

acts

of the General Council
of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

anno LXXXVII
april-june 2006

N. 393

1. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR	1.1 Fr Pascual CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA «YOU WHO SEEK THE LORD; LOOK TO THE ROCK FROM WHICH YOU WERE HEWN» (Is 51,1) <i>Presentation of the Interamerica Region</i>	3
2. GUIDELINES AND POLICIES	2.1 Fr Antonio DOMENECH Salesian pastoral formation Attitudes and skills to be developed	53
3. RULINGS AND DIRECTIVES	(none in this issue)	
4. ACTIVITIES OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL	4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major 4.2 Chronicle of the General Council	69 76
5. DOCUMENTS	5.1 Message of the Rector Major to the young people of the Salesian Youth Movement 5.2 Decree for the canonical erection of the "Mary Help of Christians" Province of Spain-Seville 5.3 New Provincials 5.4 New Salesian Cardinal 5.5 New Salesian Bishop 5.6 Admission of the Sisters of the Resurrection to the Salesian Family 5.7 Admission of the Sisters Announcers of the Lord to the Salesian Family 5.8 Salesian personnel at 31 December 2005 5.9 Our dead confreres	82 87 89 93 94 95 97 98 100

Editrice S.D.B.
Edizione extra commerciale
Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco
Via della Pisana, 1111
Casella Postale 18333
00163 Roma

Tipolitografia Istituto Salesiano Pio XI - Via Umbertide, 11 - 00181 Roma
Tel. 06.78.27.819 - Fax 06.78.48.333 - E-mail: tipolito@pcn.net
Finito di stampare: aprile 2006

**«YOU WHO SEEK THE LORD;
LOOK TO THE ROCK FROM WHICH YOU WERE HEWN»
(Is 51,1)**

Presentation of the Interamerica Region

INTRODUCTION. 1. STRUCTURE AND HISTORY OF THE REGION. Andean Zone. *Ecuador - Colombia: Provinces of Bogotá and Medellín - Peru - Bolivia.* Zone of Central America. *Provinces of Mexico-Mexico and Guadalajara (MEM-MEG) - Venezuela - Central America - Antilles - Haiti.* North American Zone. *United States: Provinces of San Francisco and New Rochelle (SUO-SUE) - Canada.* **2. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SITUATION. 3. SALESIAN WORK.** 3.1 Community life. 3.2 Formation. 3.3 Youth Ministry. *Salesian foundations. Schools - Parishes - Oratories and Youth Centres - Starting up work - Care for young people at risk - Works for social advancement - Care of migrants - Universities. Pastoral activities.* Youth group activity. *The Salesian Youth Movement - Pastoral work for Vocations. The Volunteer Movement - Formation of lay people.* 3.4 The Salesian Family. 3.5 Social Communication. 3.6 The Missions and missionary promotion. **4. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS.** 4.1 Witnessing to the primacy of God among young people in today's world. 4.2 Giving new life to Don Bosco and his zeal for "Da mihi animas". 4.3 Giving new meaning to our work in the Region, prompted by the option for those we work for by preference. 4.4 Creating synergy by uniting efforts, means and commitments for the realisation of experiences through collaboration. **CONCLUSION.**

Rome, 1 March 2006

My Dear Confreres,

I am writing at the end of an intense month of visits and meetings with confreres. First I was in Sri Lanka for the celebration of the golden jubilee of Salesian work in that country. From there I went on to India, to Thanjavur, where I presided at the conclusion of the celebrations for the centenary of the arrival of the first Salesians. Subsequently I made rapid visits to the Provinces of Chennai, Tiruchy, Bangalore and Hyderabad before moving on to China to celebrate, once again, the hundred years of Salesian work: Don Bosco's missionary dream that still awaits its full realisation. And finally I went to Johannesburg in South Africa for the Team Visit to the Africa-Madagascar Region.

I recall so many impressions, all of them wonderful and exciting and at the same time so diversified. Perhaps I shall be able to tell you about them at greater length on some future occasion. For the present it is sufficient to say that we must be grateful to God who has loved us so much and blessed us so copiously. No one will be unaware that the future of the Congregation as regards vocations lies in Asia and in Africa. It is our responsibility to inculcate faithfully Don Bosco's charism, which consists in the expansion of the work, vocational fruitfulness, the growth of the Salesian Family, the quality of our educative and pastoral mission and, above all, in our personal holiness.

