



**EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL
COMMUNITY:**
MAKE THE HOUSE A FAMILY
FOR THE YOUNG

CHAPTER

V

*“Jesus himself drew
near and went with
them”*

(Lk 24:15)



Don Bosco wanted everyone to feel at home in his establishments. The Salesian house becomes a family when affection is mutual and when all, both confreres and young people, feel welcome and responsible for the common good. In an atmosphere of mutual trust and daily forgiveness, the need and joy of sharing everything is experienced, and relationships are governed not so much by recourse to rules as by faith and the promptings of the heart. This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the Salesian vocation”

[C. 16]



You cannot have affection without this familiarity, and where affection is not evident, there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love”

[Letter from Rome, 1884]

Salesian Youth Ministry requires

agreement of purpose and conviction on the part of all those involved in the planning and implementation of the Educative-Pastoral Community. In this chapter we shall examine the community identity, how it works, the style of shared responsibility and the way it is animated. The community is called to invest in the figure of the Salesian educator. In trying to discern and renew each activity and work, we look to the Salesian style, the “oratory criterion” that connects us with the practical insights of the charism (our way of living together in communion) which have become part of our shared patrimony, and are applicable to all contexts where Salesians operate. Importance is given to the way we offer signs of the Gospel in everyday life, and the way we cultivate authentic relationships and communication.

1

Salesian Youth Ministry: a community experience

1 1

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE IN THE SALESIAN SPIRIT AND MISSION

A *Communion at the service of the same mission*

Evangelisation is always an ecclesial activity. The first key element for realising Salesian Youth Ministry is the community involving young people and adults, parents and educators in an atmosphere of family, so that it becomes an experience of the Church (cf. C. 44-48; R. 5). It implies a communion whereby the *different gifts and services* are seen as complementary. There is mutual reciprocity in the service of the same mission (cf. GC24, nos.61-67). Evangelisation is the fruit of a mission that is shared between consecrated members and lay people, who join forces in cooperation in sharing their gifts, despite the differences of formation, different tasks, different charisms and different degrees of participation in this mission. It is community in which all, religious and laity, are active agents in the evangelisation of individuals and of cultures (cf. *Christifideles Laici* 55-56; GC24, no.96).

This community is the **subject and, at the same time, the object and scope of our educative and pastoral activity**. It is called the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC). It is our way of being Church and our pastoral ministry in the Church. Education and evangelisation are the result of convergence of people, initiatives, qualifications, implemented in a shared project which involves shared responsibility (cf. C. 34; GC21, nos.63, 67; GC24, no.99). Salesian Youth Ministry is not just the action of individuals but a coordinated project of different initiatives, the result of a shared search for understanding and sharing of the gifts of all. It calls for collaboration in research and planning.

B *The Salesian way of being present among the young*

From the early days of the Oratory Don Bosco formed around him **a community – a family in which the young people themselves were the key players**. He created a youthful environment in which the values of the Preventive System were embodied. There were well-defined spiritual and pastoral characteristics with clear objectives and a convergence of roles designed to suit the needs of the young people. The Salesian Congregation and the Salesian Family were born from this community. In Don Bosco's mind the Salesians, with their life in common, are the centre of communion and participation for all the educators who make their contribution to the project and the spread of the charism (cf. GC24, nos.71-72, 75).

In remembering the beginnings at Valdocco we see not only the pastoral heart of Don Bosco but also his ability to involve others: church, hostel and playground become part of the educational reality thanks to the contribution of religious, priests and lay people. *The Preventive System pays attention to personal relationships, but attaches importance also to community.* His method is intensely "communal". The EPC is the Salesian way of animation in every context to achieve Don Bosco's educational mission. It is not a new structure in addition to other management bodies and existing ways of participation in different environments or pastoral works, nor is it only a way of organising the work or a technique of participation.

The Salesian house is meant to be *a home that is welcoming* towards young people, *a place where they are happy to be.*

With the EPC we want to form, wherever we are present, **a com-**

munity of people geared to the education of the young, that can become

an experience of Church for them and can open them to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. The EPC (C. 47; GC24, no.156) is therefore:



community: because it involves young people and adults, parents and educators in a family atmosphere. The thing that unites us is not work or efficiency, but a set of values of life (educational, spiritual, Salesian ...) that form a shared identity willingly accepted by all;

educative: because it gives first place, in all its projects, relationships and organisations, to concern for the integral development of young people. By this we mean the development of their potential in all aspects: physical, psychological, cultural, professional, social, religious and spiritual;

pastoral: because it is open to evangelisation, it walks with young people on their journey to encounter Christ and creates an experience of church where young people experience human and Christian values in communion with God and with others.

