oratory-Youth Centre functions better and with a greater focus on its young people.

The Oratory-Youth Centre and its project are addressed not only to the young, but also to **the Salesians** who actively represent but at the same time benefit from their pastoral service. For this reason, all the Salesians of the house and not only those in charge have a specific function of animation in the Oratory-Youth Centre. This puts the Salesians in a position to establish the same relationship that Don Bosco had with the young through witness of fraternal communion and openness of heart. The religious community also offers experiences of faith and prayer shared with the young: initiatives to experience processes of lifelong learning together, active participation in the development and regular evaluation of the local SEPP. Reference to the Province SEPP should always be guaranteed for presences and works of the oratory which are managed by lay people.

Typical of oratory ministry is the guidance given to responsibility we share with adults who share an environment of friendship with the young, and educational experience of life and the experience of family and community. Their constant presence is an element of stability and an important witness of maturity in the multifaceted life of the Oratory-Youth Centre. The most important amongst the adults are those with specific functions of animation, such as **parents** and **family representatives** or **members of the Salesian Family**.



The educative and pastoral proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre

The proposal of the Oratory-Youth Centre becomes a reality through formation programmes related to the interests of young people. Every young person, choosing from the possibilities of participation that are offered, can progress in the most appropriate way according to his or her own situation and level of maturity.

Greater attention should be paid to the ever present risk of focusing the dynamics of the Oratory-Youth Centre almost *exclusively on recreational and cultural activities* which are part of the Salesian educational ministry. It demands that we **rethink the identity of the Oratory-Youth Centre** and **recreate the original educative and pastoral methodology**.

A *A process of evangelisation*

The Oratory-Youth Centre proposes a Christian view of life and has the young person as its objective. Ours is a Christian proposal of education with *Salesian Youth Spirituality as its throbbing heart*.

Our faith in Jesus Christ opens us to a Christian outlook on life, speaks to us of the way of life that is to animate the Oratory-Youth Centre. In this pastoral sector the young can gradually discover an environment rich in evangelical values which guides them to the experience of faith in the practice of everyday life. They are offered different possibilities depending on the age of the recipient, gradual and personalised educational and faith programs, celebrations of faith, the sacraments. They are educated to getting involved as Christians where they live according to their vocation and how their life project in the Church and in society has developed.

The Oratory-Youth Centre **is a work of mediation between the Church, urban society and youth** which provides research and contact with young people. As a ministry on the frontier between the religious and the civil field, between the secular world and the church, it offers educational and evangelical responses to pressing needs and challenges, especially those affecting the least in society. It is a Salesian environment, favouring the group experience of the young with a Christian identity, into which everyone is welcome.

The Oratory-Youth Centre is a privileged place for the animators. This is where they live their faith personally and in community, with an attitude of openness to serve those most in need. The same opportunity is given to the children and to older youth: by their example and witness they challenge families and other young people who have distanced themselves from the life of the Church.

B *A Salesian style of education*

In the Salesian educative environment of the Oratory-Youth Centre the constant reference point is the Valdocco Oratory. It reminds us of the **profound unity of our educational and evangelising project** and it encourages us to practise those most fundamental attitudes that give it life: educational sensitivity and passion for evangelisation.

The preventive criterion promotes positive experiences, motivates and tries to respond to the aspirations and the deepest interests of young people. The following elements, therefore, are to be highlighted:

- ▮ the Oratory-youth centre is open to all young people, *especially the poorest and those at risk*, who are often not able to integrate themselves in other structures or educational initiative;
- ▮ personal accompaniment sensitive to their deepest desires: *reason, affectivity and the search for God*;
- ▮ *an atmosphere of joy and celebration* which favours optimism and a positive outlook on life;
- ▮ *animation as an educational option* which is realised through the active presence of educators among the young, in openness to everyone and to every youngster in particular, in the liberating power of love and education, trusting in the individual and in the positive energies inherent in oneself;
- ▮ *creativity and the spirit of innovation* which transcends routine, indifference or conformism;
- ▮ *the sense of duty and responsibility* concretised in personal commitment and service to others. The Oratory-Youth Centre explores new avenues and pastoral methods to respond to the pressing needs of the numerous young people without, however, forgetting deeper formation processes for those who are open to a more engaging commitment.

There is consolidation of the unique experience of Don Bosco's pedagogy in the educational field. It offers **varied well-thought out invitations**

to groups and associations to serve the interests of the young people around whom it is organised: spontaneous groups, led by born leaders and inspired by their immediate interests; associated groups, with specific training programmes of various kinds: sports, culture, socio-political engagement, ecology, social communications, deeper religious formation, missionary experiences, internal animation, volunteering.

C *An education integrated within society to transform it*

The Oratory-Youth Centre EPC is part of and open to the local Church and the social milieu. It is a living cell of society and the Church, a community of faith and life. Through our dedicated work of education and the involvement of youth in these processes we collaborate mainly for the renewal of society, beginning **from local contexts and extending to other environments and structures.**

Therefore, in imparting education we pay special attention to:

- ▮ *sensitivity* to everything around us, overcoming the negative impact of conformism and indifference;
- ▮ the ability to *analyse the situation and re-awaken attitudes* of service and solidarity by taking up initiatives that help us discover the unhealthy social impact of the area on the young;
- ▮ the value of the *family* and the contribution that young people can offer;
- ▮ “*open door*” opportunities and availability of the structures (in consonance with the aims and objectives of the centre) for useful activities that benefit the local area;
- ▮ *ever-widening involvement* in the neighbourhood, city or the state and country, an active and critical engagement regarding the social conditions in which we live. The oratory community knows how to dialogue and network with existing institutions in its relationship with the neighbourhood.

The Oratory-Youth Centre, being a **presence of the Church**, calls for an effective shared responsibility in the various structures of participation (the parish pastoral council and/or region council) and adapts the SEPP in keeping with the diocesan pastoral plan. Since the Oratory-Youth Centre is a Salesian pastoral presence in the world of the young, all its educative and pastoral programmes are particularly significant: it brings the Church closer to young people and promotes their evangelisation within a shared pastoral mission (see this Chapter 7, 2.4.4/b).

D *An experience of vocational maturity*

Certain dynamics come into play in the wonderful aspect of individual formation which the pedagogy of education and accompaniment in the Oratory-Youth Centre should encourage. **The local Oratory-Youth Centre SEPP envisages the service of accompaniment for all young people.** Spiritual direction cultivated through prayer, the pedagogy of the personal project of life, gradually matures one's discernment for the choices to be made: stable commitment to others, the role parents play, conscious exercise of one's profession, other ministries and apostolic services of the Church. Accompaniment of past Oratory-Youth Centre members is also important in view of their integration into social life and the life of the Church.

The Oratory-Youth Centre promotes a *culture of vocations* through volunteer experiences: holidays, mission camps, classes for children and older youth, support and solidarity in the neighbourhood community, caring for the environment and other similar proposals.



Systematic pastoral animation of the Oratory-Youth Centre

A *Main interventions of the proposal*

- 1 The Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre is a home open to every teenager and young person in the area: **a physical point of reference.** The educational environment is the result of a series of significant contacts, real names of real people and their histories, and of the quality of human relationships. "The oratory environment" is not only the result of an open-door policy for the young or that they have everything at

their disposal. The value of the Salesian Oratory-Youth Centre is that it educates through personal accompaniment of the individual who undergoes processes of growth and is the target of educational and pastoral initiatives.

2 Salesian assistance is the genuine closeness, affection and effectiveness of the educators for young people in places where they come alive, including outside the Oratory-Youth Centre: it is the Salesian way of encouragement and pedagogy as we carry out our mission. The active and animating presence of the Salesians and their lay collaborators among the young is an excellent form of education and evangelisation (*GC24*, no.131).

3 The many proposals, activities and experiences that characterise Salesian ministry in the Oratory require a coordinated and unified animation. Some of the fundamental criteria for this are aimed at promoting *various activities, formation groups* according to their age and interests, and youth groups as part of the Salesian Youth Movement.

The oratory is a *manifold and varied offering* (sports, recreational, cultural, social, and ecological) which responds to the most significant aspects for the developmental process of the young and where they most come alive. So among the more specific activities of the Oratory-Youth Centre there will be games and sports, be spontaneous or organised, and everything that concerns culture, music, theatre and social communication, in their varied expressions; hikes and tourism for youth, camps, field trips, activities of solidarity and of a missionary character.

It is important to involve *young people in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities* through various groups and committees. It is good that all the activities be well-articulated and coordinated so they can develop their inherent educational possibilities in the young. Everything must be consistent with *the objectives* envisaged in the Oratory-Youth Centre SEPP.

It is necessary to coordinate times, resources and educational approaches at the Oratory-Youth Centre together with those of other sectors of the Salesian presence.

4 The quality of systematic formation comes from dedication and continuous effort at educational qualification, both Christian and

Salesian, of individuals and resources. Only under these conditions can young leaders assume responsibility. Formation programmes for leaders, leaders' camps, courses, retreats, gatherings and other formative activities on such themes as education, culture, Salesian, must be connected with daily life experiences.

B *Structures of participation and responsibility*

Everyone shares responsibility for animation but some specific roles can be highlighted.

» *Local animation*

The **local Oratory-Youth Centre Coordinator** ought not minimise involvement and shared responsibility of other members of the Centre but rather encourage them, opening channels for their own development. The Coordinator will be a Salesian or a lay person with a vocation to work competently among the young, someone who is sympathetic towards them. The Coordinator will demonstrate apostolic spirit, an ability for personal and deep relationships with others in the team, a stimulating presence among the young, creativity and a determination to renew proposals and infuse enthusiasm. The Coordinator will keep the team working together and will show interest in their growth in faith.

In line with the Salesian community, the Coordinator promotes the SEP which is developed, implemented and evaluated with the EPC, animates educators working in the Oratory-Youth Centre and the various groups and commissions, promotes collaboration with other like-minded players of the locality and the Church, guarantees the insertion of the Oratory-Youth Centre in the local parish community.

The **leadership group**, an integral part of the EPC, is a point of reference for young people. Educators at the Oratory-Youth Centre include group leaders, sports coaches and workshop instructors. As educators they work closely with each other and continue their own formation.

Animation processes are also coordinated through other formation bodies. Among these is the Oratory-Youth Centre Council or **EPC Council** (cf. GC24, no.161). Its composition and functioning respond to dynamic

criteria which ensure continuity and are in line with the directives of the Provincial and his Council (cf. GC24, no.171).

Its main responsibilities are to evaluate and promote the annual pastoral project on the basis of the main demands of the youth and the guidelines of the local SEPP; to coordinate the various educational aims and objectives of associations and groups, and ensure coordination and integration between the different pastoral initiatives; to promote Salesian associations, the sharing of information and coordination among various groups and associations; to maintain a close relationship with the locality and with all those who work for the education of the young, encouraging appropriate and adequate response to situations of marginalisation and risk. Commissions in the Council and under its control, may be set up, with specific responsibilities for sectors of activity.

The Oratory-Youth Centre plan should encourage **participation arrangements for families**. Therefore, according to local need for coordination, the families of those frequenting the oratory also share responsibility. Leadership roles for young people are always to be encouraged.

Along with the SEPP, there are elements of local organisation to be found in practical **statutes and/or rules/regulations**. These specify on whom the institution depends and the Centre's legal representation; the individual in charge, appointed by the above-mentioned institution; other membership bodies and their competence, both of the individuals and collectively; the relationship between these bodies and leadership by the Salesian work, as well as relationship with families and civil and Church bodies.

» **Provincial / national animation**

The **Provincial Commission** which accompanies the Oratory-Youth Centre is part of the Youth Ministry leadership in the Province. The Coordinator and members of this Commission ensure the development, implementation and evaluation of the Provincial Educative and Pastoral Plan of Oratory-Youth Centres in accordance with the provincial SEPP.

For a good overall animation network there is need for **teamwork among the various Provincial commissions**: Oratory-Youth Centres, Schools, Parishes, Salesian Youth Movements (SYM), Vocation Ministry,

Mission Animation and Volunteer Services, Social Communication. The Provincial Formation Commission ensures that young Salesians involved in running and animating the Oratory-Youth Centre as their apostolate are also accompanied.

It is particularly important to have a *Planning and Development Office in the Province* involved in animation and coordination of this sphere of the Salesian mission of the province, in order to ensure sustainability of the project in collaboration with the Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry.

At the national level, where there are two or more Provincial commissions for the Oratory-Youth Centre, they should coordinate and operate according to a shared project and be part of broader networks. The Oratory and Youth Centre apostolate is not confined to one or other neighbourhood around town. Networking calls for an extensive coordination involving settings where decisions affecting youth policy are taken or discussed: the public forum, the work scene, child and other youth organisation (those which foster education, social activity, training and promotion of volunteer services, socio-cultural animation, leisure experiences).

2 2

THE SALESIAN SCHOOL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE (VTC)

2 2 1

The original nature of the Salesian school and VTC

The Salesian Vocational Training Centre and the school came into existence in Valdocco to meet specific needs of youth and integrate them within **an overall project of education and evangelisation of the young, especially those most in need**. Motivated by a desire to ensure their dignity and their future, Don Bosco set up trade workshops, at the same time, helping his youngsters find work and entering into contracts for them with a view to preventing exploitation. The Salesian Brother vocation enriched and enhanced this service.

This is the matrix of the current VTC which is concerned with promoting the human, Christian and professional formation of the young. This proposal responds to the predispositions, abilities and perspectives of



“It was Don Bosco who sent his sons to the state universities with possibilities to learn secular subjects. Don Bosco had very clear ideas on the unity of the human person and, consequently, the need for an integral education. He knew, in fact, that a pastoral action, at the same time, formed honest citizens and good Christians. In this sense, he saw the school as a providential moment of formation”

[CG20, NO.234]

many of them who at the end of their basic training, **wish to get a job**. Vocational training is an effective tool for holistic human development and an effective preventive measure for youth problems, as well as promoting Christian leadership in society and development in the business world.

Ever attentive to the needs of the young, Don Bosco extended his commitment by developing the Salesian school. He sensed that **the school was an essential tool for education**, a meeting point between culture and faith.