Taking up again my presentation of the different Regions, I want to speak to you this time about the Interamerica Region, to which I feel myself linked in a particular way because it includes the country of the origin of my vocation, and also because I was its Regional Councillor in the previous six-year period. It is a Region I know better than any other. I remember all its houses and confreres. To them I send my cordial affectionate greetings accompanied by my greatest desire to see them totally committed to the living out of their Salesian vocation with joy, generosity and fidelity. In this context I recall the words of the prophet Isaiah who, writing to the exiled people of Israel, reminded them of their election by God and to seek him always by remembering the firm nature of their origins: "*seek the Lord...*" (Is 51,1). With two eloquent images, the prophet makes a pressing appeal to them to renew their trust in God and imitate faithfully those who had given them birth in the Faith and in the Spirit: "*...look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried*" (Is 51,1). It is a fine text, both constructive and encouraging. And it is with these words that I sum up what Don Bosco would want from the Salesians of this Region at the present day.

INTRODUCTION

The circumstances that, according to Fr Ceria, favour Salesian work in the Americas can be applied to nearly all the 18 countries that make up the Interamerican Region:

"In his missionary dreams Don Bosco saw Salesians at work throughout South America; but he could not himself send them everywhere during his own lifetime. He had sent them to Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil; then in his last years he received requests from five other Republics that he had seen in his dreams; to only two of these was he able himself to send evangelical workers, leaving the other three to be provided for by his successor. They are the five that stretch without interruption from the Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, from Sucre to Santiago: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. The great interest shown by the Salesians for Latin America eventually reached the ears of Leo XIII through information sent by the Governments of the countries concerned, and made such an impression on the Pontiff that on the basis of it he began to appreciate the contribution and efficiency of the Salesian Congregation.

(...) In 1888 South America already had some 304,000 immigrants from Italy, and the number would soon become much greater. Those were times when the Mother Land cared little or nothing for those of her citizens compelled to emigrate to foreign lands to keep body and soul together. For them it was a great good fortune to find at their destination priests who could understand them and help them. As is well known, assistance to migrants was a part of Don Bosco's missionary programme from the outset".¹

Probably other reasons could be added: the effect produced by the biography of Don Bosco written by Charles D'Espiney while the Saint was still alive, the reading of the Salesian Bulletin in Spanish, the fame of Don Bosco transmitted to America by Bishops returning from visits to Rome and by seminarians studying

¹ E. CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana*, SEI 1941, vol. I, pag. 600-601.

in the Roman Colleges, especially the Latin-American College; by diplomats who had known Don Bosco and his work in Rome and prompted their governments to invite the foundation of Salesian work in the various countries of America.

1. STRUCTURE AND HISTORY OF THE REGION

Because of the great variety in the geographical, political and social situation found in the different countries, the Inter-american Region has been organised in three zones. Such an arrangement seems useful also for a presentation of the history and development of the Congregation in this continent.

Andean Zone

The Andean zone is made up of Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.

Ecuador

The Salesians reached Quito on 28 January 1888, at a time when the country was undergoing profound changes of an economic, political, social and religious nature. It was the last expedition personally sent by Don Bosco.

After two and a half months of unending sacrifices, on 15 April the "Talleres Salesianos del Sagrado Corazón" (workshops of arts and trades) were inaugurated in the former "Protectorado Católico". Fr Luigi Calcagno, who had been put in charge of the expedition, was appointed Rector of the new work. The foundation soon proved to be a quite exceptional educative and pedagogical experience: a centre was built to house an installation providing electricity for the Ecuadorian capital, contact was made with the Meteorological Society of Italy for the installation of a new observatory at Quito, and experiments were made to find new primary materials for the leather industry. All with excellent results.

The work of the Salesians in Quito gradually expanded. First they took care of the young apprentices of the School of Arts and Trades, and then of the prisoners in the "Panóptico" (high security prison). The Salesian Cooperators were promoted, and this led to the creation on 15 April 1894 of the Catholic Workers' Circle for the care of the working classes. In 1893 the houses of Ecuador, which had been a Vice-province, were erected into a Province, even though the canonical decree was published only on 20 January 1902.