C *The EPC involves many people in the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project*

The EPC demands a new mature sense of belonging and a new mentality, a new way of thinking, judging and acting, a new way of confronting problems and a new style of relationships—with young people, and with educators and pastoral workers. It is a community made up of concentric circles with young people at the centre as the key reference point (cf. C. 5). *The Salesian community* is the guarantor of Salesian identity, and the core of communion and participation. *Families* are the agencies first and foremost responsible for the education of young people. *Lay people* are responsible in various ways as leaders and collaborators. Among them, members of the Salesian Family who work in our settings bring a special contribution that reflects the peculiar features and the richness of their vocation.

The most significant pastoral initiatives form a network. All members of the EPC work together at different levels in drawing up the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP) which is the centre of convergence of all activity. All cooperate in the same educational process, enriching each other in a shared process of formation (cf. GC24, no.157). The formative experience involves agreed criteria, agreed goals and intentions, initiatives

that have been planned together (co-responsibility, discussion, research, evaluation). The SEPP helps in coming to a shared understanding of the Gospel and of culture, of faith and life (cf. *GC24*, no.96)

D *The EPC and family*

As has been said, the EPC is a centre that welcomes the greatest possible number of people interested in the human and religious aspects of the area. One clearly identified pastoral challenge is to achieve a fuller sharing with **the family, which is the primary and indispensable educational community**. We recognise that the family is the basic cell of society and the Church. Despite all its difficulties, the family is esteemed by the children because there they receive the affection they need and cannot do without. For parents, education is an essential duty, connected to the transmission of life. The role of the family is irreplaceable and inalienable and comes before the educational role of anyone else. It cannot be delegated or substituted (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 36).

The emergence of counselling centres in support of education to help with family problems, run by both lay people and religious, is an interesting and promising development. The same can be said of groups that help parents in educating their children to the faith. The EPC is committed to making parents aware of their educational responsibility, in the face of new emerging patterns of education. It pays particular attention to accompanying young couples and actively involving them in the EPC. It is necessary for Salesians and lay people together to make a careful community discernment, in order to identify and respond to the most urgent problems of the family, making use of all the resources available. A greater involvement of the family in the SEPP is needed.

E *The EPC as a meaningful experience of the Church in a particular area*

Every Salesian work has an extraordinary educational potential because of its widespread penetration in the local area. The Salesian mission is not identified with and is not reduced to the Salesian community and Salesian work. However, the Salesian house is necessary as a meeting place and training place for the vast movement of people who work for the young, inside and outside Salesian structures, in the Church and in the institutions of civil society (cf. *GC24*, no.4). The EPC, when properly

understood, is *open to and collaborates with all those working for the promotion and training of young people* in the area. It works in solidarity with former students, and with young people and adults in the area it serves. As an agent of pastoral care it lives and acts in the Church and in the world (cf. C. 47), and is a significant presence in both.

- **The service offered by the EPC is integrated into the pastoral care of the local church.** The SEPP is inserted in the pastoral plan of the diocese or region. The work of the EPC is coordinated with that of other Christian forces working for the education of young people. It expresses its belonging to the Church through appropriate gestures proportionate to the level of faith reached by the EPC.

By bringing its specific contribution to the community of the Church, the EPC enriches the local Church with the gift of Salesian Youth Spirituality, Don Bosco's educational system and the vitality of the Salesian Family and Salesian Youth Movement. This can be done by being actively involved in the Parish or area Pastoral Council. We offer our professional contribution as educators of the young and we make suggestions or proposals to serve the educational and pastoral mission of the Church on behalf of young people.

- **It operates as a centre of unity for the existing social forces in the area,** and helps them to be integrated into the situation in which they live. It maintains a mutually enriching dialogue with these forces and participates in the formation and human and Christian education of young people, collaborating with other organisations working for the same purpose (cf. GC21, nos.17, 132; GC23, nos.229-230, GC24, 115).

Being *a centre of communion and participation*, the EPC is like a spiral whose core radiates sensitivity and responsibility out to the periphery, seeing to communication and the search for meaning (cf. GC24, nos.49, 114, 135). It makes the Salesian presence significant, with its educational and pastoral identity. It becomes a place of welcome and a gathering place, a sign of communion and participation, and works for the transformation of the surrounding area (cf. GC23, nos.225-229; GC24, nos.173-174).

- It works as an agent of transformation in the area.** It is not only present through its members who live the area, but it participates in “the commitment of the Church to justice and peace.” (C. 33). It works to change situations which are contrary to Gospel values (cf. C. 7). Its educational and pastoral competence may be called upon to respond to problems affecting young people (cf. GC24, no.235). It is *present in the human contexts* in which the young people live, especially the marginalised and the excluded. It is attentive to the factors that have most influence on their education and evangelisation, discerning there the signs of the saving presence of God. It participates strongly in *cultural debate and educational processes* through the various forms of group activity, voluntary service and social cooperation, bringing an original educational proposal for the creation of a mentality and a social conscience and civic and Christian solidarity, and for the evangelisation of the prevailing culture.

The dynamism of the EPC will bring the community to evaluate critically what is happening around and will encourage the committed Christians in the area.