We consider the school as a privileged *cultural mediation* in education; an institution for the formation of personality which we cannot do without because it conveys a concept of the world, the human person and of history (cf. *The Catholic School*, no.8). The school environment has developed considerably in the Congregation in response to the needs of the young people themselves, of society and of the Church. It has become a movement of educators firmly established in the school area.

There are also **Pre-Vocational Training Centres** with a special set-up and varied proposals: career guidance, education and training, updating, upgrading, integration and social and work reintegration, promotion of social-minded enterprise. They contribute to the personal success of each individual and cater to a wide range of target groups: young people in their compulsory schooling stage, young people and adults seeking employment; young people in problematic situations or school drop-outs; migrants or apprentices. These include a highly personalised opportunity to facilitate re-entry into formal schooling or to be initiated into work. In fact, this pre-vocational training includes a series of provisions designed to make individuals aware of the working environment and prepare them to better confront their subsequent entry into the new occupation.

Some provinces offer the **service of a boarding school for boys** attending schools/VTC. The boarding schools have a residential facility that allows the students to stay through. It is a conducive environment for study in a climate of peaceful coexistence. The boys are constantly accompanied by a team of educators. The figure of the educator is of great importance in such institutions: assisting and counselling students during the hours of study and recreation; sharing meals with them and accompanying them during the day. In some cases, the educator takes care of the human and cultural formation which sustains their daily study. The daily programme is well-planned to ensure school attendance, study, recreation, wholesome sports and spiritual activities.



The Educative and Pastoral Community of the Salesian school/VTC



The importance of the EPC of the Salesian school/VTC

In the decades between the end of the twentieth and early twenty-first century there was a shift from an institutional educational model to a community educational model, from a model where education was delegated to certain consecrated people (religious, teachers) to a model of active participation by everyone involved in the educational process. The **EPC is the new body with responsibility for education and the new educational environment.** *Unity of purpose and conviction* on the part of all members makes the working of the SEPP easier and more effective in Salesian schools and VTCs.

We recognise the value of the vocational training centre and the school as areas where the *Gospel enlightens culture and allows itself to be challenged by it.* It creates a successful integration between the educational process and the process of evangelisation. This integration provides an important educational alternative in the face of the cultural, ethical and religious pluralism of society. The socio-political and cultural reality, the new guidelines for renewal of schools in different countries and likewise within the schools themselves, present new challenges and complex difficulties. **Concrete well-developed criteria and strategies are needed to help the SEPP develop so that it can deal with such complexity.**

B *Membership of the Salesian school/VTC EPC*

The students are the primary players in the formation process:

They participate in a creative way to develop and implement it at through its various stages; they grow in relational skills through their schooling and formation. By responding to the explicit need for young people to receive a serious cultural and vocational preparation, the Salesian school/VTC urges them to think about the meaning of life. The Salesian school/VTC sets forth the roadmap, the activities and initiatives which respond effectively to that concern.

In the words of Don Bosco, **educators** create a “family” together with the young, a youthful community wherein the interests and experiences of young people are the basis of everything that comes under the heading of education. The teachers not only teach, but “assist”, work, study and pray together with the pupils. They are willing to be with the young, capable of empathising with them and their problems: “*Teachers in the classroom and brothers in the courtyard*” (Don Bosco).

Among the educators, we include *the teaching staff*, Salesians and lay who are fully involved in an educational and pastoral role, according to the Salesian project and according to their professional competence:

- ▮ the *choice of the laity* is the manifestation of a careful and thoughtful decision that demands balance, seriousness and integrity of life: lay people who assume their educational commitment joyfully, and are open to the pedagogical aims of the Salesian school or VTC. They have professional competence, are interested in systematic updating, and take an active part in planning, implementation and evaluation processes. Their professional touch enhances interpersonal relationships and is characterised by a fundamental ethical dimension, understood as a personal testimony that helps students imbibe values. Lay teachers contribute their experience of lay Christian life which they express culturally and professionally in their life choices, knowledge and activities, including various parallel and extra-curricular activities;
- ▮ in turn, *religious teachers* testify to their experiences as consecrated individuals, stimulating new ways of confronting

culture and education according to a Christian outlook on life, humanity and history.

The **administrative and ancillary staffs** contribute to education through the care they exercise for the school or VTC, their style of relationships and the proper functioning of logistic and organisational detail.

Parents, directly responsible as they are for their children's growth, dialogue with their educators; they play a personal part, through various opportunities for dialogue with the school/VTC in planning and evaluation, and planning leisure activities.

Don Bosco's Preventive System is inspired by the family and is practised in a family atmosphere. It is part of our schools and our VTCs, serving as model of relationship and growth for parents in their dialogue with their children.



The educative and pastoral project of the Salesian school/VTC

The Salesian school/VTC are **two related structures of systematic formation with their own characteristics**. There is no true Salesian school that does not aim at preparing the young for work. Nor is there a true Salesian VTC which does not take into account the systematic development of culture. The educator's task is the art of thinking about the contents of his/her teaching from the point of view of the holistic development of the young and their personal growth.

It is appropriate here to briefly recall some essential features of the educative and pastoral practices that make the Salesian school/VTC an *excellent means of formation*, a valuable factor in development of the people and a setting for *effective evangelisation*.



Inspiration from Gospel values and an invitation to faith

The urgency of evangelisation in our educational institutions is to be underlined. We are part of the *VTC and Catholic school* scene with the pedagogical legacy we have inherited from St John Bosco, enriched by its successive development (cf. GC21, no.130).

It is necessary for every educational institution offering an educational service to remain open to shared values in the contexts where it is present. This fosters openness and a deeper appreciation of religious and transcendent experiences. It re-considers the Gospel message as it comes into contact with the variety of languages and the questions arising out of the local cultures. Therefore:

- all the activities are enlightened by the *Christian conception of life of which Christ is the centre* (cf. *The Catholic School*, no.33);
- it directs *cultural content and the whole educational enterprise* according to a vision of humanity, the world and its history inspired by the Gospel (cf. *The Catholic School*, no.34);
- it fosters the *sharing of pastoral and educational values* expressed especially through the SEPP (cf. *The Catholic School*, no.66);
- it fosters Catholic identity through the *testimony* of teachers and the presence of a *community of believers* giving life to the process of evangelisation (cf. *The Catholic School*, no.53).

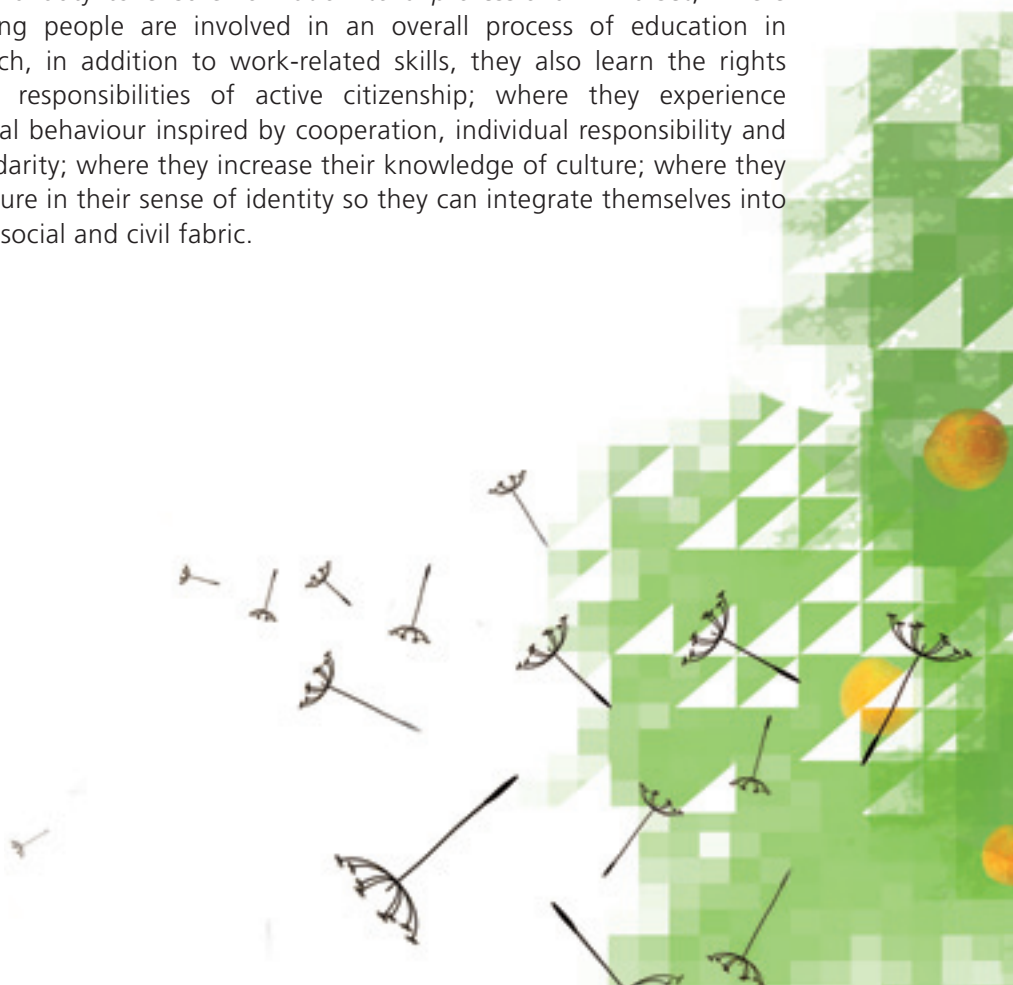
B *An efficient and quality education*

Among the many ways through which evangelisation takes place, we Salesians give preference to those processes in which the educational experience is acknowledged, where its well-defined processes are assured. In a very general sense, education is “planned” (specific aims, defined roles, adequate experience) and a team effort (EPC). With this in mind, Salesian schools/VTCs offer an educational and cultural proposal of quality in which:

- ▮ the dynamics of teaching and learning are based on a *solid educational base*;
- ▮ *continuous critical attention* is given to the phenomena of culture, work and social communication;
- ▮ it offers a well-ordered *pedagogical and methodological approach* that fosters in the young the discovery of their project of life;

- D it has a developed human and Gospel outlook on *work*, which is not understood as merely something to be done as part of social organisation, but as a privileged form of communication, self-expression, self-fulfilment, of ever new interpersonal and social relationships, and a personal contribution to the good of the world in which one lives and works;
- D it guarantees a continuous updating of the *vocational qualification and of the Salesian identity* of all members of the EPC through systematic processes of ongoing formation;
- D it encourages an appropriate pedagogy and a planned educational activity by ensuring a close relationship between *educational, teaching, and pastoral goals*.

It is a duty to ensure *formation to a professional mind-set*, where young people are involved in an overall process of education in which, in addition to work-related skills, they also learn the rights and responsibilities of active citizenship; where they experience social behaviour inspired by cooperation, individual responsibility and solidarity; where they increase their knowledge of culture; where they mature in their sense of identity so they can integrate themselves into the social and civil fabric.



C Salesian pedagogy

The Salesian school/VTC reaches its goals through **Don Bosco's style and approach to education** (GC21, no.131). The following elements in practice provide the typical features of our educational centres:

- animating, guiding and co-ordinating things in an *oratorian* way, thus making the institution a family where the young feel "at home" (C. 40);
- emphasising *personal* relationships in education based on trust, dialogue and the presence (assistance) of the educators among the young;
- taking on board the *integrity of life of the young*, where educators share their interests and promote leisure activities like theatre, sports, music and art;
- preparing them to *responsibly assume* active citizenship in family life, civil society and the Church community.

D Social function and care for those most in need

The educational programmes are open to joint ventures with other partners or agencies and can be coordinated by the school/VTC. Educators accompany **the integration of young people into whatever situation they face**, in collaboration with like-minded educational and formative agencies. The full inclusion of young into their locality and their taking up responsibility represent a goal in their journey of receiving an all-rounded education in the Salesian school/VTC. Our schools/VTCs aim to contribute to building up a more just society worthy of the human being. For this to happen:

- they seek to establish themselves in *the more working-class* localities and preference is given to the *young who are most needy*;
- they reject all *discrimination or exclusion*;
- they give priority to *accompaniment for all* rather than selection of the best, as a criterion;



- they promote systematic *social formation* of their members;
- they endorse the idea of a *just inclusion of young people into the working world* and seeing them receive educational support while maintaining a systematic contact with the world of business;
- they become centres of animation and cultural and educational services for the betterment of the environment, with special emphasis on curricula, specialisations and programmes which meet the *needs of youth in the locality* (cf. GC21, nos.129, 131);
- they show *empathy and solidarity*, making people and local structures available, offering development services open to all, and they collaborate with other educational and social institutions;
- they encourage our *past pupils* to have a significant presence in the world, where they are active and purposefully involved in cultural, educational and professional dialogue locally and in the local Church.

"A Salesian school should be for poorer people: this should be reflected in its sitting, its culture, its curriculum and its choice of students. Services to meet local needs should be provided, such as courses for cultural and professional training, literacy and remedial programmes, scholarships and other initiatives"

[R. 14]



Systematic pastoral animation of the Salesian school/VTC

A *Main interventions of the proposal*

- 1 In the Salesian tradition people, time, space, relationships, teaching, study, work and all other activities interact in a climate of peace, joy and commitment: **this is the educational environment.**

Educational relationships need to be based on reasonable demands, the value of daily life and on educational accompaniment. In addition to the attention given to study, research and work, it is important in educational terms to respect and look after tools, equipment and the facilities where scholastic and professional life unfolds. This is part of the sense of belonging.

The *playground* is an inescapable and central factor for the Salesian school/VTC. It is not just a place for activities and initiatives, but also **a time for building personal relationships through animation, games and sports**. Every Salesian school/VTC is called to safeguard times and places where students can meet. The EPC guarantees assistance of young people in the spirit of Don Bosco.

- 2 The organised content of various disciplines** is offered as knowledge to be acquired, truth to be discovered, techniques to be mastered, answers to deep-seated questions, values to be acquired. This is aided by how clearly know-how is presented, the teaching approach, and above all the underlying cultural ideas being presented.