The government of Ecuador, in the desire to extend to other provinces in the country the great benefits the Salesians had brought about in Quito, had on 8 August 1888 issued a decree establishing two new foundations, at Riobamba and at Cuenca. The Saint Thomas the Apostle Institute was founded at Riobamba in 1891 followed, two years later, by the School of Arts and Trades at Cuenca. After these, in 1896 came the houses of Tola at Quito, and the novitiate at Sangolquí, a village close to the capital. As missionaries, the Salesians did not delay in entering the eastern part of Ecuador, the Amazon region: Sígsig was the point of departure for those who eventually reached the Vicariate of Méndez and Gualaquiza. On 17 August 1903 the foundation stone was laid of the church of Mary Help of Christians at Gualaquiza.

During the liberal revolution, with its anticlerical tendency, Salesian work suffered considerably. Only in 1903, after a most difficult and violent period, could the interrupted work be taken up again; it began with a return to the country of the confreres who had been expelled; the houses of Quito, Riobamba and Cuenca were reopened, and a year later at Guayaquil the "Domingo Santistevan" Institute, which thus became the first Salesian educational and pastoral centre in the coastal area, was founded. During the revolutionary period the Province was in the trustworthy hands of three outstanding superiors: Fr Luigi Calcagno, the first Provincial, who was later expelled from the country in 1896; Fr Antonio Fusarini, the second Provincial, whose name

will always be linked with the story of Salesian work at Riobamba; and especially Mgr. Domenico Comin, the third Provincial, who governed the Salesian houses for two periods (1909 to 1912, and 1916 to 1921) and was consecrated Bishop in October 1920 as Vicar Apostolic of Méndez and Gualaquiza.

After the First World War and the weakening of the liberal regime, a new period in the country's history began. The Congregation became consolidated, especially from the thirties onwards, with a decisive move towards the education of the young in the 'Sierra' (the high plateau of the Andes) and in the 'Costa' (the coastal plain), and to development and evangelisation in the Amazonian missions. Educative work in the towns became well established because of the great demands from the youth sectors of the population, to which the Congregation directed its preferential care. Similarly it became possible to organise new missionary expeditions which enabled the long-desired work of the evangelisation of the Shuar people to be started. By means of an agreement with the government, official recognition was even obtained for the protection and safeguarding of the territory by the Salesians and, by means of an official subsidy, important economic support for the Salesian educational institutes in the Amazon area.

Following World War II (1939-1945), which prevented the Salesians from communicating with the centre of the Congregation in Italy, and reduced in consequence the sending of new personnel, Salesian activity in Ecuador had to be organised in a more autonomous manner, by the opening of houses for the formation of young confreres. After Vatican II and the General Chapters of the Congregation that gave effect to the new requirements, the Province underwent profound changes. The Salesian missions were the first to be affected by the great transformations: a pastoral activity was organised that aimed at the formation of ministers who were natives of the territory, and a liturgy was developed with religious celebrations that were in harmony with native cultural values. The organisation of the Federation of Shuar Centres provides an important example.

In 1961 the Province was divided into two, with headquarters at Quito and at Cuenca respectively. The division lasted only twelve years, until 29 August 1973, and served among other things for the definitive establishment of the Vicariate of Méndez, with the acquisition of new personnel and energy. At the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties work on new fronts was opened up: the Andean missions of Zumbagua, Salinas and Cayambe, and the work with street children in Quito and Guayaquil. To these must be added, in the nineties, the beginning of the Salesian Polytechnical University with campuses at Cuenca, Quito and Guayaquil.

Colombia: Provinces of Bogotá and Medellín

The Salesian presence in Colombia is the result of a *dream of Don Bosco*, who in 1883 during the night preceding the feast of St Rose of Lima, saw a map in which "the diocese of Cartagena was highlighted. It was the point of departure".² Don Bosco was already well known in Colombia as a wonderworker, and he would soon become known as the great educator of the young. And so it was, that through the mediation of General Joaquín F. Vélez, their representative with the Holy See, the Colombian government invited the Salesians to Colombia to provide religious, scientific and artistic education for the young.

Sent by Don Rua and led by Fr Evasio Rabagliati, the first Salesians arrived on Colombian soil on 31 January 1890, disembarking at Barranquilla. A few days later they reached Bogotá, where on 1 September they opened the first school in the country for technical education, the *Colegio Salesiano León XIII de Artes y Oficios*, which became a focal point for cultural expansion in Colombia.