- It is a Church presence in multi-religious and multicultural contexts:** Salesian Youth Ministry is practised also in contexts of cultural and religious pluralism, with a significant presence of lay people of different cultures and beliefs involved in our mission. For this reason, it must always be *open to dialogue and collaboration* with different religious traditions, promoting the integral development of the person and openness to the transcendent. This points to the need for a deep inculturation of our pastoral ministry. The Preventive System is the basic criterion for this collaboration: “With those who do not accept God we can journey together, basing ourselves on the human and lay values present in the Preventive System; with those who do accept God and the transcendent we can go further, even to welcoming their religious values; and finally, with those who share our faith in Christ but not our membership of the Church, we can walk still more closely on the path of the Gospel.” (GC24, no.185) For this reason it is important that Christians in the EPC live in fidelity to their vocation and the evangelising mission of the Church according to the Salesian charism (cf. GC24, nos.183-185).

1 2 ANIMATION OF THE EPC

The EPC is not a ready-made structure or institution but a living organism that exists in so far as it grows and develops. For this reason we should pay attention not only to the organisation but, above all, to developing the life of the EPC. Every EPC must **ensure the promotion and care of the many different ways of animating and accompanying the people**. This is why we can speak of *an original Salesian style of pastoral accompaniment*. We support people at different levels, through the general environment of the EPC, groups, personal relationships and personal guidance.

A *An accompanying environment*

First of all, we aim to provide accompaniment by creating an educational environment, where young people feel at home and there is an atmosphere of support. Ideas and feelings are shared and there are educational activities which prepare them to make choices and be committed. The environment which an EPC offers in a Salesian work must be understood first in its more external and operational aspects, that is, **in its organisation and coordination**. It offers good quality information and communication both internally and externally. It involves everyone's efforts in the educational process. It respects the roles, functions and specific contributions of the different vocations. It provides space for participation in the drawing-up, implementation and evaluation of the SEPP together. It values the educational and pastoral objectives, the content being offered and the achievements of the various participants.

In order to mature, the young person needs to establish **an educational relationship with, and to identify with, different adult figures in the EPC**. Each of these people gives his or her own contribution and leaves a lasting impression of their personality and their own expertise. The EPC must ensure open relationships with people who foster personal relationships between the world of adults and young people, relationships that go beyond the purely functional and foster fraternal relations of respect and interest in people. This is the basic principle of Salesian assistance.

Finally, the environment must encourage the constant commitment of **quality ongoing training and formation** at different levels, spiritual, Christian and Salesian. The EPC is not only the subject but also the object

of Youth Ministry. For this reason, we must ensure training and formation for all. Our educative and pastoral ministry must be designed not only for young people but should also inspire formation programmes for adults (Salesians and lay people together) which, in addition to allowing them to live “for” young people, will help them grow “with” them, enabling them to march in step with the younger generation.

B *Group Accompaniment*

All those forming part of an EPC come into contact with a single proposal for life and spirituality. Somehow they walk along a single route which involves **various educational and religious activities**. Group activity is one of these. In groups people are accompanied, always taking good care of individual differences or different stages. An effort is made to meet the diverse interests of the people, treating each one in a unique way. Different levels of belonging are blended on a personal level in a form of active learning, which makes use of experiment, research, active participation, and the discovery of new approaches. All these are a sign of vitality. They allow young people to develop the values which appeal most to their cultural sensibilities. Groups can be for young people the place where their expectations come into contact with the proposals of value and faith. They become involved in the discovery of values, and assimilate them in their lives.

They help young people to find their identity more easily and to recognise and accept the diversity of others, an essential step if they are to mature in the *experience of community and Church*.

Group accompaniment helps young people **to develop the sense of belonging** to the EPC. Each group must recognise its involvement in a larger group which is the EPC. The groups become proactive and offer an experience that avoids the danger either of feeling lost and anonymous in a large crowd, or the loneliness of being closed in on self. As the group gets stronger internally, it interacts positively with the EPC, sharing its proposals, insights and expectations, and encouraging affective participation in its activities and symbols.

C *Personal accompaniment*

There is yet a third task, which is to **accompany each of the members of the EPC in his or her human and Christian growth and personal choices**.

This means that the person is encountered with his or her individuality, “face to face”, even when part of a group. Don Bosco’s pedagogical praxis has always included the *word in the ear*, a personal dialogue even in the group. His is an educational method that is based on relationship. The goal of the *one by one* part of the educational journey is personal authenticity.