This means that, on the one hand, we give importance to human experience underlying the different disciplines, helping young people to grasp, appreciate and assimilate *the values inherent* in the facts presented and explored, and on the other, that interest is shown in *universal culture*, through expressions of the different peoples and the heritage of values shared by all humanity.

We need to be absolutely careful that we avoid the risk of a scientific-technological shift playing down or even excluding reference to the fundamental values which are the foundation stone of knowledge. Values education, ideals and research are some of the educational aspects that form the backbone of an all-round education.

The central problem of the school is its cultural setting or approach: its holistic reflection of the human person. In the daily life of the classroom or the laboratory, it offers a *complete anthropological vision inspired by Christian humanism*.

Teachers of the various disciplines introduce the students to a lively and vital encounter with their cultural and professional patrimony in

dialogue with Christian humanism. In this context, particular attention is given to choice of textbooks and other teaching materials.

Educators in the Salesian school/VTC set up *formative programmes* imbued with the contribution of Christian and Salesian humanism and issues central to the overall growth of the young: the *formation of conscience, education to affectivity and socio-political education* and specifically, *religious formation*. We believe that the religious dimension should be presented in the overall context of the knowledge which forms the basis of the formation of children and the young.

In fact **the teaching of the Catholic religion** considered as an essential element of education, is part of the school curricula of many nations. With awareness of issues relating to the Christian formation of young people, there are processes for periodic planning and evaluation to improve the teaching of religion, *an important opportunity for cultural education*. The teaching of religion in schools must aim at proposing what is for believers the object of faith. Its ultimate aim is to form people in a habitual religious way of thinking, that is, on events that punctuate the human being's religious experience. The school offers a systematic and critical understanding of religious facts, as it does with all other cultural facts, through educational discussion aimed at a systematic and critical understanding of religious affairs in human experience. It is a teaching that helps young people to discover the religious dimension of our humanity and seek the ultimate meaning of life. It offers guidance towards a choice that is conscious and free for a challenging and coherent life. It offers an open and positive view of Christian teaching and its explicit proclamation. It fosters critical and positive dialogue with other areas of knowledge and with other religions. It reawakens the desire for ongoing education to the faith in the Christian community.

- 3 As a **teaching method** we choose a **personalised approach to what we offer by way of education, and mutual collaboration**. Hence, active teaching which develops a capacity for discovery in students and develops habits of creativity and autonomous cultural growth; an interdisciplinary approach whereby the different subject areas are complementary; evaluation of students' development processes, their capacity to learn and do research, not just look to final results.

- 4 Holistic education means rounding off school and training curricula with **other complementary, freely chosen activities which support them**. The Salesian school/VTC provides ample room for leisure activities (artistic, recreational, sports, cultural), leaning in the direction of a *school which also occupies out-of-school hours*.

The Salesian school/VTC makes room for, promotes and accompanies *different groups* (study-research, cultural, recreational, artistic, community service, volunteer services, Christian growth, vocational guidance, Christian commitment), recognising that they are a special form of education and evangelisation. Some schools/VTCs provide opportunity for informal meetings, dining rooms, music rooms etc. Yearly planning should set aside specific times for taking part in such activities.

It is very much part of the Salesian tradition to maintain contact with *our past pupils*, young people who have attended our schools/VTCs. We need to find the best ways for them to be involved as individuals are as a group.

One of the pillars of the identity of the Salesian school/VTC is a **clear and comprehensive spelling out of explicitly evangelising occasions**. The educative and pastoral proposal is translated into experiences and activities which are dear to the Salesian tradition:

- ▮ short *daily encounters* for everyone or for groups (the “Good morning”, words of welcome) inspired by the “Goodnight” practised by Don Bosco with his boys at Valdocco. The “Good morning” is a time for prayer and a wise interpretation of life which gradually encourages them to look at things from a Christian point of view;
- ▮ over the school year both staff and students are offered *formative and spiritual experiences*. These are preferably linked to the important seasons of the liturgical year and became favourable opportunities for growth in faith and evaluating one’s life in relation to the Christian message;
- ▮ faithful to what Don Bosco did with his boys at Valdocco, each school/VTC should plan specific moments of *prayer*

and celebration. Pupils belonging to other Christian denominations and other religions may also take part as opportunities for cultural integration and to become familiar with religious traditions of the country in which they live. The Eucharist and celebrations of the liturgical time or of local practices and traditions are an integral part of the educative and pastoral invitation. Special attention ought to be paid to times for celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation, which should find a place in the annual programme;

- time should be allotted during the school year for *celebrations and coming together*: opportunities for gratitude, education to shared responsibility and also a sign of belonging. On such occasions, the families and other components of the EPC should be actively involved. Special emphasis ought to be given to celebration of Salesian feasts, opportunities for growth in family spirit and a sense of gratitude.

- 5 Young people who attend the Salesian school/VTC often find the family atmosphere there attractive. It is important, in animating the EPC, for educators to be always available for **personal encounter with students**. Taking into account the different developmental stages of the students, let educators in any sector offer *quality time and space for personal encounter* with the students, for review the progress each has made and to look ahead.

All the educators should be available for a personal chat, but some of this group should be especially dedicated to this service to the young. Psychological guidance is an important service.

- 6 **Formation and updating of teachers** are great opportunities for every educational institution and for those who work there. There is always a need for formation and updating our teachers in a way *that links faith, knowledge and life*, other than in method and their disciplines. *It is this which marks out the Salesian school as being professionally competent.* Therefore, the formation of teachers should see to good professional pedagogy and Salesian educational style, Christian spirituality in practice, teachers who stand out for their human and welcoming quality. Greater attention should be

given in their formation to *education as a ministry* within the specific dynamic of the school.

Initiatives at local as well as provincial level should be regularly planned, in the context of a Provincial formation plan for teachers which address their needs, paying particular attention to the formation of *newly inducted teachers*. These courses, days of reflection and formation, where the teachers of the Salesian school/VTC are expected to participate, will involve them in a process which includes an understanding of Don Bosco and the Preventive System. There should also be sharing concerning practical aspects of method and teaching in the Salesian tradition.

- 7 All the components and interventions that make up the school/VTC SEPP should be *part of the broader and overarching Educational Project*, in line with government legislation. **SEPP pastoral planning** expresses and defines the identity of the school, explaining the Gospel values which inspire it, translating them into practical and precise terms. The SEPP is the criterion for all choices and interventions (school programme, choice of teachers and textbooks, lessons plan, criteria and evaluation procedures). It *highlights the pastoral intent animating the entire EPC, which is decisive in all the elements and articulation of the school/VTC*.

As educational institutions, our Salesian centres are part of an historical context and defined by national laws which define the system of organisation and teaching, ordinarily recognising and endorsing our aims and objectives for the school/VTC, our principles and the values that characterise them. The SEPP is our “identity card”. It is here that the charism inspiring our educational service is presented (the original motivation must continue to enlighten our work today): the concept of holistic education; the EPC as our model of the educative community; our values of reference; our educational method and preferred options in any given circumstance.

The identity of our Salesian school as written up in the local SEPP will constitute a common programme for all the students of the school and each individual class. The SEPP, which lays out explicitly evangelising activity in pastoral planning is fully consistent with

the culture of the educational curriculum (educational choices and teaching in general); it is also consistent with the wider extra-curricular and organisational offerings, together with management proposals (formation programmes, activities, educative initiatives, organisation and management of structures, personnel and school resources). Pastoral activity is not isolated but permeates the entire work of education.

B *Structures of participation and responsibility*

» *Local animation*

Structures of participation and shared responsibility are designed to create ideal conditions for ever greater communion, sharing and collaboration among the different components of the EPC. The aim is to implement the Educative and Pastoral Project and see to growth in collaboration between teachers, pupils and parents. These structures vary according to the country and its school legislation. This is why every province should define *concrete and appropriate organisation procedures, internal functioning and responsibilities in its schools/VTCs*, keeping in mind the following elements:

- ▮ first, the **EPC Council for the School/VTC**, in accordance with the provisions of each province, is a body which animates and directs all Salesian activities through reflection, dialogue, planning and review of all educational and pastoral apostolates (GC24, nos.160-161, 171);
- ▮ secondly, **the teaching body** is responsible for planning education guidelines in terms of proposal, discussion, decision and evaluation in accordance with the Educative and Pastoral Project. Every school/VTC also ensures the teaching body has certain structures: *commissions (or teams or working groups) and departments (or different disciplines)* with a view to planning, programming, and implementation of educational initiatives;
- ▮ finally, the **Pastoral Team**, directed by the pastoral coordinator, provides leadership for evangelising activities, keeping in mind

their effective integration into the educational process. The criteria for the composition of the Team are agreed upon at the local level. Some students are also members of the team.

» *Provincial / national animation*

The organisational structures envisaged for Salesian schools/VTCs exist at provincial, national and international levels. They can be **civilly recognised legal entities**. This network of cooperation at different levels constitutes an active presence in the school and vocational training system, interacting with the production sector, and public and private entities for research and development in vocational training, other social partners and trade unions, as well as with other national and international bodies interested in educational processes and work policies.

2 3 SALESIAN PRESENCE IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

2 3 1 *The original nature of Salesian presence in Higher Education*

Salesian presence in the Higher Education field is relatively recent.

Although the first higher education institute goes back to 1934 (St Anthony's College, Shillong, India), an awareness of the importance of this level of education and the development of the Salesian presence in it was realised only during the final decades of the last century, with substantial numbers of people from the middle and lower classes worldwide getting access to higher education.

The Salesian Higher Education presence has grown in number and quality due to the process of reflection and networking of our universities which the Rector Major, Fr Juan Edmundo Vecchi, initiated in 1997 as a service of the Generalate for the Provinces and the institutions themselves (cf. Fr Juan Vecchi, AGC 362, *"Documents and news: A service for Salesian Universities"*). This service is provided by IUS and its general coordination, representing the willingness of the Salesian Congregation to guide and improve development of this new type of presence among the young. As

a result of the process carried out the Salesian Congregation amended Article 13 of the Regulations, recognising that **presence in higher education is part of its mission**:

The school, vocational training centres and institutions of higher education promote the integral development of the young through the assimilation and critical revision of the culture and education of the faith in the Christian transformation of society (R. 13; CF. GC26, NO.122).

Salesian presence in this field today is quite vast and diverse. We operate through management and promotion of *academic centres* – under the direct responsibility of the Salesian Congregation or in shared responsibility with other church institutions – management and animation of *colleges and hostels for university students*, and the presence of many Salesians with managerial, teaching, research responsibilities or who provide leadership in chaplaincy or similar ministry in institutions of higher education, be they Salesian, Church or Civil.

Reflection on and guidelines for the Salesian Congregation's presence in higher education affects the institutes, colleges and university residences under its responsibility in a particular way, since these are structures that allow the development of a more systematic educational and pastoral proposal with the Salesian charism at its core.



Salesian Higher Education Institutes

Under the title of Salesian Institutes for Higher Education (IUS) we have **a range of higher level study and tertiary sector centres** of which the Salesian Congregation is title-holder and is responsible, directly or indirectly. The different social conditions and education systems of the countries where they are ensure that the centres present great diversity not only in management procedures but also from the point of view of academic degrees conferred and the types of courses offered: university, university study-centres, polytechnics, colleges, faculties, institutes, colleges or specialisation centres.

There are several reasons for IUS coming into being: the concern to offer and guarantee higher education for Salesian religious;

transition to higher education as a natural result of the growth and evolution of middle and senior high schools known for their academic excellence and education; the need to continue to accompany young people at a time in life when they are making fundamental decisions about their future, and providing university access for young working class people (cf. *Identity of Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, nos.3, 19). Taken together, they reflect the belief that we are able to offer society something of quality through our higher education centres enriching it with mature individuals, competent professional and active citizens.

The nature and purpose of this type of Salesian presence has been defined by these institutions themselves through the already mentioned process of reflection and networking. This made it possible for a series of documents to be developed and then receive approval from the Rector Major and his Council. These now constitute the framework of the IUS: *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education* (Rome, 2003) and *Policies for the Salesian Presence in Higher Education 2012-2016* (Rome, 2012). While the former defines the identity and nature of this type of presence, the latter lays down concrete operating guidelines for the development of institutes in a given period.

IUS institutes are defined as “institutions of higher learning that have a **Christian inspiration, and a markedly Salesian Catholic character**” (*Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.14). Assuming the scientific tradition and the academic structure of the university, they offer educational values according to the Salesian charism at this level, thus they are higher education institutes with a specific identity, both within the Church and society.

IUS seeks to be “a Christian presence in the university world confronting the great problems of society and culture” (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 13) as part of the Church, given that the Salesian Congregation’s presence is “characterised by their preferential option in favour of young people from the lower classes, by the clear Salesian identity of their academic communities, by the Christian and Salesian orientation of their institutional project, and by their educative and pastoral goals” (*Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.18).

IUS — as is every Salesian presence — is under the responsibility of the Province, which promotes supports and gives these institutes a specific function within its OPP. Each IUS institute is a significant presence of the Province in the service of the mission and of the other types of Salesian presences in its region.

A *The Academic Community in Salesian Institutes of Higher Education*

» Importance of the Academic Community

As such it has its own institutional academic and management autonomy in accordance with the mission and purpose assigned to it by the Church and the Salesian Congregation (cf. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 12; *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.21), as well as the specific scope assigned by the Province and shaped by its statutory acts and regulations.

The IUS academic community is a party in the Salesian mission, just as the EPC is in other Salesian settings and works. Its members share responsibility for developing of a comprehensive educational program for young people and act responsibly to meet the needs and expectations of the society they are part of.

The community is configured according to the values of Christian humanism and the Salesian charism set out in the Institutional Project. As noted by "*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*", "the source of its unity springs from a common dedication to truth, a common vision of human dignity and, ultimately, from the person and message of Christ" (no.21).