Little by little Salesian works began to grow and multiply. In 1896 the Province was erected with St Peter Claver as its patron.

² MB XVI, p. 389.

And 1895 saw the first branch of the fertile tree of the Salesian Family, the *Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary*, founded at Agua de Dios by Fr Luigi Variara, who had continued the heroic work of Fr Michael Unia for the benefit of the lepers.

With 31 houses scattered all over Colombia, in 1957 a division brought into being the new Province of Medellín.

In Colombia the Salesian Congregation has charismatic works which have become benchmarks, such as the work for lepers at Agua de Dios and at Contratación, or the work for the Ariari, which continues to be a challenge for the Church because it is one of the country's regions most afflicted by violence. Thanks to the work done by the Salesians over the last forty years, the Vicariate has become a Diocese and has a group of local secular priests. For this reason the Salesians are gradually withdrawing and handing over parishes to the diocesan clergy, though there are still some places that require the apostolic generosity of the sons of Don Bosco.

For several years now, the Salesians of Bogotá (COB) have been opening works of great significance, taking care of street children (known locally as "gamines"), youngsters highly at risk because of violence (Tibú, San Vicente del Caguán) or the marginalised who gather in large numbers on the outskirts of towns (Ciudad Bolívar); and youngsters who because of the poverty of their families could have no access to a good education (in the 'colegios concesionados'). Deserving of special mention is the movement for the benefit of street children, now widespread in so many provinces throughout the world, which had its origin at Bogotá through the work of Fr Xavier De Nicolò who, after observing this tragic social phenomenon, was able to devise an effective educational project to meet it, which has become an example for others.

The Salesians of Medellín (COM) have also strengthened social works directed preferentially to young people who are poorer. I would like to recall especially the "Ciudad Don Bosco",

and also, in the Afro-Colombian contexts of Buenaventura and of Condoto, the care of youngsters at risk in the "Centro de Capacitación Don Bosco" at Cali, the project for the re-education of former participants in armed conflict in the "Hogar San Juan Bosco" of Armenia, and the training for employment offered in many of our works.

Peru

In 1886 the President of the Republic of Peru visited Valdocco and, in a meeting with Don Bosco, asked him for Salesians for his country. A similar request reached Don Bosco from a group of Salesian Cooperators, to whom he replied in 1887 asking them to discuss the matter with Fr James Costamagna who would be visiting Lima in 1888.

In 1890 Fr Angelo Savio arrived in the Peruvian capital to assess the suitability for the desired foundation and held a meeting with members of an Institution called the '*Sociedad de Beneficencia*', who had the intention of setting up in the city an Institute for girls to be directed by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and a School of Arts and Trades to be entrusted to the Salesians. Meanwhile Don Rua had received two letters, one from Mgr Macchi, Apostolic Delegate in Peru, and the second from Cardinal Rampolla, in the name of the Holy Father, insisting on the presence of Salesians in Peru. In the face of these requests, on 6 June 1890 the Superior Council approved, with some modifications, the project presented by the '*Sociedad Benéfica*', even though the definitive response of Don Rua could not be given until he obtained the approval of the Archbishop of Lima, which arrived in May 1891.

The founding group of Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians left Turin on 16 August and reached Lima on 27 September 1891. The Salesians, two priests (Fr Antonio Riccardi and Fr Carlo Pane) and a Brother (Bro. John Sciolli) started by assisting the nine Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who

began their work on 15 October. They were able to open their own oratory only on 8 December 1891. Nearly a year later they began a boarding establishment. Salesian work, thus begun in the Rimac district of Lima with an Oratory and Workshops of Arts and Trades, soon spread to Arequipa in the southern part of the country (1896); then later to Brena, another part of Lima (1897), and about the same time to the port of Callao, not far from Lima.

In the light of the rapid expansion of the work, Don Rua had erected the Province of St Gabriel the Archangel, with headquarters at Santiago in Chile, to include the houses of Chile and Peru, but because of the impossibility of any real animation and government, and to maintain the rhythm of development, in 1902 the Province of Saint Rose was erected with headquarters at Lima-Brena for the houses of Peru and Bolivia.