The life of the members of the EPC is not limited to the environment or the group, even if this experience is crucial. *Meeting and dialogue have a value and a particular function.* The dialogue is an opportunity for pastoral intervention, as we see in the encounter of the boy John Bosco with Fr Calosso or the meeting between Don Bosco as a priest with Bartholomew Garelli. The Salesian approach is intended to evoke the young person’s active collaboration and this is critical to the educational process, because of the possibilities, choices and personal experiences it creates. It encourages the search for underlying motivations for living. It requires clarity at the precise moment. It evokes the desire for dialogue and discernment, and promotes the internalisation of daily experiences in order to decipher the messages to be learned. It enables the young person to face confrontation and make critical judgements, to seek reconciliation and regain inner calm, and leads to a growth in personal and Christian maturity. The timing of these choices and these experiences is not the same for all and neither are the situations and decisions in which the young people find themselves. Accompaniment is an educative and pastoral service to individuals. It enhances their personal life and *life is the central theme of all educational and spiritual dialogue.*

The EPC provides many opportunities for personal communication. **There is a single goal which can be reached in a great variety of ways, in different circumstances and interventions.** The informal and spontaneous moments of sharing are the most frequent, but others are more organised and these also are indispensable. Among these, *spiritual direction* is particularly significant. It serves to strengthen the faith as life in Christ and an understanding of the meaning of life. It assists young people in discerning their vocation in the Church and in the world. It helps them to grow constantly in spiritual life and holiness.

Young people feel the weight of the multiplicity of proposals that are around, and the inner struggle to sift through them all for the sake of their growth. They want a space where they feel loved but know that their freedom is respected, space where they can breathe, question, exercise responsibility, where they can find support as they patiently get to know and

accept who they are. In a very strict sense, they are looking for **educators and guides, capable of offering personal accompaniment**.

The EPC must provide opportunities and possibilities for face to face dialogue. We cannot turn a deaf ear to their request for this space. This means ensuring that there are **times and places** where personal communication can take place without hindrance or haste. Care for the personal dimension provides oxygen for the EPC, creating opportunities for each one to check his or her own life and become aware of where life is leading them. There is an ever more urgent need for *people ready to listen* and respect confidence, without ever intruding on the intimacy of conscience.

People are needed who have the gift of listening and accept the educative responsibility of assisting young people, particularly in their efforts to grow. Walking alongside each young person, helping him or her to discover the way, is a human experience and a faith experience that leave an indelible imprint.

1 3

A SPECIFIC SERVICE OF ANIMATION: THE “ANIMATING NUCLEUS”

Salesian animation of the EPC involves intervening to ensure the organisation, coordination, educational objectives and content, pedagogical guidance, the training of individuals who take part, and strengthening of the distinctive Salesian character of the work. **All of these are necessary and together they make up the overall animation of the EPC as a group.** The diversity of tasks and roles and responsibility of all facilitate the achievement of the objectives (cf. GC24, nos.106-148).

A

A group of people in mutual enrichment

All components of the EPC, Salesians and lay people, participate in its animation but **some have the specific task of promoting the contribution of all** and the responsibility of the largest possible number of members, taking care of the quality and coordination of the animation and paying particular attention to levels more immediately concerned with the Salesian identity and quality of education and evangelisation. With their charismatic witness, these people constitute the “animating nucleus” of the EPC.

The human heart is a small organ compared to the rest of the body but it is capable of getting blood, and therefore life, to all parts of the body, though only if all the “valves” are working in harmony to achieve this end. Similarly, the animating nucleus is a group of people composed of Salesians and lay people who identify themselves with the mission, the educational system and Salesian spirituality and together assume **the task of convening, motivating, and engaging** all who are involved in the work, in order to form with them the educational community and to realise together the plan of evangelisation and education of the young.

It should be emphasised that the *Salesian religious community* (cf. C. 38, 47, R. 5), with its spiritual heritage, its educational method, its relationships of fraternity and shared responsibility for the mission, is the point of reference for the pastoral identity of the animating nucleus: “The Salesian community plays the role of the charismatic point of reference from which all take their inspiration” (GC25, no.70). The religious community alone is not the animating nucleus but is an integral part of it. Lay people who work in a Salesian work where there is no religious community must ensure, in whatever way they can, that there is open participation and real responsibility in the organisation and management, and in all the functions that belong to the animating nucleus.

The EPC Council is the body that animates and coordinates the implementation of the Educative and Pastoral Project. It is the first place for the exercise of shared responsibility between Salesians, lay workers, parents and young people. It works through reflection, dialogue, planning and review of planned initiatives (cf. GC24, nos.160-161, 171). Being a coordinating body for the service of the unity of all who are involved in the local project, it cooperates with all other agencies that act within the EPC. It belongs to the Provincial with his Council to decide on the criteria for the composition of the council, its competence and level of responsibility, in coordination with the House Council of the Salesian community (cf. GC24, no.171). This question is treated fully in Chapter 8, 2.1/d.