"Every IUS, as an institution for higher education, is an academic community composed of teachers, students, and administrators. In a systematic, critical, and proactive way, it promotes the development of the human person and of the cultural heritage of society, through research, teaching, higher and ongoing education, and diverse services offered to local, national and international communities"

(IDENTITY OF THE SALESIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, NO.15)

» *Members of the Academic Community*

As indicated by the reference documents, the academic community is made up of various members, Salesians and lay people, who cooperate and share responsibility for the achievement of institutional objectives. To achieve its goal, the academic community requires of each of its members:

- identification with the charism and the Salesian educational method, shown especially in the Preventive System of Don Bosco;
- focus on the circumstances of young people and an ability to relate to young university students;
- identification with and commitment to the Institutional Project. This presupposes and requires ethical, professional consistency on the part of every member of the academic community. This consistency is both theoretical and practical, with the values and principles contained therein;
- the skills needed to perform one's duties in the university;
- compliance with the respective functions and roles assigned to each member of the community (students, teachers, management, administrative and ancillary staff);
- care for and promotion of an environment in which the human individual is central, and in which dialogue and cooperation are the basis of the educational method.

Educators and all members of the academic community employ their personal qualities and skills in order to achieve the educational and pastoral goal (cf. *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.31): each individual employs his or her respective skills in the specific assigned task within the academic community. The academic community needs:

- ▮ **lecturers** furnished with the professional, pedagogical and social skills, whose academic work, be it research or teaching, is consistent with the values of the Gospel;

- ▮ **students** ready to learn and develop as human beings, who are committed to and share responsibility for the cultural, scientific and social values promoted by the Institutional Project;
- ▮ **administrative and ancillary staff** who a vital support to the institution through their work offer and thereby contribute to the formation of the young university students;
- ▮ the **Management**, Salesians and lay people, who are able to articulate the challenges and responsibilities of the university and lead the community in developing and carrying out the Institutional Project.

In order to achieve its mission and obtain quality results, according to the aims and objectives of the university's Catholic and Salesian identity, **each IUS institute should ensure the management and development of its staff**, especially its teaching and managerial staff. This implies careful selection, training and support to ensure identification with and commitment to the Institutional Project (cf. *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.29).

B *The Institutional Project*

As an institution of higher education, **each IUS institute should carry out research, coordinate teaching, and disseminate knowledge and culture**. Each one, however, does it “through an appropriate *institutional project* — cultural and scientific, educative and pastoral, organisational and normative — which addresses the needs of the local situation, and thus applies and gives shape to the identity described above” (*Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.26).

The Institutional Project specifies the way in which the institution



“Religious Orders and Congregations bring a specific presence to the Universities. By the wealth and diversity of their charism - especially their educational charism – they contribute to the Christian formation of teachers and students”

(PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNIVERSITY AND IN THE UNIVERSITY CULTURE, II, NO.1)

contextualises the Salesian charism in response to the needs of the national higher education system and the circumstances in its neighbourhood. The mission and local context of each IUS institute gives it its own particular character, accordingly, amidst the institutes of higher education in the same local area.

In addition to clearly defining the nature, mission and institutional goals, the Project sets out the options and criteria for research, selecting disciplines and training areas and methods of transmitting knowledge and culture. In line with the Overall Provincial Plan (OPP), it evaluates the choices to be preferred locally, sectors and social areas to encourage in consonance with the Salesian mission and the needs of the local Church of which it is a significant presence in the university field. **The Institutional Project is a true constitutional charter that guides the life of the whole institute.**

Development and practical application of the Institutional Project are realised progressively through a series of tools and procedures. These ensure that orientation, direction, management and operation are in accordance with the specific identity of the institute (cf. *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.28). First, *the Strategic Plan and the Operational Plan* that accompany the gradual realisation of the Institutional Project. These define strategic objectives, goals, action plans and identified resources; institutional evaluation and accreditation, such as orderly procedures to ensure continuous improvement of the institute and actual achievement of objectives and purposes as indicated in the Educative and Pastoral Plan. Finally, the Institutional Project determines *the organisational structure and the body of laws* (statutes and regulations) that characterise university life and institutional culture.

C *The educative and pastoral proposal*

As has already been stated, **“the Institutional Project of each IUS is guided by a clear educative and pastoral purpose**, according to the characteristics of Salesian pedagogy and spirituality” (*Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.24). This goal becomes an educational and pastoral proposal addressed to all members of the academic community, particularly the students, in the desire to have an educational and cultural impact in society and the Church (cf. *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, nos.24, 31).

The educative and pastoral proposal is at the heart of the Institutional Project and is to be developed through the different processes and actions through which the institute carries out its functions of research, teaching and service to society. It is based on the Christian concept of the person and oriented according to Salesian values and pedagogy (cf. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* 49; *Identity of the Salesian Institutions of Higher Education*, no.22). In agreement with these principles, the educational and pastoral proposal promotes:

- ▮ a Gospel-inspired concept of the human being, putting the individual and his/her dignity at the centre of things;
- ▮ a constant quest for truth in the light of the Gospel, which puts knowledge at the service of the individual and society development;
- ▮ a vision of education that prepares people capable of critical judgement, with a comprehensive understanding of reality, the result of interdisciplinary knowledge and its integration;
- ▮ an understanding of professional life guided by an ethical conscience and open to responsibility and service to society;
- ▮ a dialogue between culture, science, and faith that can enlighten life in a Christian way thus promoting the inculturation of the Gospel.

The purpose of the educative and pastoral proposal is also manifested in **the desire to have an educational and cultural impact** on society and in the Church. It is achieved through a commitment to understanding society and its transformation, especially in those aspects that affect the situation of young people (cf. *Policies of the Salesian Presence in Higher Education from 2012 to 2016*, no.41). The social context is a constant reference point for the life and activities of the institute and is the testing ground for its educational proposals. It is a constant challenge for its relevance and significance.

This service is developed through scientific research, the study of contemporary social and human problems, critical analysis of culture, the promotion of the common good and social justice according to the principles of the Church's social teaching. It is also promoted through formation of men and women capable of assuming responsibility and commitment to service in the Church and in society.

D *Systematic pastoral animation of Salesian Institutes of Higher Education*

The educative and pastoral proposal is put into practice and implemented in the various areas of the life and activities of the institute. It is particularly evident in its educational climate, its holistic approach to student formation, in the attention and pastoral care it offers members of the community.

1 A key element of Salesian pedagogy is the **educational climate**. This is an abundance of stimuli and quality personal relationships that give currency to a set of values which make educative and pastoral activity possible. In Salesian educative praxis this demands:

- ▮ family spirit characterised by a welcoming attitude and availability for personal encounter;
- ▮ fraternal relationships where mutual respect, friendliness, and readiness for dialogue are evident;
- ▮ that the life of individuals and organisation of the institute reflect, in practice, the values proposed (solidarity, justice, freedom, equality, etc.);
- ▮ an environment rich in educational experience and initiative, which encourages growth in individuals;
- ▮ promotion and accompaniment of groups and involvement through representative bodies;
- ▮ readiness to make room and physical structures available for encounter, communication and relationships between people.

2 The **proposal of holistic formation** is expressed through academic activity and the complementary initiatives that make up university life. To the extent that research, teaching and professional practice are carried out uniformly, a contribution is made to the creation of a structure of thought and development of policies, attitudes and skills that provide an all-rounded education for students. The wholeness and integrity of this proposal offers students the necessary personal growth

and cultural, scientific and professional preparation to ensure they achieve fullness of personality and a place in society.

The complete nature of the Institutional Project therefore requires special attention to the following components:

- ▮ development of an educational model integrating the values and principles of the Christian and Salesian humanistic vision, learning theories and methods, and the necessary teaching methods and resources;
- ▮ a curricular model that helps develop criteria and basic human attitudes, knowledge and skills relating to professional development and the range of skills that prepare individuals for life, professional work and their inclusion in society;
- ▮ a rigorous and scientific research model, curricula and contents of teaching, open to a transcendent vision of the human person and of life;
- ▮ interdisciplinary dialogue between different academic subjects including those of an ethical, religious and theological nature, to help students gain a comprehensive view of reality;
- ▮ the offer of a range of specific subjects of an ethical and religious nature in the curriculum at a scientific and pedagogical level, of equal academic value with other disciplines in the curriculum.

3 Complete human development offered by way of formation requires that **each individual receive pastoral attention and accompaniment.**

This complete approach means integrating the different dimensions of the person with transcendence and openness



“Pastoral ministry is that activity of the University which offers the members of the university community an opportunity to integrate religious and moral principles with their academic study and non-academic activities, thus integrating faith with life”

[EX CORDE ECCLESIAE 38]

to God. This implies developing a model of formation and ministry that:

- ▮ ensures the orientation and accompaniment of the individual in integrating the different dimensions of human, Christian, professional and social development;
- ▮ explicitly proclaims Jesus Christ and his Gospel, while accompanying those who freely wish to follow a path of Christian growth and maturity, through programmes of education in faith, liturgical and sacramental celebrations, and by helping them be part of and experiencing a community of faith;
- ▮ create the possibilities for dialogue and spiritual direction as a means of accompaniment for members of the community in their journey of faith and the deepening of their Christian calling;
- ▮ propose opportunities for reflection on the circumstances of youth today and on social, intercultural and inter-religious situations;
- ▮ offer formation proposals, services and tools which focus on young people in response to the situations and challenges posed by their status as university students;
- ▮ encourage experiences of Christian commitment and solidarity through community or volunteer services for the poor and needy;
- ▮ make places and structures available for coming together and growing as Christians: places which are welcoming, open to everyone for fellowship, reflection and prayer.

Pastoral ministry is something that runs across all processes and areas of activity in Salesian Institutes of Higher Education, guiding and reinforcing them. Proper organisation is needed to animate this, and means appointing people to carry out it such responsibility, develop appropriate activities, and see that services of individual pastoral accompaniment are managed efficiently.

233 University residences

The expansion of higher education systems in different countries, considered necessary for economic and social development as well as for consolidation of democracy, has meant significant access to higher education for young people from middle and lower classes. This has led to an increase not only in the number and types of higher education institutes, but also in **service facilities and hospitality which are essential to guarantee access to young people living away from study centres.**

The growing need to ensure that these young people receive hospitality, and, above all, a positive human, Christian and professional experience, has encouraged Salesian communities to create a variety of facilities for young college students away from home. In accordance with the higher education systems and the socio-economic circumstances of each country or region, they have developed university or college residences, either as separate structures close to the centres of studies, or integrated within the campus of Salesian institutes of higher education or within institutes run by others.

University colleges, unlike traditional boarding schools which are mainly residential, are centres outside the university structure that welcome students and offer them a formation programme. Many such colleges are the result of a restructuring of the Salesian mission and openness to the new needs of young people, especially in cities known for their great and traditional university structures. In these cases there has been a shift from the initial offer of board and lodging, made possible by renovation of existing buildings, to the development of proper environments that offer a complete human, Christian, academic and professional experience.



“Structures are often lacking for welcoming and supporting them and for community life. Many of them, transplanted far from their family to a strange town, suffer from loneliness. In addition, contact with the professors is often limited, and the students find themselves without guidance in face of problems of adjustment which they are unable to solve”

(PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNIVERSITY AND IN UNIVERSITY CULTURE, I, NO. 1)

University colleges, as separate structures from the university campus, are generally associated with a Salesian work which also involves other sectors (Oratory-Youth Centre, School, Parish, etc.) all of which are integrated under the guidance of the Salesian community responsible for the work. Its management is generally entrusted to a Salesian or layperson, accompanied by other staff.

University residences which take in students, are structures belonging to an institute of higher education. They are generally found within the campus and as well as offering accommodation and a supportive setting where students can live and study, allow them to engage in experiences on-campus, enjoying a whole range of academic services (library, areas of study and consultation) and formation opportunities (activities and programs of a cultural, sporting, religious and social nature) provided by the institution.

In addition to extracurricular activities carried out within the university, the residences offer students their own formation programmes – personal growth, spiritual, social and cultural development – integrating the value of the experience of living and sharing a project together with the services already offered on campus.

A *The Educative and Pastoral Community for university residences*

» *The importance of the EPC for university residences*

Inasmuch as these are Salesian educational presences, colleges and university residences are called on to promote a community which offers a formation programme and provides an educative and pastoral type of accompaniment.

In this kind of presence the EPC is made up of all stakeholders: Salesians and laity, managers, and young college students involved at various levels in animating the life of the community and in achieving its objectives.

» *Members of the EPC in university residences*

The organisation of the various services and achievement of the residence's educational objectives require involvement and shared responsibility of different members:

- ▮ **the Rector and the Salesian community** are responsible for the management and animation of the whole work or university institute as well as the residence that accommodates the students;
- ▮ **the one immediately in charge**, Salesian or lay person, who ensures guidance and management of the college or residence in the name of the community, and accompanies the formation programme;
- ▮ **tutors or educators** who in various ways are part of the community experience at the college or residence (counsellors, psychologists, administrators, chaplains, etc.);
- ▮ **students** who play an active part in their growth and formation, taking on specific roles and tasks in the life of the college or residence, according to their specific capacities and possibilities.

Building up such a community requires its members to engage in opportunities for communication and formation. It is particularly essential to promote student involvement in the life and animation of the college or residence through groups, advisory bodies or assemblies.

The Salesian community in particular is called upon to ensure a constant presence in the environment and life of the college or residence, providing young people with its testimony and the opportunity to experience that family spirit which Don Bosco so desired in all his houses.

B *The educative and pastoral proposal in colleges and university residences*

College residences not only offer students a welcoming place where they can live and study, but also **an offer of formation that allows them to grow as individuals, professionals and citizens**. These structures find direction through the SEPP, where objectives, reference personnel, contents, method and timing are defined.

The SEPP is the tool that brings together the various elements of this experience, the community and formation aspects that colleges and



“In response to the demands of university culture, many local Churches have taken appropriate action in various ways... Stimulus for a university pastoral action that is not limited to a general and undifferentiated ‘pastoral action for youth’, but which takes as its starting-point the fact that many young people are deeply influenced by the ‘university environment’. It is there, to a great extent, that they have their encounter with Christ and bear their witness as Christians. The aim is therefore to educate and accompany the young people, enabling them to live in faith the concrete reality of their milieu and their own activities and commitments”

(PRESENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE UNIVERSITY AND IN UNIVERSITY CULTURE, II, NO.3)

university residences offer to the young. As such it is a single proposal which integrates responses to their needs, demands arising from the experience of studying at the university, and values of Salesian spirituality and pedagogy.