The opening of the missions in the “Valle Sagrado de los Incas”, after the closing of the works at Puno and Yucay so as to take on a work more directly benefiting native youngsters of the Peruvian high plateau, was an important step towards giving the Peruvian Province a more integral Salesian appearance; a similar objective was achieved by the organisation of the training centres for employment starting in the seventies and the initiative of the Don Bosco reception houses. In addition, the “Bosconia” foundation at Piura, the reopening of the Oratory of Rimac, the strengthening of the SYM, the opening of the mission at San Lorenzo (2000) in the Amazon region of the country, are also contributing to the presentation of a more complete image of what the Salesians are trying to do in Peru.

Bolivia

Fr James Costamagna visited Bolivia in 1889 and aroused the enthusiasm of the authorities to such an extent that they asked for the foundation of Salesian work in their country. But several years were to pass before Don Rua, in 1895, signed an agreement in Turin to open two boarding schools for arts and trades. Fr

Costamagna, who by then had become a bishop, travelled to Sucre and La Paz to establish in both cities the "Colegio Don Bosco", a boarding establishment organised for students and artisans and with a festive oratory; at Sucre there was also the care of a church. The two houses experienced a wonderful development from the outset and the Salesians gained the good will of the people; they were made part of the Peruvian Province. The distance from the provincial headquarters did not favour repeated attempts to make new foundations in Bolivia, and it was only in 1943 that were opened the agricultural school at Chulumani and two diocesan seminaries, those of "San Jerónimo" at La Paz and of "San Luis" at Cochabamba. In 1955 we withdrew from the two seminaries and opened an aspirantate of our own at Calacoto to foster local vocations. The following year the Fatima agricultural school was opened at Cochabamba. In 1960 the agricultural school of Muyurina was inaugurated at Montero (Santa Cruz), and in 1963 the "Colegio Don Bosco" of Cochabamba.

Because of the small number of foundations and of personnel, Bolivia was slow in becoming a Province; the erection took place only on 9 January 1963, with "Our Lady of Copacabana" as its Patron and Fr Peter Garnero as its first Provincial. Unfortunately Fr Garnero had to leave Bolivia a year and a half later on being appointed Provincial of San Paolo in Brazil. Fr José Gotardi was appointed as his successor, but he too was unable to consolidate the work, because after eighteen months he was sent as Provincial to Uruguay. Salesian work in Bolivia achieved a certain stability under Fr Jorge Casanova, from Argentina, who was able to complete successfully his six years as Provincial. Under his successor, Fr Rinaldo Vallino, who came from Guadalajara (Mexico), new foundations were made: the mission of Kami and Independencia on the high plateau, and those of "Sagrado Corazón" and of "San Carlos" in the eastern part of the country.

After Fr Vallino's six years as Provincial, the Province began to be governed by Provincials coming from its own communities. The first of these was Fr Tito Solari who had come to Bolivia

through a twinning arrangement between the Provinces of Venice and Bolivia. At the end of his mandate Fr Solari became Auxiliary Bishop of Santa Cruz and, a few years later, Archbishop of Cochabamba. During the subsequent periods of office of Fr Carlo Longo, of Fr José Ramón Iriarte and of Fr Miguel Angel Herrero the Province continued its growth in foundations and number of confreres. Since January 2005 the Province has been headed by Fr Juan Pablo Zabala Torres, the first Provincial of Bolivian origin.

Central America Zone

It includes Mexico, Venezuela, Central America, Antilles, Haiti.

Mexico: Provinces of Mexico-Mexico and Guadalajara (MEM-MEG)

The first Salesians reached Mexico on 2 December 1892. They were three priests: Fr Angelo Piccono, leader of the expedition, Fr Raphael Piperni and Fr Simon Visintainer, with a Brother Peter Tagliaferro and a cleric Augustine Osella.

They had been invited through the enterprise of a Salesian Cooperator, Fr Angel Lascuráin who from 1890 had been running a small college in Mexico City. Soon afterwards in the following year the Salesians moved to the "Santa Julia" district on the outskirts, where they built a big College for students and artisans. In 1894 Fr Piperni moved on to the city of Puebla where he made the second Salesian foundation. The third was made in 1901 in the city of Morelia and the fourth in 1905 in that of Guadalajara. These four houses formed the Province of "Our Lady of Guadalupe". But during the next fifty years Salesian work in Mexico could not be developed at all: first because of the revolution (1910-1920), and then subsequently because of persecution (1926-1929) and the period of anticlerical legislation (1930-1940). In fact in 1937 only 13 Salesians remained in the whole Republic. Salesian work began again only from 1941, and it de-

veloped with unexpected vitality, to such an extent that in only 22 years (1941-1963) it had reached 35 houses and 400 Salesians.