B *New organisational models*

The 26th General Chapter (no.120) recognises that there is **a plurality of models of management of works** at present in the Congregation. Some works are managed by a Salesian community which is the animating

nucleus of a larger Educative and Pastoral Community. There are activities and works entrusted entirely by the Salesians to lay people, or started by lay people, and recognised in the provincial project (according to the criteria set by GC24, nos.180-182). There are other modes of management which cannot be reduced to a single model in which there is still a relationship between the local community and one or more works, and there are pastoral or activity sectors managed entirely by lay people. Obviously, such situations require new organisational models. Where there is no Salesian community the animating nucleus, made up of lay people, is inspired by the three criteria of identity, communion and significance of Salesian ministry and is implemented under the responsibility of the Provincial and his Council (see Chapter 8, 2.2).

2

The Heart of the Salesian Educator

We have identified the people in the EPC with whom we build this experience. Now, we have to think about the person of the educator, the image that should inspire him or her, and the attitudes to be cultivated. We will look briefly at the heart of the Salesian educator who, in whatever field of activity, is true to the model of educator and evangeliser left to us as legacy by Don Bosco.

2 1

AN INNER APOSTOLIC SPIRIT IS ESSENTIAL

A

Enter more deeply into the Gospel

The essential “inner apostolic spirit” leads to a **greater awareness of what it means to be an educator and pastor** and the demands this makes. It means growing into a fuller and deeper knowledge of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and developing an authentic experience of faith through one’s daily work.

Only a *person with an interior life* has the ability to listen, to distinguish the apparent from the authentic, to be open to the needs of others and allow himself or herself to be touched by them. This interiority reaches its culmination in the person who is “full of God,” who lives and walks “in the presence of God,” who has discovered God who reveals himself in the history of daily life and, in a special way, is revealed in the history of the children and young people we serve.

To make a greater impact it is not enough just to have more people or better means. What is needed, above all, is to be better disciples of Christ, *to enter more deeply into the Gospel*. The force of attraction that motivates all educative and pastoral action comes from pastoral charity, that is, from a vocational wish to be of service to the Gospel. This basic choice permeates the consciousness of the educator to the extent that all his or her activities, whatever their nature, take on a gospel motivation (cf. Ez 34:11-23, the true shepherd). Really competent people who are able to combine an interior Salesian gospel way of life with their own rich humanity, are able to see their commitment to education as an aspect of their mission. Without special care of the interior apostolic life of the consecrated members themselves, and that of lay people and young people, we will not have real evangelisation. It is pastoral charity rooted in the heart which becomes the living centre of the Salesian spirit.

B *The first form of evangelisation is witness*

Moved by this apostolic interior life, the evangeliser is aware that the good news lies not only in the truth that is proclaimed but, above all in the witness and conviction of the one who proclaims it (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 42). The Salesian educator bears witness, not to seek to be imitated,

but to show the possibility of a life leavened by the gospel and thus help each young person to come to personal understanding.

In proclaiming the gospel to the young, a witness needs to be able to live his or her faith among the young in a way that can be seen. Youth ministry requires not only teachers open to



“Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers (I said last year to a group of lay people) and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”

(EVANGELII NUNTIANDI 41)

the illuminating power of the gospel, but also witnesses who speak of God, because they are accustomed to speaking with God.

Every educator must strengthen, in a conscious way, his or her motivations of faith. It sometimes happens that some other educational contribution, even if given in collaboration with the ecclesial community, does not flow from motivations of faith. It is important that the service we offer comes from a sincere desire for life and promotion of life. The educational journey touches the heart of the person (in the biblical sense) and, in the Christian sense it is a journey of spirituality, life in the Spirit of Christ, nourished by faith in its fullness.

2 2

SALESIAN CHARISMATIC IDENTITY

The charismatic identity sheds light on the life project. Don Bosco made **education his life-choice and the reason for everything he did**. His vocation as an educator gradually matured and it became his specific way of being a citizen, a Christian and a priest. Then, as now, the Preventive System needs people who make education their life-choice. Education becomes the unifying concern of their personal life and the inspiration and driving force of their activity, their office and their personal roles. Don Bosco used to say:

Take note of what I am. I am all for you, day and night, morning and evening, all the time. I have no other aim than to gain your moral, intellectual and physical well-being. For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life (CHRONICLE OF THE ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS OF SALES).

By continually studying and re-proposing the theoretical and practical framework of the Preventive System, our Salesian legacy becomes an educational, moral and spiritual competence, deeply rooted in *interior dispositions*: the desire to respond to the call for help that comes from the young; the willingness to dedicate our time, our energy, our knowledge and our skill for the welfare of the young; the ability to continue with perseverance in a systematic way, in spite of difficulties and disappointments,

in pursuit of the welfare of every individual. Evangelisation today cannot be lived in any other way. It cannot be entrusted to people without courage, who are permanently dissatisfied and pessimistic. The vocation and passion for education must take first place.