Drawing up such a SEPP requires deep knowledge of the circumstances of young people and the peculiar dynamics that characterise university studies and subsequent employment. Special attention needs to be given to the transition from family life to the university environment and the need to develop new relationships and learn to live with other people. The same attention is given to adapting to the needs and the methods of university study, and the ability to integrate scientific and professional training with one's life and faith beliefs.

The educative and pastoral proposal contained in the SEPP provides a path of growth aimed at full human development, the formation of a Christian vision of life and a professional life open to solidarity. It brings together different dimensions needed to ensure a holistic educational experience for young people, among them being the following:

- ▮ human growth oriented towards full maturity, involving the ability to handle life in an autonomous and responsible way;
- ▮ the value of interpersonal relationships, living together and of service to others;

- ▮ growth in personal responsibility for study and formation;
- ▮ growing ability to reflect, discuss and be committed to the pursuit of truth;
- ▮ development of a notion of professionalism open to solidarity in the service of the most needy;
- ▮ spiritual growth through gradual awareness and experience of a personally and communally lived faith;
- ▮ discovering one's vocation and drawing up a project of life at the service of God in the Church and in society according to Gospel values.

C *Systematic pastoral animation in college and university residences*

Opportunities and experiences need to be offered students so they can put their educative and pastoral experience into practice. Of particular relevance are the following dimensions:

- 1 a life-inspiring environment** in an atmosphere of acceptance and family spirit that encourages serious commitment to study from the perspective of an all-rounded individual formation. To this end many colleges and residences offer a variety of settings in addition to accommodation, to support study and personal growth: chapel, study rooms and computer facilities, TV rooms, recreation rooms, meeting rooms, dining room, sports grounds, etc.;
- 2 times and places for communal sharing**, in which they learn to live together and share an experience of community;
- 3 personal accompaniment and guidance** (vocational, professional, work-related) that helps young students to live and integrate their different learning experiences;
- 4 shared formation programme** for the year, which encourages personal, social and cultural development. Cultural experiences and

contact with social situations are also offered to help with ethical awareness, responsibility and solidarity, especially towards the most needy in society. These experiences lean towards volunteer services as a life choice which reinforces growth as human beings and good Christians;

- 5 a faith formation programme based on the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality, through **spiritual direction and prayer occasions**, reflection on the Word of God and celebration of the Sacraments.

Where it is possible, the educative and pastoral proposal of the college or university residence should be in tune with campus ministry initiatives of the local Church offered through its various offices and agencies.

2 4

PARISHES AND SHRINES ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIANS

2 4 1

The original nature of the Salesian parish and shrine

Don Bosco's apostolic zeal for the poorest youth of Turin led him to create **a parish for young people without a parish**. During his time, Don Bosco accepted seven parishes. In 1887 he wrote a regulation on the proper functioning of the parish. He touched on issues that most concerned him: the priority of attention to the young especially the poor, and the identity of the Salesian parish priest who served in communion with the bishop and the diocesan clergy:

The sick, the poor and the children are the subjects of special concern (of the parish priests) (RESOLUTIONS OF THE FOURTH GENERAL CHAPTER, 1886).

Many years later, GC19 stated that the parish is the place for "an exemplary care of the youth community" (GC19, IX, no.3), and GC20 stated that "we find in the parish ministry vast possibilities and favourable conditions to fulfil the true purpose of our mission and, in particular, for the "education of poor and abandoned youth" (GC20, no.401). GC21 saw the parish as a work that allows us to position ourselves among young people in view of evangelisation in the style of the SEPP (cf. GC21, no.135). GC21

confirmed the priority of youth ministry and defined the characteristics of the Salesian parish (cf. GC21 nos.136-141).

In 1984, with the final approval of the renewed *Constitutions and Regulations of the Society of St Francis of Sales*, the parish was explicitly recognised as one of the sectors in which we fulfil our mission: “We carry out our mission also in the parishes; in this way we respond to the pastoral needs of the particular Churches in those areas which offer us adequate scope for service to the young and to the poor” (R. 25; cf. C. 42).

The option for young people in the parish entrusted to the Salesians is not exclusive or discriminatory, but a preferential option. This option is a precious gift for the mission in the whole ecclesial community.

2 4 2

The Educative and Pastoral Community of Salesian parishes and shrines

A

The importance of the EPC of the parish and shrine entrusted to the Salesians

The parish is the first communal instance in which the Church carries out the mission entrusted by Jesus in a well-defined socio-cultural context. *It is a large community of baptised believers*, “portion” of the universal Church, within the dynamics of diocesan ministry. The Christian community is the place where communion is experienced; the believer finds a home there.

Being a **community of communities**, the parish creates a



“The parish is, without doubt, the most important locus in which the Christian community is formed and expressed. This is called to be a fraternal and welcoming family where Christians become aware of being the people of God. In the parish, all human differences melt away and are absorbed into the universality of the Church. The parish is also the usual place in which the faith is born and in which it grows. It constitutes, therefore, a very adequate community space for the realization of the ministry of the word at once as teaching, education and life experience”

[GENERAL DIRECTORY FOR CATECHESIS 257]


broad weave of human relationships that fosters communion and fraternity – a “spirituality of communion” (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 43-45).

B *The members of the EPC of the parish and shrine entrusted to the Salesians*

The EPC of the parish entrusted to the Salesians takes up a common mission involving responsibility shared by the largest possible number of people (cf. GC24, no.18) focused around a pastoral plan. It is **a community of believers** which by promoting *membership in a family atmosphere*, welcomes a conscious, clear and shared participation of various vocations, charisms and ministries, mutually complementary in diversity.

The parish is entrusted to the **Salesian religious community**, which accepts the pastoral guidelines of the diocese, offering the wealth of its pastoral charism, creating a team of leaders around the parish priest with a view to ministry. It promotes the development and implementation

of the SEPP in the parish and is responsible, in collaboration with the parish priest and his team, for formation and spiritual animation of the faithful. It accompanies the members of the Salesian Family who are the first collaborators in development of the project.



“When the Salesians are called by the Bishop to the pastoral care of an area or sector of God’s people, they assume, before the Church, the ‘stimulating work to build – in full shared responsibility with the laity – a community of brothers, gathered in charity, for the ‘listening to the Word, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and for the ‘announcement of the message of salvation’”

[GC20, NO.416]

“The responsible agent of the Salesian parish, that which gives it life, is the religious community”

[GC21, NO.138]

The religious community (cf. R. 26; GC21, no.138) is *part of the animating nucleus of the Salesian parish* and assumes a clear role (cf. GC24, no.159). It bears witness to the primacy of God, visibly manifested in its fraternal life and practice of the evangelical counsels through moments of prayer, meetings, social gatherings and sharing the testimony with the laity of the parish community. It is a portion of the pastoral project that

gives space to the different skills of the confreres, participates in the life of the parish, taking an interest in the stories of people, especially young people.

The **Rector of the Salesian community** has a special responsibility in the parish as spiritual leader of the religious community and the one primarily responsible for the apostolic activities of the community. He looks after unity and the Salesian identity of the entire work and encourages the confreres as they carry out the parish pastoral plan (cf. *R.* 29). He is a member of the Parish Pastoral Council.

The **parish priest**, pastor of the community, is responsible for the immediate parish mission entrusted to the Salesian Congregation by the Bishop. For the Christian community he is the representative of the Bishop but also of the Salesian Congregation. True to the educative and pastoral mission, he holds Don Bosco to be his model in the evangelisation of young people and the people of God.

The Salesian parish priest is called to welcome, listen, accompany and form the parish community. He presides over the parish community, taking on responsibility for implementing the pastoral plan in communion with the Rector, the Salesian community and the Pastoral Council.

The parish community promotes and accompanies the diversity of vocations, encouraging the **laity to take a significant role** in the evangelising mission. The parish community is strengthened through the experience of *assemblies, associations, small communities and movements* who exercise greater commitment on behalf of all. The Salesian parish animates the various ecclesial groups, with special attention to proposals by the Salesian Family and the Salesian Youth Movement.

The parish community considers the **young people to be members of the EPC in their own right**. This charismatic presence ensures attention to adolescents and older youth, with a positive interest in their world, their concerns, experiences and expectations. Our preference for youth



“The Educative and Pastoral Project is a rich synthesis of content and methods; a process of human development and also of evangelical proclaiming and of deepening of the Christian life”

[GC21, NO.80]

characterises the shape of parish pastoral ministry, which is dynamic, enthusiastic and offers evangelical ideals.



The educative and pastoral proposal of the parish entrusted to the Salesian community

The parish is immersed in a world which is undergoing profound and rapid change. Its mission is a unified though complex reality and hence requires an Educative and Pastoral Plan (cf. GC21, no.140).

A *A centre of evangelisation and education in the faith*

The *Acts of the Apostles* is one book of the New Testament which helps us understand more than the others that life in the early Christian communities was not easy. The sharing and spreading of the truth about Jesus Christ took root in them and was consolidated. In Chapter 2, verses 42-46 we read a passage that can really accompany the life of every parish community:

They remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles.	Evangelisation and Catechesis
They lived together as brothers.	Testimony of charity
They went as a body to the Temple every day	Prayer
They met in their houses for the breaking of the bread.	Liturgy

The parish entrusted to the Salesian community offers everyone a *systematic proposal of evangelisation and education in the faith* (cf. GC23, nos.116-157). It promotes first proclamation to those who are far away, and offers ongoing programmes and gradual education in the faith especially for families. The parish is *a community where one can experience the values most characteristic of Salesian spirituality*: the joy of daily Christian life, the hope that sees the positive in people and situations, and promotion of communion.

The parish community cultivates human relationships, ensuring that people and groups feel *recognised, accepted, included*. Our ecclesial communities represent the appropriate place for daily Christian experience.

The community *commits itself, then, to everyone*, and in particular, to *the weak and needy* so they may grow in faith and maturity. It not only welcomes everyone seeking religious meaning in their lives, but also offers compassion and support to those who are tempted to distance themselves. Aware of this, the parish is positively challenged by those who consider themselves as indifferent or non-believers.

It is a missionary and evangelising community. *The Word of God and the liturgy* sustain the faith life of its members. It promotes communication of the Christian experience. The parish community puts the Eucharist at the centre of community life, and celebrates the sacraments of Christian life in a meaningful way, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The parish entrusted to the Salesians nourishes devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco's Madonna is to be considered as a very active presence encouraging us to follow Jesus better: "Do whatever he tells you" is our Mother's invitation. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians unites us within the universal communion of the Church.

B *A Church presence which is open and fully part of its locality*

The parish is the face of the Church. **It is the point of reference in its locality which makes the Church visible in everyday life.** It is where Christians experience and live out faith, hope and charity nourished by the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments. The parish is *"the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters"* (Christifideles Laici 26).

The parish community is the significant focus for the various ecclesial communities and groups that exist within it. It is an open



"In parishes and mission residences we contribute to the spreading of the Gospel and to the advancement of the people. We collaborate in the pastoral programme of the particular Church out of the riches of our specific vocation"

[C. 42]

community *collaborating with other parishes and communities* and with other social and educational agencies in the area which provide for the human and spiritual growth of its citizens.

Engaged in a *dialogue with the various cultural environments*, the parish helps everyone to develop values, criteria and patterns of life according to the Gospel, through a presence based on trust (given and received).

The parish carries out its mission in communion with the local Church and the Bishop, with the other parishes and diocesan pastoral organisations.

C *A Community with a missionary outlook*

In fidelity to Jesus, the parish believes that the Kingdom of God has the poor as its beneficiaries and privileged target. Therefore, its pastoral, evangelical nature should reflect **the preferential option for the poor and needy**. This implies, first of all, the appreciation of the faith and wisdom the poor show, and it implies their accompaniment.

The parish entrusted to the Salesians assumes as its fundamental choice and criterion the **existential unity of Evangelisation, human development and Christian culture**. We proclaim the Gospel and the person of Jesus in intimate relationship with the history of the people, their problems and their possibilities. In the desire to heal less than human situations we are guided by the value of human fullness the individual finds in God. Development of evangelisation in the parish calls for spreading of the Gospel and developing the people (cf. C. 42). If we consider pastoral activity in its entirety as diffusion of the Gospel, this idea cannot be confined to mere administration of the sacraments.

The parish is encouraged to be a welcoming place, one of hope for everyone, especially for the tired, disinherited, marginalised, sick and suffering. Thus, in close dialogue and cooperation with institutions within parish boundaries, it strongly promotes the protection and promotion of their human rights and shares their concerns and aspirations.

D *Clear option for the young and for working class people*

Youth ministry should be considered the dimension that most characterises parish life. This is the particular contribution the Salesians offer as an enrichment

to the mission of the particular Church (cf. C. 48; R. 26). **Our preferential choice of a youthful dynamic in evangelisation is, therefore, the special attention we give to young people.**

The preferential option for the young, especially the poorest, immerses the entire parish in a *particular kind of activity and a particular educational approach*. We encourage experiences that make young people evangelisers of other young people. The priority of youth also involves the duty of creating awareness in the *diocesan community* of the problems and needs of youth ministry. The Salesian parish can help provide examples of educational approaches for parish contact with young people.

The parish is a community that accompanies the faithful in their vocational choices, especially the young. Accompaniment of young people requires considerable effort. This service helps them personalise faith, listen more profoundly to God and mature in their Christian life understood as vocation. The parish *guides and accompanies various vocations in the Church*. It offers young people a specific invitation to religious life, priesthood or a committed lay vocation. Prayer for vocations is continuously fostered in the parish community and its various groups and movements.

The Salesian parish is of a *broadly accepting popular nature*. The evangelisation of popular culture requires constant attention to the many ways this manifests itself. Evangelisation is contextualised and integrated into the life of the people, through consideration of their history, tradition and culture, customs and roots.