Such prodigious expansion led in 1963 to a division into two Provinces: that of "Our Lady of Guadalupe" (MEM) in the south with headquarters at Mexico City, and that of "Christ the King and Mary Help of Christians" (MEG) in the north with headquarters at Guadalajara.

Salesian work in the Mexico-Mexico Province (MEM) is of particular importance because of the missionary activity in the southern part of the country (Oaxaca), where we work among the Mixes, the Chinantecos and some Zapoteca communities. The first Salesians arrived in this area in 1962, and in 1966 the Mixopolitana Prelature was erected, thus beginning the process of inculturation of the Gospel and the development of a Church with native features, in line with Vatican II and the Church's magisterium. Though it was under the jurisdiction of MEM, this missionary work was entrusted to both Provinces. In the Prelature at the present time the Guadalajara Province has a community (San Antonio de Las Palmas) under its direct responsibility.

In 1979 the MEM Province began a work at San Cristóbal de Las Casas (Chiapas), with a festive oratory and the care of some native communities of the area, and during the nineties an Oratory was begun at Mérida.

From its beginning the Guadalajara Province has been very sensitive to the formation of young confreres, with the building of training houses and the preparation of formation personnel.

Half way through the eighties the desires of various Salesians began to take shape in the opening of daily Oratories in the frontier areas with the United States, so as to follow up young people at risk coming from within the country and in fact from all over Latin America; in this way the work at Tijuana, Mexicali, Los Mochis, Ciudad Juárez, Nogales began and recently that at Chihuahua, Acuña and Laredo.

For some years now the Mexican Provinces have been growing progressively in their identity and sense of belonging, through initiatives of various kinds: Provincial Community Assembly, Weeks of Ongoing Formation, the Provincial Christmas Celebration, Provincial Retreats. Moreover in each of the two Provinces there are activities that take care of youngsters who are at risk, such as Nazareth House (MEM) and Boys' Town (MEG).

Venezuela

In February 1894 Mgr Giulio Tonti, Apostolic Delegate in Venezuela, and as an envoy of the government, asked Don Rua for the foundation of Salesian work at Caracas and Valencia. Already some time earlier Mgr Uzcátegui, Fr Arteaga and the Venezuelan Salesian Cooperators had asked Don Bosco to send his sons to their country.

The first seven Salesians reached Venezuela on 29 November 1894. The beginnings of the work at Caracas were difficult because of disagreements with the government. The Salesians, led by Fr Enrico Riva, began a small work which grew with time and eventually became the great College of St Francis de Sales at Sarriá. Later the Don Bosco Free Schools were built alongside the College. In the early part of 1900 the building of the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians was begun. In 1894 at Valencia the "Don Bosco College", begun earlier under the direction of Fr Bergeretti, was opened. In 1902 work was started at San Rafael (Zulia State), which at the request of Don Albera was later transferred to Maracaibo. 1914 saw the birth of Salesian work at Táriba (Tachira State) with the "St Joseph College" and a chapel in honour of Mary Help of Christians. In 1927 the various stages of formation were established at La Vega and in 1938 the novitiate was transferred to Los Teques.

Salesian work in the present State of Amazonia dates from 1933, when the Province was entrusted with the Prefecture Apostolic of Puerto Ayacucho. The greatest growth-rate, in both

works and personnel, took place in the fifties and sixties. Houses were opened at Mérida, Coro, Judibana, Puerto La Cruz, and Los Teques. Large educational establishments were built. The Puerto Ayacucho Vicariate was developed with new works in the Upper Orinoco: Isla del Ratón, Manapiare, La Esmeralda. In 1953 the Prefecture became a Vicariate. The FMA, who had been working in Venezuela since 1927, became integrated into the missionary work of the Vicariate from 1940 and at present have six communities there. The Church, especially through the activity of the Salesian Congregation and of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, has made a great contribution to the formation of the State of Amazonia, through educational centres and works of evangelisation among the various ethnic groups, abandoned since the XVIII century after the expulsion of the Jesuits. In the fifties the Salesians began an evangelisation project among the Yanomami.