2 3

ANIMATION IS THE BEST FORM OF EDUCATION

A *Priority is given to the person in the growth process*

The Salesian educator favours **the practice of animation to bring people to listen to Jesus and accept him**. The model is the encounter on the road to Emmaus: the missionary approaches the young person, and meets him or her with an attitude of *listening* and *welcome*, *proclaiming* the Gospel and offering to accompany the young person (cf. GC20, nos.360-365; GC23, nos.94-111). Animation helps people to make the good news their own and assists them in the development of their conscience. It makes them aware of the motivations that drive their options and their critical thinking skills. It encourages their active involvement and makes them responsible agents in their own education. The aim is to bring about a sharing of values, criteria, objectives and the various processes of Salesian Youth Ministry. It aims to deepen the vocational identity of the educators, by increasing communication and sharing among all, and by encouraging shared responsibility. It fosters coordination, complementarity and the collaboration of all in a shared project.

B *The active presence of educators among the young*

This implies **an effort to be where young people live and meet**, establishing a relationship with them that is personal and, at the same time challenging and liberating. It needs a commitment by adult educators to share with young people by meeting them, listening to them and giving them witness. This requires the physical presence of the educator in the manner that Don Bosco called “assistance”, understood as accompaniment, being close to the young, animating them, paying attention to everything that happens, being ready to intervene at the right time, giving them an example. There is a very telling scene in the life of Don Bosco which highlights the contrasting attitudes of priests – some of

them polite but aloof and distant, and others with the paternal attitude of the elderly priest Fr Calosso:

There were many good priests who worked for the good of the people, but I could not make friends with any of them. It often happened that I would meet the parish priest and his assistant somewhere along the road. I would greet them from afar. They approached me politely, but they only responded to my greeting, and continued on their way. Several times, I was bitter to the point of tears, and I used to say: 'If I were a priest, I would not behave like that. I would try to get close to the young people. I would give them good advice. I would speak kind words to them'

(MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY, FIRST DECADE 1825-1835, NO.4).

This original style of education is based on some fundamental beliefs that are at the same time precise operational choices. Young people need contact with educators if they are to develop the energies they have within them. The educators must cultivate the *loving kindness* taught by Don Bosco. It is their duty to be open to all young people and to every young person, not minimising their educational expectations, but offering everyone what they need, "here and now". This decision implies accepting the young "where they are" respecting their freedom and level of maturity, gradually awakening their potential and opening their lives to new perspectives, through different educational and religious measures.

Hence, *mature and loving Salesian fatherliness* is an essential part of Salesian education in the present-day world where young people are often more and more "orphaned" and alone. According to witnesses of his life, Don Bosco had a fatherly kindness expressed in countless acts of goodness. He used to give small gifts, write friendly letters, show little gestures of concern, offer words of comfort and encouragement – little acts of kindness that people kept fondly in their hearts. Fatherhood, godly and human, is defined in terms of giving life. There is no way of giving life without somehow, giving of self as a sign of gratitude. We can say that generating life always involves a dying of some kind. For educators, this is never a loss of life, but is always finding oneself again in a better life. In addition to dedication and generosity, loving kindness that reaches out to all is a requirement for paternity. Young people need not only to know that they are loved, but also to feel that they are regarded with kindness!

They have, in fact, a “right” to touch the fatherhood of God in the lifestyle of educator. The educator’s way of thinking, speaking, feeling and behaving, should reveal the loving kindness of God.

24

PASTORAL INTELLIGENCE TO GIVE LIFE TO THE SEPP

A *Read the present youth situation from an “educational perspective”*

We need urgently to give a pastoral and cultural qualitative boost to the SEPP. We need **adequate preparation to enable us to carry out our mission to the full**. Our formation should aim at multiple conversion of heart, mind and pastoral action. This results in a change of heart and a new understanding of the ministry itself.

The call to *read the present youth situation from an educational perspective* demands that we cultivate an acute awareness of the urgency of educational and pastoral care as seen in the signs of the times. This means identifying the emerging values that appeal to young people: peace, freedom, justice, communion and participation, the promotion of women, solidarity, development, ecological issues, the plurality of cultures, peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups, and a commitment to oppose any kind of exploitation of children and the new forms of slavery. As servants of young people, we are called to evaluate the events and currents of thought of our time that most affect the human person.

B *A patient commitment to change and formation*

As educators with the awareness that we are also mediators, we are asked for a *patient commitment to change and rethinking* in many respects. We have the task of designing faith journeys that are able to make use of the different ways of communicating that are available today to connect with the situation of young people. We need to find ways of proclaiming the gospel that are incisive, vital and clear, and to develop educational strategies for the evangelisation of cultures. Life becomes a continuous lesson, an opportunity to reflect on the educational experience, a journey

marked by creativity, and a readiness to evaluate instead of being satisfied with what we have always done and simply repeating the same thing over and over again.

Formation is an attitude of mind and heart, and a willingness to learn from life for the whole of one's life. The person is intelligently active and ready to learn. This attitude cannot be improvised. It does not come from nothing. It is a consequence of our vocation as educators.