“The parish entrusted to the Salesians ought to reproduce today this charismatic experience of Valdocco and make it an enriching contribution to the pastoral service of the local Church. For this reason it has certain charismatic features which are the foundation of its own life and mission”

(FR ANTONIO DOMENECH, AGC 396, “GUIDELINES AND DIRECTIVES: THE IDENTITY OF THE PARISH ENTRUSTED TO THE SALESIANS”)



Systematic pastoral animation in the parish

A Main interventions of the pastoral proposal

The parish is an evangelising community: it brings first proclamation to those who are estranged from it and catechises them, taking them as they are as

the starting point. It would seem appropriate to recover **certain principles inspired by the Christian catechumenate** (RCIA) as a pedagogical element and basis for education in the faith. The catechumenate seeks to evangelise in the four main areas of growth in faith found in the Church's experience (cf. *General Directory for Catechesis* 147): the personal dimension, the community dimension, the liturgical and celebrative dimension, and total commitment to evangelisation. These four dimensions can assist in proper programming of interventions with young people, ensuring the completeness and integrity of the Christian experience.

- 1 The parish **creates and offers gradual and diversified programmes in faith education**, particularly for young people and families, without reducing catechesis to simple preparation for the sacraments (cf. GC23, nos. 116-157). These processes help start families off in the faith education they offer their children, set up processes for baptismal catechesis, and education in faith programmes for engaged couples that might later give rise to family group programmes.

Catechesis in all its forms should transmit *an adequate and relevant summary* of the Christian message and, above all, integrate personal experience in the process of maturity and growth. It seeks to encourage and accompany gradual commitment to Christian life.

Christian initiation is based on experience, community relationships and on the testimony of life. Therefore, the parish entrusted to the Salesians offers many lively and creative pastoral processes and initiatives, processes which allow for personal encounter with Jesus Christ. It is urgent for Christian communities to offer meaningful experiences and accompany people in search of faith at its various stages: understanding and listening to the Word of God (introductory courses on Sacred Scripture, preaching, *Lectio Divina*), the experience of personal and shared prayer (schools of prayer), participation in liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments, further exploration of the faith, appreciation of the wealth of popular piety, and missionary-oriented youth ministry experiences in rural and urban areas. All this should be accompanied by reflection, good communication as well as silence and contemplation.

- 2 Another parish activity is to encourage membership of groups in the Church. For this purpose the parish fosters **group movements, youth**

communities and Salesian Family Groups, among others. There is also a need to co-ordinate these groups with the Salesian Youth Movement and the invitation to Salesian Youth Spirituality. Group experiences should be able to lead to open and integrated Christian communities.

- 3 **The parish is a community that practises liturgy and the sacraments: celebrating them with dignity and beauty.** Care is to be taken that liturgy is in close contact with life, trying to use a language that is understandable and accessible, expressed in a simple way through songs, gestures, stories, testimonies and symbols. For a celebration to be alive it is important to get everyone to be actively involved its preparation and implementation.
- 4 By fostering growth of an active faith the parish educates to the **social dimension of charity**, building a culture of solidarity. Thus, it recognises and encourages the commitment of members of the parish community to being involved in social and charitable activity, and in civil and political life. It supports the promotion, formation and accompaniment of voluntary services and missionary work.

A Church community working with other organisations on behalf of the poor needs to exhibit concrete and visible gestures of a modest lifestyle and one which is open to generosity and solidarity through actions which manifest the values of the Kingdom. Preference is to be given to acts of solidarity of a more lasting kind.

- 5 The parish community is to become a formation centre for lay people who are dynamic and committed, above all for pastoral leaders of young people. A priority that keeps the future of the Church community in mind is the **development of appropriate formation courses for a variety of categories**, in particular those with responsibility for education: catechists, adults (or mature older youth) who are prepared to lead groups. A creative and dynamic approach cannot be truly fruitful unless practised by catechists who have themselves been well formed.

All this calls for the parish community, Salesians and lay people, to offer *space and time for analysis and reflection* on pastoral activity for youth and adolescents.

B *Structures of participation and responsibility*

» *Leadership in the local parish community*

The parish assembly and groups are instruments both of communion and lay involvement in the life of the community. They are opportunities for shared responsibility. Their identity is strengthened through the preparation and implementation of a Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan for the parish.

Parish ministry is given a *unified and articulated* shape in the Educative and Pastoral Plan. This plan helps the parish forge effective collaboration in its pastoral mission to *teach, sanctify and guide* everyone. Parish structures strengthen communion, convergence and complementarity amongst people, activities and other things focused around the Educative and Pastoral Plan.

The parish council is an advisory, operational pastoral team by nature (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 536). It includes representatives of the various sectors and groups in the parish. In accordance with the *Code of Canon Law* and the guidelines of the Church, the parish council fulfils the functions that GC24 presents for the EPC (cf. GC24, nos.160, 171). This pastoral team is essential for animation of the parish. It is presided over by the parish priest, led and accompanied by him along with other Salesians in the community; the team is made up of priests assigned to the parish, representatives of the various sectors of parish life, and other members whom the parish priest is free to appoint.

Its functions are defined in the statutes and these are: to analyse the situation of the parish and its members, offering an evangelical response to the challenges encountered; to offer the SEPP to the parish assembly, implementing it, and evaluating it periodically; to study and approve the regular parish budget; to ensure the formation of the pastoral workers in the parish.

The committees and working groups are teams that, in accordance with the SEPP, provide leadership in various areas of activity. Among these the *youth ministry commission or leadership team* is particularly important. It is coordinated by the assistant parish priest, or by a Salesian/lay person responsible for the Oratory-Youth Centre (cf. GC20, no.432).

A Finance Council is also mandated for the parish. The criteria for its composition include competence and administrative efficiency. Its members should be experts in finance and of upright conduct. Its juridical role is purely advisory: advising the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish. The chairman of the finance council is the parish priest, as its “proper pastor” (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 515, 519). The parish priest is responsible not only for sacraments, liturgy, catechetics and charitable requirements, but also for administration. He is the legal representative (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 532) and sole administrator (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 1279).

The Finance Committee has its own statutes which define the nature, characteristics, objectives, composition, powers, functions of the members, work patterns, relationship with the Parish Council and the duration of its tasks.

When a parish is one of a number of other sectors in a given area (Oratory-Youth Centre, School, Social work, Boarding house, Hostel), through dialogue it fosters along with them **a special collaboration for unified pastoral ministry within a single mission**. For the Oratory-Youth Centre the parish is a reminder that there is a converging pastoral plan involving the local area and the local Church, based on the different responsibilities of the two sectors. Unified pastoral activity is spelt out through mutual relationships and the fact that they are different projects help us provide a better response to quite a few special situations in the Congregation: Oratory-Youth Centre in a Salesian parish; Oratory-Youth Centre in diocesan parishes; Oratory-Youth Centre in presences with multiple sectors.

The Oratory-Youth Centre Council, in its entirety or through well-chosen membership, has representation within the parish pastoral council to guarantee the unity of evangelising activity. In quite a number of provinces it has been laid down that the director of the Oratory-Youth Centre is the associate pastor for youth ministry.

» **Provincial / national animation**

The parish priest is appointed by the Provincial and presented to the local Ordinary to be of service to the local Church, in communion with the Bishop, the *presbyterium* and the other parishes. He seeks coordination with other parishes in the Province and the Youth Ministry delegation in

the Province. The guidelines of GC19 and GC20 (cf. GC20, no.441) require **co-ordination of the parishes to be fostered** in all our Provinces.

The parishes depend on the dioceses in which they are located but are entrusted to the Salesian Congregation to respond to the pastoral needs of particular Churches (R. 25). Because of its membership in the local church, the Salesian parish incorporates the pastoral guidelines of the diocese and those of the Provincial SEPP in its own SEPP.

A **Provincial Commission** headed by a co-ordinator ensures Provincial accompaniment and support for parish communities in their implementation of the parish SEPP. Both the coordinator and the Commission are part of provincial Youth Ministry bodies.

The Coordinator and members of the Commission have the following functions:

- ▮ raising awareness of Salesian communities so that they pay more attention to the parish where they are located;
- ▮ promoting reflection on and improved understanding of the identity of the Salesian parish in relation to the ecclesial and social situation around them;
- ▮ responding to the pastoral challenges of the Church in local churches and shrines where the mission of the Province is carried out;
- ▮ ensuring the development, implementation and evaluation of the SEPP in parishes and shrines, offering parish communities guidelines that can help them live out their Salesian identity;
- ▮ fostering communication and collaboration amongst the different parishes of the Province;
- ▮ supporting ongoing formation of Salesians and laity who share responsibility for parish ministry, through meetings and courses;
- ▮ convening regular meetings of parish priests, pastoral councils, catechists, diaconal teams, health apostolate and youth ministry.

There needs to be **teamwork with other Provincial commissions:** Oratory-Youth Centre, Salesian Youth Movement, Vocation ministry, Mission animation, Social Communication. The Provincial Formation Commission ensures formative accompaniment for students of theology, especially deacons, in the exercise of their ministry. They are part of the actual running of parish ministry.

The dynamics and work of provincial coordination are supported by **national leadership and coordination**, according to circumstances and contexts. Its function is primarily to promote reflection and deeper understanding of the Salesian identity of the parish through development and updating of the educative and pastoral proposal. It seeks to facilitate communication among provinces to share experiences and challenges. A common practice in different situations around the Congregation is to promote updating and training of parish priests through national organisation (formation, retreats, and courses of specialisation). Moreover, along similar lines, it is possible to convene meetings for reflection on a national level, conscious of the fact that there is a variety of groups involved in our parishes (catechists, pastoral councils, youth leaders, committees, groups).

2 5

WORKS AND SOCIAL SERVICES FOR YOUTH-AT-RISK

2 5 1

The original nature of works and services for youth-at-risk

As he went through Turin's streets, Don Bosco saw the dangers faced by needy youth and responded to their difficulties and poverty by opening new types of pastoral services. As soon as he entered the *Convitto*, Fr Cafasso entrusted him with the task of visiting the prisons where, for the first time, he encountered and witnessed the alarming and the unfortunate conditions of many young prisoners. His encounter with these young prisoners had a deep impact on him – it touched him, disturbed him and moved him to reflect on what needed to be done.

He considered himself sent by God to respond to the cries of the poor and the young. His insight told him that it was important to give an immediate response to their problems and above all to **prevent the causes through a holistic educational approach.** This is why he first of



“With Don Bosco we affirm our preference for the young who are poor, abandoned and in danger, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty”

[C. 26]

all sought to take upon himself the care of orphaned and abandoned youth who came to Turin in search of work, their parents being unable, or uninterested in caring for them.

We too encounter children, teenagers and older youth living in conditions of social exclusion, and we do so with Don Bosco’s zeal. Social exclusion is to be understood in the broader sense which goes beyond the mere

economic meaning usually intended by the traditional concept of poverty. It also refers to limited access to education, culture, housing, work, lack of recognition and achievement of human dignity and the fact that they are often disbarred from exercising real citizenship. We believe that the most effective form of response to this difficulty would be preventive action in its many forms.

The option for poor youth and those abandoned and at risk, has been at the heart of the Salesian Family and its life from the time of Don Bosco till today. **A great variety of projects, services and facilities for poor youth**, with the choice of education as inspired by the Salesian preventive criteria, has sprung from this.

Urged on by our awareness that social exclusion is on the increase, we acknowledge the need to ensure that *Don Bosco’s system of education is practised*, so that young people can overcome difficulties and marginalisation, imbibe an ethical understanding of education and personal development and be socially and politically involved as active citizens. We want to see young people educated and the rights of the minors defended in the struggle against injustice and for building up peace.

Poverty and exclusion are on the rise day by day even to the extent of tragic dimensions. It is a poverty that harms the individual and the community and especially the young to the point where it becomes a structural reality and global way of life. Our model is the Good Samaritan, “the heart that sees” and saves.

Situations of poverty and social exclusion have a strong social impact and, unfortunately, they tend to persist. We cannot remain indifferent in the face

of all this. It urges us to put *immediate short and medium term responses* in place (cf. GC21, no.158; GC22, nos.6, 72; GC23, nos.203-214), so that by overcoming injustice and social inequality, we will be able to give the young opportunities to build their life in a positive way and be able to fit themselves responsibly into society.

Many of these works and services offer a **new pedagogical and Salesian model** and, therefore, require professional competence, specialised programmes and collaboration with civil and religious institutions. An overview of these works is offered here:

- ▮ works for street children: school-home, day care centres, family homes. Along with these are residential resources for young homeless people. There are reception centres for refugees and displaced persons, young drifters living on the streets, on city outskirts, youngsters who have “no one”, abandoned or orphaned;
- ▮ services for young people with special needs: minors under protection orders or in the penal system; prisoners; child soldiers; children exploited by sex tourism and abuse; young people who need special education due to physical and mental disabilities;
- ▮ attention to immigrants: literacy; psycho-pedagogical support at school; legal advice to regularise their situation; contributions to social and professional skills; participation and integration in context;
- ▮ reception and accompaniment for recovery and rehabilitation: drug addicts, kids with behavioural problems, HIV-AIDS;
- ▮ alternative educational services for coping with the problem of school failures: socio-educational projects; professional training workshops for pre-employment; additional classes for scholastic reinforcement; socio-professional workshops; courses for training the unemployed; educational support programs;
- ▮ integration in poor neighbourhoods and cultural activities in fringe areas; activities which take in and accompany victims of violence, war and religious fanaticism;
- ▮ centres which give attention and support to education by the family; services addressed to young people who suffer because

they come from dysfunctional families, families without a home or in non-standard accommodation;

- specific services for promotion of women: literacy, responsible parenthood, health education and hygiene.

Taking up our charismatic and preferential option for the poor and needy is something that **runs through the entire systematic animation of the Salesian Family**. The Provincial Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plans should guarantee this commitment in all our works and presences. Our main work is to prevent and address possible situations and needs of young people in any situation or context, especially through works and services which give specific attention to poverty and social exclusion. This is a typical feature of Salesian Youth Ministry.