The new guidelines of the Special General Chapter in 1972 introduced considerable changes in the configuration of the Province and in the pastoral service it provided. New works were begun to create a presence in densely populated areas: the "Primero de Noviembre" community at Petare and the parish of "San Félix" in Bolivar State. Most of the schools were aimed at poor youngsters, and were subsidised by the AVEC (Venezuelan Association for Catholic Education) in the State of Bolívar. From that period all those in formation were Venezuelans, and the presence of Venezuelan confreres has been very much strengthened in the Province as a whole.

In 1976 the ISSFE (Salesian Higher Institute of Philosophy and Education), for the formation of young Salesians, was founded and affiliated to the Salesian Pontifical University of Rome. In 1991 the process was begun for the creation of the "Father Ojeda Salesian University Institute", and it was subsequently approved by the National University Council on 7 February 1996.

In 1994 Salesian work in Venezuela reached its centenary and this was the occasion for the launching of two projects aimed at

providing a response to new challenges in the service to youngsters most in need: the “Red de Casas Don Bosco” for the care of children at risk, which already has seven houses, and the “Asociación para la Capacitación Juventud y Trabajo” which offers training for employment to youngsters and adults who have dropped out of school; across the nation there are now 60 such training centres, including works of other religious congregations.

Central America

This is a Province that includes six countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

The first Salesians landed at the port of La Libertad (El Salvador) on 2 December 1897. They had been sent by Don Rua at the request of General Rafael Gutiérrez, President of the Republic. The request was based on an explicit desire of Leo XIII. Members of this first Salesian expedition to Central America were Fr Luigi Calcagno (leader), Frs Joseph Misieri and Joseph Menichinelli, Bros Stephen Tosini and Basil Rocca, and the young clerics Peter Martin, Constantine Kopsik and Luigi Salmón.

At first the Salesians took charge of the “Finca Modelo” in the capital San Salvador, an agricultural school belonging to the government with about 120 students, all of them boarders. Salesian work continued there for two years, after which political instability put at end to the enterprise. The Salesians then took charge of an institute for 20 orphan children in the neighbouring town of Santa Tecla.

On 4 January 1903 the fourth group of missionary Salesians arrived in San Salvador. In that same year the Central America Province of the Most Holy Saviour was erected, which included the five Republics of Central America and the territory of Panama, which in the same year became detached from Colombia as an independent State. Setting out from Santa Tecla successive groups of confreres founded Salesian houses and works in Honduras (Co-

mayagua, 1905), Costa Rica (Orphanage of Cartago, 1907), Panama (1907), Nicaragua (1912) and Guatemala (1929). In the Republic of El Salvador itself in 1903 the Salesians inaugurated the "St Joseph College" in the town of Santa Ana and in 1904 the "Don Bosco College" at Avenida Peralta (San Salvador). On 29 May 1912 El Salvador received a visit from the first Salesian Bishop and future Cardinal, Mgr John Cagliero, as Apostolic Delegate.

Made up as it is of six countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama), the Province presents a picture of great complexity. International frontiers are an obstacle to the free flow of personnel and materials; well marked social and political divisions foster cultural differences and an accentuated national feeling; six educational systems; six sets of legislation for workers; six monetary systems, six frontiers, six episcopal conferences. The Province has 24 communities: 6 in Guatemala, 7 in Salvador, 2 in Honduras, 3 in Nicaragua, 4 in Costa Rica and 2 in Panama; their activities involve houses of formation (including a regional centre for Brothers), missions, academic centres, technical institutes, parishes, oratories, youth centres and two universities.

Antilles

After a brief and unsuccessful attempt at Curaçao and in Jamaica, Salesian work in the Antilles became established in Cuba and depended originally on the Tarragonese Province of Spain. Subsequently in 1924 it became part of the Mexican Province and three years later, because of the religious persecution going on in Mexico, the Provincial moved his headquarters to Havana. The canonical erection of the Antilles Province took place on 15 September 1953, with Don Bosco as its patron and the provincial house at La Víbora (Havana, Cuba), when Fr Ziggìotti was Rector Major. Later, following the Castro revolution, the headquarters was transferred to the "Don Bosco College" in the Dominican Republic; there it remained until 1993, when it moved into its own premises.