Formative programmes that focus only on content or the acquisition of skills and techniques have been shown to be insufficient. We are becoming more and more convinced of the importance of the educator being involved with his or her whole person in the task of education. Communication skills and education must be firmly rooted in the educator's own identity and be part of a real personal journey. It is possible to have all the information, and to have mastered all the most modern methodologies and teaching procedures, to have all the resources and a professional approach, but these are not enough. The process of professional training of Salesian educators ultimately *brings into play the educator's own identity and the gift of his or her testimony*. The educator is a model with whom the young identify by imitating the path of his or her personal growth. The vocation to the service of education requires the ability to question oneself and allow oneself to be questioned on one's deepest convictions, motivations and expectations. Self-knowledge takes away fear and strengthens one's identity.

Every time we *examine our mission and vocation as educators*, we become convinced of the need to make it more suitable. We feel encouraged to develop a whole *new range of cultural, pedagogical and pastoral skills*, such as ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue and dialogue with non-believers, the use of social communication and participation in public debate.



3

The Preventive System in practice: the Salesian style of education

3 1

DON BOSCO'S ORATORY, CRITERION FOR ALL OUR WORKS AND ACTIVITIES

A *The “oratory criterion”, inspiration and model for our activities and works*






“When we think of the origin of our Congregation and Family, we find first of all a community, which was not only visible, but indeed quite unique, almost like a lantern in the darkness of night: Valdocco, the home of a novel community and a pastoral setting that was widely known, extensive and open ... Such a community gave rise to a new culture, not in an academic sense but in that of a new style of relationship between youngsters and educators, between laity and priests, between artisans and students, a relationship which had its effect on the area and on the city itself ... All this had as its root and raison d’être the faith and pastoral charity, which tried to create from within a family spirit, and led to a deep affection for God and our Lady”

(FR JUAN VECCHI, AGC 373, “THIS IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME”)

The Valdocco Oratory brings us back to the original experience of the Salesian mission. Don Bosco, together with his collaborators and the first Salesians, embodied in the oratory that particular charism or experience of the Spirit who raised up in the Church our original form of apostolic mission among the poorest young people. So, today, referring to the Valdocco Oratory is not a historical exercise, simply looking back to what occurred there with Don Bosco. It is the way for us to return to our origins, to the source that inspired our work and activities (cf. C. 41), and to verify the fidelity of our educational-pastoral activity.

Don Bosco’s Oratory in Valdocco is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works (C. 40):



-  This return to our origins has as its goal the “oratorian heart,” which is characterised by a **concern for the poorest youth and ordinary classes**. This zeal is an expression of the salvific will of God embodied in the figure of the Good Shepherd, and it is directed first towards poor youth in the various forms of poverty in which they find themselves.
-  It requires a change in pastoral perspective: *young people come before the works!* Their needs require that our institutions and activities be rethought, rewritten and reordered, if we are to be faithful to the mission entrusted to us “to be signs and bearers of God’s love” (C. 2).
-  Secondly, in reference to the “oratorian heart,” we practice a **typically Salesian educational method** of sharing and communion which gives a specific style to our works. It is the heritage of the Salesian Family that consists not only in a wealth of experience in Valdocco but as an identity that results in a style. The practice of this method creates a family atmosphere and determines the initiatives that are necessary for each young person to grow in a warm and welcoming atmosphere (home) marked by happiness (playground), where he or she can develop all their potential, acquiring new skills (school) and embark on an explicit faith journey (parish).

“It was on those occasions that I realised how many were brought back to that place because they were left to themselves. Who knows, I said to myself, if these young men had a friend outside, who would take care of them, assist them and instruct them in religion on public holidays, would they not be able to stay away from ruin, or at least would it not reduce the number of those who return to prison? I shared this idea with Don Cafasso, and with his advice and insights I started to look for a way to do so by entrusting them all to the grace of God without whom all efforts of men are in vain”

(MEMOIRS OF THE ORATORY,
 SECOND DECADE 1835-1845, NO.11)

The oratorian heart characterises our ecclesial charism, ensures the quality of our educational work and renews our pastoral activities, in line with the various cultural forms and with the various experiences of faith and religion in which young people live.

B General indicators for discernment and renewal

The “oratorian heart” is not only the goal and form of Salesian educative-pastoral activity, but also becomes the **fundamental criterion for discernment and renewal of our activities and works**. If our work is to merit the description given by Don Bosco to his work, we must measure it, first of all, against Don Bosco’s basic criteria.



“Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves. As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works”

(C. 40)

*A disposition of listening and of obedience to the Spirit is absolutely fundamental if we are to be faithful to the mission and the people for whom our work is intended. He is, in fact, the one who supports and accompanies our mission, and directs and renews it. By submitting to his action and inspiration we walk the path of Don Bosco who, docile to the Spirit, gave a lasting response to the situation of young people. If we are to be renewed, we must be consistent in our ability to read and discern. This demands *attentive listening to the socio-cultural reality of young people*.*

The exercise of discernment is of fundamental importance. It is the starting point from which Salesian Youth Ministry seeks to formulate an appropriate response to today’s challenges. Discernment involves knowing how to ask appropriate questions, to examine the signs of the times wisely, and to evaluate carefully the different options. Then, docile to the Holy Spirit, we try with an understanding heart and a strong will to put into practice the kind of activities that will make Don Bosco present and make the work he started fruitful in our day.