The Educative and Pastoral Community in youth-at-risk presences

A *The importance of the EPC in youth-at-risk presences*

Don Bosco offered abandoned youngsters a true family in the Oratory where they could grow and prepare for life; therefore he considers the community experience as very important.

In works and services which respond to youth problems the EPC takes its own particular shape and our understanding of this has grown. The Congregation has accumulated criteria over recent years which need to be considered if we wish to consolidate this institutional commitment. This well-ordered and complete educational service is a **real missionary option of acceptance and family presence among young people at risk**. Attentive to the individual, it accompanies them as they try to be part of the community by supporting their rights and helping them be committed to justice and the renewal of society. It promotes a culture of solidarity according to values inspired by Church's social teaching (cf. C. 33).

B *Members of the EPC in youth-at-risk presences*

The educators share a close and friendly relationship with the young, through familiarity and loving Salesian presence (loving-kindness). The educator not only works for poor youth but in communion and solidarity

with them. This is expressed through strict but flexible interdependency and an educational 'agreement' based on mutual consent.

The team of educators is chiefly responsible for drawing up, implementing and evaluating the local SEPP. The joint responsibility of educators and young people in this project is an essential feature and one which is characteristic of Salesian pedagogy. This community experience becomes a **school of experience for the young people themselves**. They see themselves as helping to educate their peers, with whom they share the same development processes. It prepares them gradually for future roles of service as educators in the work itself, in their families and in society.

Insight, personal experience and personal good will are not enough to carry out a pastoral and educative activity of a certain quality. The people involved need to be ready to:

- ▮ ensure strategies and interventions in the SEPP that continuously strengthen *the motivations and values* guiding institutional choices and those of every educator;
- ▮ have the necessary *preparation* for carrying out a project which is professionally competent and of quality, faced with the complexity of the situation;
- ▮ ensure *professionalism* based on seeing this as a vocation, even more so in the case of educators dedicated to this service, who need to be experts in education and in humanity;
- ▮ cultivate a *profound understanding of the youth situation* and the cultural processes generated by social exclusion and marginalisation;
- ▮ further their *study of the Preventive System* in relation to everyday life, *through ongoing formation* in the social dimension of charity;
- ▮ adopt the viewpoint of the *Church's social teaching* and *Human Rights*;
- ▮ manage lengthy *educational and recovery processes* in an efficient way, at the same time seeing to good organisation and management, as well as seeking and managing resources.

The enterprising involvement of educators and young people on a daily basis requires cooperation from **professionals**: sociologists, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, pedagogues, social educators. These kinds of works are developing the very best kinds of *volunteer service* experiences. Equally important are connections and regular dealings with **family members** and **other institutions or groups in the area** working in the same field.

Living with young people in such a precarious and fragile situation requires *a personal as well as an institutional conversion* on the part of the **Salesians and the lay people with them**. Situations of need, the many faces of suffering, vulnerability, hardship and exploitation are a challenge for the Salesian educator and can question his or her ordinary activities, the profound sense of gestures which are usually taken for granted. These faces and stories urge us to be concrete and immediate, and bring to bear all our expertise and passion, creativity, spirituality and hope and without seeking recompense.

The Salesians, on the one hand, offer an austere witness of solid presence and education among the young people, who feel accompanied and sustained by such a profound faith in God the Father who wants everyone “to have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10), while at the same time they acquire ever deeper understanding of their surrounding circumstances and its mechanisms. Lay educators, on the other hand, represent a model of life for the young people, centred around the nuclear family lived in a responsible manner. They are professional in their educational interventions and are witnesses to a life inspired by the Gospel of Christ.



The educative and pastoral proposal for youth-at-risk presences

The specific educative and pastoral project for these presences and social services on behalf of young people at risk determines **the identity of the proposal and serves as a guide to the service offered by the educators**, which responds to the requirements and need for professional quality and the awareness they have that theirs is a vocation as spelt out in the Salesian pedagogical model.



The evangelising inspiration

All our educational commitment is inspired by the Gospel and is oriented to open the young people to Christ, the one who “spent his life doing

good" (Acts 10:38). In these works and services, at times *our intervention needs to be an immediate response to basic survival needs* (food, water, medical care, shelter in a family environment) so the young can grow in an independent manner, overcoming the constraints of dependence. Having achieved this first goal, the intervention then tends to assure them of all the other resources they need to live in a dignified and secure way. Don Bosco's formula, "upright citizens and good Christians" means responding to all the needs of "abandoned" youth from an ordinary human perspective.

The witness of the educators and the EPC, the environment of acceptance and family, the safeguarding and promotion of personal dignity and its values are a first form of **proclamation of Christ and fulfilment of salvation in Him**: liberation and fullness of life.

It is an educational activity that offers young people an invitation to interior growth by paying special attention to the *religious dimension of the individual*. This is a fundamental factor in prevention and becoming more human. It is also a solid support which offers hope to young people who are suffering the dramatic consequences of poverty and social exclusion.

For us, evangelisation means being close to them, sharing with them, helping them be more human, offering them an invitation. It is a process, and even when it does not become a Christian invitation of the same intensity for everyone, it is nevertheless a first and authentic form of evangelisation. Jesus became one of us to make us more human and he calls everyone to follow him.

Therefore, the SEPP of every educational community should offer young people experiences and programmes that awaken the spiritual dimension of life in them and help them discover Jesus Christ as their Saviour (cf. GC26, nos. 105-106). **This proposal of evangelisation should be fully integrated into the educational process** through a simple, personalised pedagogy, one which is strictly and gradually connected with daily life.



"The source of our inspiration is always the pastoral charity diffused by the Spirit in baptism and in the call to the Salesian life: but the seeking out, contact with and the sharing of the life of the poor youngsters are the 'providential circumstances', the indispensable mediation in the beginning and practical development of our mission"

(FR JUAN VECCHI, AGC 359, "NEW POVERTY, SALESIAN MISSION AND SIGNIFICANCE")

We need to protect and develop this religious awakening in the young through *patience and perseverance*, helping them discover the goodness in them, be aware of their dignity and their desire to change themselves. The specific forms of support and action that we share with the young are the following: helping them deal with the question of the meaning of life (what is the meaning of my life? what kind of person do I want to be?); being with them at celebrations and for important events in their family, social, and religious life; offering them values that will guide their religious search and promote the freedom of faith, thus presenting the Christian humanism of the Gospel of Jesus as Good News. We also invite them to experience acceptance within the Christian community and by its members. We propose simple but meaningful religious experiences and gradual acceptance of commitments and responsibilities.

B *A holistic and systematic educative proposal*

It is very important to help them restructure and unify their interior world through process of identification. We live at a time of fragmentation, and interior unity can only be achieved through **vital contact with individuals and institutions with a strong sense of identity**, but also respectful of diversity and freedom. Therefore we educate through conviction and motivation in personalised relationships expressed by a welcoming attitude and

dialogue, respect and unconditional acceptance. Every educator is a positive role model to be identified with and a point of reference in the personal growth process of the young. In short, our presence “among” the young should awaken interest and identification in them.

This situation necessarily requires an animation which is both communal and family-like. Its nucleus, the Salesians and every lay educator, carry out this important task. Young people at risk, the majority of whom come from a far from ideal environment, need to discover a family atmosphere



“Poverty and emargination are not a phenomenon which is purely economic in nature, but a reality which touches individual consciences and challenges the mentality of society. Education is therefore a fundamental element for their prevention and suppression, and is also a more specific and original contribution which we, as Salesians, can provide”

(FR JUAN VECCHI, AGC 359, “NEW POVERTY, SALESIAN MISSION AND SIGNIFICANCE”)

which offers them favourable conditions for adequately restructuring and re-orienting their lives. Above all, **offering them a family environment** where there is a chance to relate with positive adult reference points, breaks the barrier of distrust and awakens a true desire for education.

The essential element is the development of a **critical attitude to self and one's environment** with renewed criteria for such analysis. Cultural and technical skills and above all *acquisition of good work habits* open up the way for young people to be incorporated into a family environment, work and social life.

This complete formation, which covers all *their experiences and dimensions of life*, places emphasis on all their resources in a continuous and systematic way. It facilitates their sense of responsibility. It is a proposal aimed at every young person, called as he or she is to develop every aspect of their life – personal, family, socio-cultural, environmental, socio-political, ethical and religious.

C *The choice of the preventive criterion*

Prevention is an educational approach that surmounts problems by preventing their **negative effects**. It is also a **systematic social form of intervention** that is not reduced to short-lived assistance. It remedies exclusion by working on its causes. It is not only about direct education of the individual but also creating a new social mentality at a cultural and political level for the common good and on behalf of human rights.



“The educational power of the Preventive System is also shown in its ability to salvage lost youngsters who have maintained points accessible to good”

[GC22, NO.72]

Our educative proposal, even though it is often a response to an emergency, always includes assistance and social protection. The preventive criterion ensures the pedagogical conditions for rebuilding a dignified life, and avoids things becoming worse. One basic element in all this is **pedagogical accompaniment** of the young as they grow up. It aims at making them autonomous, able to take up responsibility for themselves.

Sometimes the personal circumstances they are in require *re-education and improvement*. Don Bosco offers a system which is more than satisfactory in helping to re-educate young people trapped in delinquency or who have been excluded from society. Pedagogy today recognises “resilience” as an individual’s or group’s ability to make progress, to move on in life from destabilising events or difficult and traumatic life circumstances.

The Salesian project offers *group pedagogy* as an experience which can help young people relate spontaneously and freely with one another. These youngsters, who tend to be “gregarious” and easily led, find the group to be a determining factor in their education and as they develop their personalities.

D *The social and political perspective*

The Salesian response to youth exclusion is also necessarily a *social and political one*. These works and services should promote a culture of the ‘other’, of moderation, peace, justice understood as respecting the right that everyone has to live a dignified life.



“What is wanted is a work of ‘social animation’ which will give rise to changes of vision and criteria through gestures and actions... It is a matter of promoting a culture of one’s neighbour, of sobriety of life... of availability and free sharing, of justice understood as attention to everyone’s right to a dignified life and, more directly, to the involvement of persons and institutions in a work of broad intervention, and of acceptance and support for those who have need of it”

(FR JUAN VECCHI, ACG 359, “NEW POVERTY, SALESIAN MISSION AND SIGNIFICANCE”)

Educational activity in these works and services helps young people to prepare themselves to engage in this field. At the same time, it fosters **a new way of thinking which helps to transform the social situation**. We need to understand the struggle against poverty and social exclusion as a structural challenge. Ongoing reflection on poverty and exclusion, and the influence it has on the young, especially in the family, implies that there has to be systematic collaboration among the various educational institutions working in this area. Our charism invites us to take a careful look at the cultural categories of the

young, of poverty, minority groups, so we can contribute to building a new human world order, even from the fringes of history.

This requires ongoing analysis of local situation, identifying the precise challenges to the SEPP and hence the relevant processes and specific interventions needed. There is growing awareness of our need to *network with other institutions* in drawing up policies which tackle education, family, youth, urban living etc, so they can help prevent and overcome structural problems. It is urgent for Provinces to strengthen their presence in competent civil platforms so they can follow up youth-related policies and offer reflections and make interventions in legislative processes.

Every EPC is carried out within the Church and in the social setting we are in. **We are striving to foster a culture of solidarity according to the Gospel of Jesus.** The pastoral care of children, teenagers and any young people at risk requires real participation and commitment for it to deliver justice and peace (cf. C. 33). By involving everyone responsible, we become a prophetic voice for building a society worthy of the human being.



Systematic pastoral animation in social work

A *Principal interventions of the proposal*

- 1 New forms of poverty among the young should find a response in all our works and services in the Province. **Co-operation and complementarity of the various Salesian works** in a given territory and our unified service in promoting and educating the young, strengthen and multiply forces and improve the effectiveness of each sector. Hence we need to focus on provincial and local projects dealing with youth crises and various forms of poverty and social exclusion, ensuring they have clear objectives, goals and educational approaches which are capable of preventing and overcoming these problems. It is high time for us to set up a *network of information on various topics, presences, programmes and activities*.
- 2 The SEPP of a presence explicitly dedicated to social service for young people at risk plans policies and strategies which offer gradual approaches to **attention and accompaniment**:

- *approaching, being interested in and knowledgeable about the situation of the young*, sharing their interests and leisure time, welcoming them unconditionally from the outset;
- carrying out pertinent interventions of *recovery/personal rehabilitation* helping them to recognise their situation so we can then offer them the possibility of healing and living more positively (cultivating appropriate attitudes of healthy relationship with self and others);
- knowing what their religious beliefs are, so that religious experiences can encourage them on their spiritual journey and help them personally assimilate educative, religious and evangelical values;
- helping them discover and experience the *God's loving presence and fatherliness* in their lives, creating conditions for personal, patient, trusting and confidential dialogue;
- starting out with *small commitments* so they can move on to greater responsibilities. When young people get involved in civic events and celebrations or have group experiences of solidarity, this gradually leads them to more stable commitment.

- 3 Prevention, as we have seen, is not only a method of healing problems and preventing their consequences, but also of creating the conditions that ensure each young person can develop to full potential. It is important to **offer open areas with a wide range of possibilities and initiatives**, especially social activities like music, theatre, sports, art, outings, ITC (information technology and communication), and where individuals are valued for their innate qualities. These are significant approaches to recovery and preventive action and in the context of an overall project, they encourage personal accompaniment of every young person.
- 4 **The struggle to overcome social exclusion implies planned, mutually supportive teamwork**, helping a variety of social agents to converge on the issue: the neighbourhood or surrounding area, institutions, entities or groups and wherever there is acknowledgement that situations of exclusion or crisis exist. The aim is to create a new mentality, a culture of solidarity in society where all the actors involved work together on education, family, youth policies that have an impact on the life and conditions of the young.

B *Structures of participation and responsibility*

» *Local animation*

To tackle the speed of fundamental change in our society, the entire EPC needs to commit to searching for an effective response to situations of youth poverty around us and creatively implement **rapid processes of coordination so particular projects can be carried out.**

In every community of the Province and its works, attention to young people in difficulty needs to be developed via an analysis of the culture and mentality proposed in its SEPP. **The local community should include pointers to this need in developing its SEPP:** openness to the local situation and the young; reinforcing a systematic planning mentality which includes the criteria and requirements of educative and pastoral work for those most in need; attention to dynamics and approaches in the work that can avoid exclusion; group and activities which get young people involved; quality process in education and other programs, taking into consideration the circumstances of those intended to benefit from them.

Specific works aimed at educating young people at risk have acquired a large number of criteria and interventions specific to their management. As for every Salesian work, it requires an educative and pastoral presence with proper *management and administration* of financial resources.

The project needs to be sustainable in terms of human, administrative, pedagogical and financial resources. It is important for all sectors to seek legal advice through appropriate channels. This latter point needs greater study involving all the works and services of the Province and in collaboration with other institutions in the area.

Young people play an active part in these structures and leadership bodies too – they play an active part in their own formation in view of their inclusion within family and society.

» *Provincial / national animation*

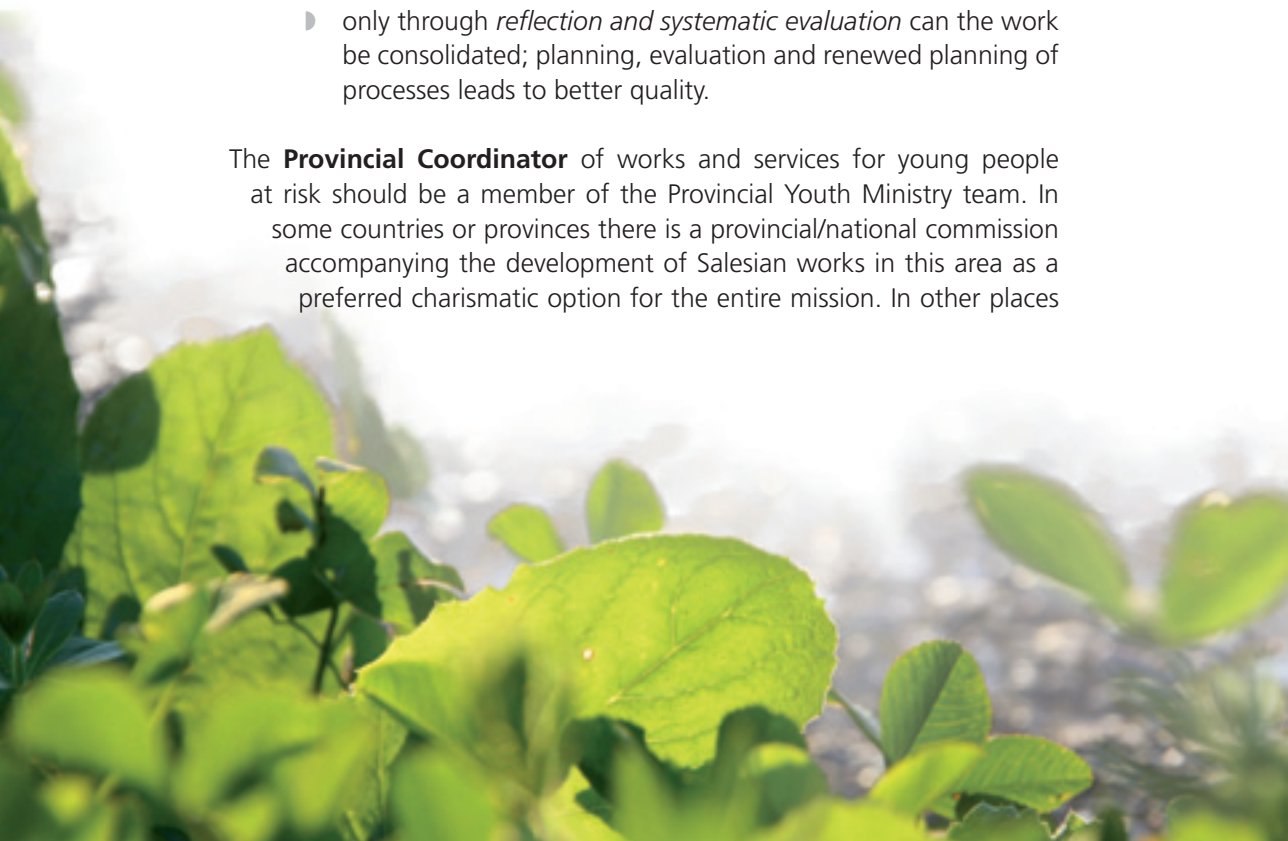
There is increased awareness and sensitivity in Provinces, as well as reflection on and commitment to young people on the fringes of

society. It is no longer an isolated sector identified with just one or two works or individual initiatives. **Our focus on the very poor is becoming an institutional sensitivity expressed in the provincial SEPP** on the basis of which each EPC encourages particular attention to poverty and exclusion while gearing its specific services towards work for young people at risk. The SEPP, consistent with its choices, policies and strategies in favour of the poor, should see that its work leans towards systematic animation and networking, collaborating at all levels with the Salesian Family and other Church and civil bodies.

The basic principles guiding Provincial leadership and animation should emphasise formation and systematic pastoral animation:

- ▮ the *social and political formation* of Salesian educators, religious and lay, and of the EPC as a body, so they can all appreciate the complex reality of poverty and exclusion in which the young find themselves. This helps them draw up approaches and programmes appropriate for the young and for the educators (consecrated/lay, reference people/family members);
- ▮ only through *reflection and systematic evaluation* can the work be consolidated; planning, evaluation and renewed planning of processes leads to better quality.

The **Provincial Coordinator** of works and services for young people at risk should be a member of the Provincial Youth Ministry team. In some countries or provinces there is a provincial/national commission accompanying the development of Salesian works in this area as a preferred charismatic option for the entire mission. In other places



this coordination is taken up by one of the Salesian civil organisations (an association, federation or other) that plans and implements activity on behalf of the young, especially fringe youth, those at risk and/or socially excluded.

For animation and coordination of this sector special emphasis and particular importance should be given to the **Provincial Planning and Developmental Office** (PDO). This office helps the Province in its strategic planning as it seeks to finance these projects. It is very important that this be a joint effort with the Provincial Youth Ministry Delegate so that these projects are seen to be part of the Provincial SEPP and at the same time encouraging systematic planning and evaluation of objectives of the local SEPP.

26

OTHER WORKS AND SERVICES IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS

New situations and new opportunities for youth to come together have come to light for the Salesian world. These are *educational activities, services or works* responding to new needs and requirements of the young and they offer appropriate responses to questions about education and education to faith. Among these we can list: *vocation ministry programmes* (aspirantates, live-in community experiences, vocational discernment centres). There are also specialised programmes for Christian and spiritual formation (retreat houses, youth ministry and catechetics centres), leisure time groups and services like the Italian *Tempo Libero ed Animazione Socioculturale* [*leisure time and socio-cultural animation*] schools, sports, tourism, musicals and theatrical performances. There are other media-based activities, and mission animation groups, all led by the respective Social Communication and Missions Departments.

These new presences take the form of a project rather than a structure. They respond and adapt to changing needs with a certain freedom of action and inventiveness. They employ the kind of communication which is part of the natural setting for young people today, independent of fixed structures. This approach makes it relatively easier to involve young people who are aware that things are in their hands. These are an expression of a **new kind of presence in the world of the**

young and can be effective tools for responding to education and evangelisation needs. They are experiences offering a pastoral opportunity which we can work at along with other groups of the Salesian Family.

These new spaces and formats are exposed to *dangers that potentially reduce their effectiveness for education and evangelisation*: individualism in the way they are dealt with, weak identity that lacks clarity, they can be both temporary and precarious and make it difficult to achieve continuity for educational purposes. So it would be appropriate to identify some conditions and criteria that need to be fit in with our traditional presences within the overall Province plan. Here are some examples:

- openness to the basic principle of discernment and renewal: every activity and work of ours is “*a home that welcomes, a parish that evangelises, a school that prepares them for life and a play-ground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves*” (C. 40);
- being clear as to our *educative and pastoral aim* (cf. C. 41);
- *keeping a community dimension*; the EPC is always the subject of the mission (cf. C. 44);
- *integration within the Provincial project* involving constant interaction and collaboration among the various educative and pastoral works and services of the Province (cf. C. 58).

A *Experiences or services of animation and vocational guidance*

In an effort to find new approaches to vocation ministry, new *experiences and services of animation and vocational guidance* have come into use (**welcoming communities, live-in community experiences, vocational discernment centres**). These offer the young opportunities for a concrete experience of the Salesian life and mission for a fixed period of time, where they receive accompaniment and care as they explore their calling in a more systematic way.

It is important that these activities guarantee:

- a *Salesian community* which is open and welcoming and that offers significant vocational witness to the young;
- *experience of fraternal life and Salesian mission*;
- *systematic accompaniment* for each individual's process of vocational maturity;
- close contact and *collaboration with other communities* in the Province and with those responsible for vocation ministry as laid down by the Province Plan;
- collaboration with other vocation ministry centres in the *local Church* and with other religious institutes.

B *Specialised services in Christian formation and spiritual animation*

Over the last ten years, various initiatives and services for Christian formation and education in spirituality have come into being: **retreat experiences, schools of prayer, retreat houses, ministry and catechetics centres**. These services are a new form of Salesian presence among the young, and today are seen as necessary and even urgent.

Retreat and spirituality houses or specialised centres for pastoral formation and catechetic are based on the following criteria:

- a *team of SDBs* and other members of the Salesian Family, organising and working in these houses not simply as a place of hospitality but as a community or a team of individuals who welcome, accompany and share a spiritual experience with the young;
- a *precise programme* of spiritual pedagogy, with different proposal and levels according to the various needs of the groups, this way overcoming a simple and sporadic experience by presenting a precise programme of initiation and spiritual depth;

- special importance given to the *pedagogy of prayer* and listening to the Word of God and participating in the sacraments according to the values of Salesian Youth Spirituality; above all taking care of the aspect of initiation and accompaniment to help the young have a truly spiritual and personal experience;
- offering every young person the *possibility of a personal talk* with a Salesian or other leader during their stay or even having follow-up accompaniment;
- a *vocational theme* to help young people orient their life towards the Lord and His plan of salvation for them.

There are *other pastoral services* offered outside the Salesian presences, be they in the local church (such as the services of an SDB working for diocesan vocation ministry; an SDB working in Youth Movements in places where there are no Salesians) or in other places (such as teacher formation). These pastoral services should take on in agreement with the Provincial and in accordance with the Province SEPP.

C *Leisure time services*

Various activities during leisure time: sport, tourism, culture, music, dance and theatre, are concrete places where the young meet to satisfy their own interests. These are present in all our works. These educative experiences today have considerable *social and preventive relevance*. It is a new way of recreating the same oratory environment that Don Bosco started at Valdocco, where the playground was a privileged place in all his educative and pastoral activity.

The Salesian world has a great variety of groups and associations with different initiatives. They are ways of implementing the Salesian educative and pastoral proposal with a huge variety of approaches, organisational forms and number of participants.

We can point to some common elements in these which are a feature of their identity, such as the *group and associative experience* being a privileged educational opportunity and one which is essential for full human maturity.

There is our *active presence in the local area* by offering something that is free from consumer overtones, and then there is the *approach which is typically that of Don Bosco*: animation, involvement and the active role that young people themselves play.

» **Salesian sport – its educational value**

Active encouragement of *sporting activities in Salesian houses* is a known fact and takes place in a variety of ways. **Sport is**

recognised as a value in the Salesian education system; an activity for every age and context.

A careful interpretation of *Salesian sport and its value for education* allows us to present certain common elements amongst all the variety of ways we offer it:

- ▮ *sport is for ordinary people*, it is not only for the elite; everyone has the right and opportunity to play sport;
- ▮ *sport makes us more human*, increases potential for growth in a young person so long as it promotes 'clean play' and interpersonal relationships and respect for each other; sport brings young people and adults together and creates a more spontaneous rapport than a other occasions for education like the classroom or workshop;
- ▮ *sport is preventive* in that it promotes a healthy way of life. We are especially careful to see that we offer sport to children and young people at risk because of their age or where they live, or their family situation, or their low academic standard;
- ▮ *sport has a clear playful dimension*: without lowering the competitive side of things, in the right measure competition



“The Church esteems highly and seeks to penetrate and ennoble with her own spirit also other aids which belong to the general heritage of man and which are of great influence in forming souls and molding men, such as the media of communication, various groups for mental and physical development, youth associations, and, in particular, schools”

[GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS 4; CF. GAUDIUM ET SPES 61]

helps balance out success and failure; it welcomes and brings together all the members of the group, including the less gifted, with the same aim;

- ▮ *sport as an integral part of the SEPP*, bringing together a wide variety of people with common objectives; for this to happen we need to form and accompany sport leaders;
- ▮ *structured and organised sport*, considered as part of the SEPP with the help of youth members: sports leaders, parents and others.

» ***Various forms of artistic expression (music, song, dance, theatre)***

Right from the outset the Salesian oratory included music and theatre as **values belonging to the way young people express themselves**. As was the case for Don Bosco today too the Salesians continue these activities, offering theatre and music as art forms accessible to the young and as a means of communicating positive messages.

Recognising the strong educational values involved here, Salesian works promote these forms of expression while taking the following aspects into consideration:

- ▮ they have their *own unique way of being near* to the young and their situation, interpreting it through language, symbol, expressions of beauty; they result in ideas, feelings and emotions; they highlight fundamental aspects of human experience that are difficult to understand through any other form;
- ▮ they are a unique contribution to development of *intellectual, creative and expressive skills*, facilitating concentration, discipline and constancy in young people;
- ▮ they offer a *privileged space for interpersonal relationships*: their various expressions give rise to socialising and collaboration ... besides being very amusing;

- they are one of the *privileged means for evangelisation, proclamation and expression of the Good News*: music and art make room for celebration and festivity, and our concern for it;
- they have an *aesthetic and ethical value*: they lead the spectator to contemplation, admiration, critical ability and flexibility of judgement. This is why Salesian pedagogy is always attentive to these initiatives, fully aware that in many places our educational goals can only be achieved through non-formal activities.