3 2

WAYS OF SHARING LIFE AND COMMUNION IN THE SALESIAN STYLE

The Preventive System is so tied to the Salesian style that it constitutes its most characteristic and expressive embodiment. The

Preventive System as a concrete method of education not only facilitates educational and pastoral action, but is also the content of what we try to teach. Its most significant aspects have been identified as **home, parish, school and playground**. These are images that do not indicate determined environments, spaces and places, but rather a series of experiences that are offered to the young.

The diverse experiences of these four images add up to an indivisible and inseparable unity. It presupposes various forms of action in response to the youth situation, and therefore none of the four can be overlooked.

A *A home that welcomes (the experience of family spirit)*

The experience of “home” creates **an environment of confidence and familiarity**.

As in a family it is essential that each member care for the others.

In a Salesian environment this

care is shown in many different ways and young people feel that they are listened to and understood. Values are transmitted through witness and accompaniment by educators who love and are loved. An unconditional welcome to young people when they arrive for the first time makes a huge impact. They are able to see that their most important needs are respected and that they are being offered an appropriate response.

This experience of “home” in the family spirit is a distinctive feature of our educational method. **Salesian assistance** consists in an attitude of empathy and friendly welcome, the desire to bring young people to Christ and a willingness to meet their concerns.

It is only in this loving and meaningful relationship that young people feel they can enter into dialogue, albeit slowly, and that values can be shared. In this climate, all the key conditions necessary for the young to mature in all aspects and dimensions can develop.



“Act in such a way that everyone you talk to becomes your friend”

[BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS 20, CHAPTER 8]

B *A parish that evangelises (religious experience and pedagogical journey)*

The experience of the “parish” is built on two main pillars: in the first place, the belief that **every young person has in his or her heart the desire for God**, the desire for a full life, the unifying perspective of faith; secondly, a series of initiatives suitable to young people, with the goal of helping them to discover and follow their vocation.

On this foundation our evangelising activity aims at creating an environment where faith is lived daily with spontaneity and normality, as exemplified above all by the EPC. It is an environment where the essential dimensions of the Church are made explicit, according to the Salesian charism. This leads to “Koinonia,” whose ultimate expression is the EPC, whose members live the values of the Kingdom and call others to take an active part. A key element is “Liturgy” or the Christian celebration of daily events. It reaches its highest point and fullest expression in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Another important element is “Diakonia,” which means a willingness to serve in educational and promotional activities, far beyond ordinary assistance. Finally there is “Martyria,” which means witnessing the values of the Kingdom to the world in deeds of charity, with formative initiatives that prepare young people and educators to give a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

All this is developed in the EPC within a *pedagogical journey* of gradual education in the faith that helps young people to discover their own vocation and follow it according to God’s plan (see Chapter 4, no.3.2).

C *A school that prepares them for life (holistic growth through education)*

The experience of “school” is characterised by providing the resources necessary to ensure that **every young person develops the skills and attitudes essential for life in society**.

In every educational space, formal or informal, the educator must seek and find *the way that leads to the welfare of each young person* so that he or she can mature fully.

The young person is the one who is *first responsible for his or her own growth and maturity*. The educator will accompany the young on their journey by offering them the experiences necessary for the harmonious development of their personality, in a way of life founded on respect and dialogue, for the formation of a critical conscience and a sense of commitment.

D *A playground to meet up with friends and be happy
(the pedagogy of joy and celebration)*

The experience of the “playground” is a natural environment where young people can form and deepen friendship and trust. The playground is understood as the place of education to happiness and joy. It encourages **values and attitudes of confidence**, and a suitable place for the care of each young person, for the little word in the ear, where the relationship between educator and young person helps to overcome the formalism associated with other structures, roles and environments.

In this sense, **the experience of the playground is a call to change from formal structures**, and leave the walls within which we work, to make every place where we meet young people an environment rich in educational and pastoral proposals. It means a more decentralised approach, meeting young people in informal places such as the streets. The focus is not only on the personal relationship but also on enhancing the dynamics of informal groups.

In the context of leisure activities, the new virtual meeting places and social networks are actually spaces where there are no strangers. We must be able to be present with the young wherever they meet.



“Here we make holiness consist in being cheerful. We try to avoid sin, which is the great enemy who steals God’s grace and peace of heart, to fulfil our duties exactly, and to be faithful to the practices of piety. Start today and write as a motto: ‘Servite Domino in laetitia’ – we serve the Lord in holy joy”

[LIFE OF ST DOMINIC SAVIO, A PUPIL OF THE ORATORY OF ST FRANCIS OF SALES, CHAPTER 18]