Cuba

The first Salesians, led by Blessed Joseph Calasanz landed at Camagüey on 4 April 1917 to take charge of the parish of Our Lady of Charity. They had been preceded two years earlier by Mgr Felix Guerra who, after being appointed Administrator Apostolic of Santiago di Cuba and later Bishop of the same city, was actually the first Salesian to set foot in Cuba.

The foundation at Camagüey was followed by those at Havana (“Institución Inclán”) and at Santiago di Cuba (1921). In 1929 a house of formation for aspirants and novices was opened at Guanabacoa. In 1931 the church of the former Carmelite convent was acquired at Havana and immediately converted into the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Guines was founded in 1936, and in 1939 the great Institute of Arts and Crafts at Camagüey was completed. 1943 saw the blessing of the foundation stone of the Church of St John Bosco at La Vibora; it was completed in 1947 and the provincial house was set up next to it. In 1943 a novitiate was opened at Matanzas. In 1955 Salesian work began at Arroyo Naranjo (Havana), and in 1956 the technical school was opened at Santa Clara.

After the success of the Castro revolution in 1961, all the Salesian schools were nationalised and the confreres were obliged to emigrate or be compelled to live in the church and parish premises in great difficulties. In some places a single Salesian remained alone; at Camagüey the parish had to be abandoned; it would be taken back again only in 1988. In recent years Salesian work has become more consolidated in parish settings with the arrival of new Salesians and with the appearance of local vocations – an element of great hope for the future.

Another source of encouragement for Salesian work in Cuba is that among the outstanding confreres who have worked there is the figure of Fr Joseph Vándor, a native of Hungary and an extraordinary missionary; the cause for his beatification is in progress.

Dominican Republic

The coming of the Salesians to Santo Domingo is linked with the figure of Fr Richard Pittini who in 1933, when Provincial in the United States was sent by Fr Peter Ricaldone to assess the possibilities for opening a school of arts and trades in Santo Domingo. Following the favourable report he gave to the Rector Major, Salesian work became a reality on 26 August 1935 when Salesians began to take care of the city's poor youngsters. Fr Pittini was appointed by the Holy See Archbishop of Santo Domingo; at that time the diocese included all the territory of the Dominican Republic.

As archbishop, Mgr Pittini set up the parish of St John Bosco, which soon after gave rise to the Salesian houses of Christ the King and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Villa Juana). In that same year the Salesians accepted the agricultural colony at Moca, which the government handed over to the Congregation; a few years later, and once again at Moca, they accepted the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which would be transformed into a National Sanctuary by Fr Antonio Flores. In 1947 the aspirantate was opened at Jarabacoa. The oratory of Mary Help of Christians was begun in 1944, and in 1952 Archbishop Pittini created the new parish of Mary Help of Christians. The "Hogar Escuela Domingo Savio" in Santo Domingo was opened in 1955.

In 1956 the "Colegio de Artes y Oficios" which formed part of the "Don Bosco" was transferred to become the present "Professional Salesian Technical Institute" (ITESA) and in its place a secondary school was opened. The Salesian work at Mao began in 1960 and in 1968 the Salesian community of the "Heart of Jesus" was erected. 1974 saw the beginning of the community of La Vega and of the parish of "Dominic Savio". In 1978 Salesian work began in the city of Barahona. In 1982 the studentate of philosophy, which had already been transferred from Aibonito (Puerto Rico) to Havana (Cuba) and then to Villa Mella, was provisionally housed in the house of Calle Galván. In 1984 the

“Sacred Heart of Jesus” novitiate was erected at Jarabacoa, together with the “Christ the King” Salesian community. In 1987 the Polytechnical Institute of Santiago de los Caballeros (IPISA) was taken over.

In the nineties in the Dominican Republic the Antilles Province launched a large-scale work for the benefit of street children which is now being consolidated and extended.

Puerto Rico

A Salesian presence in Puerto Rico was already being requested in 1933, but it was only in 1947 that Fr Peter Savani could take over the parish of “St John Bosco” at Santurce. From there he began to look after an oratory in the present territory of Cantera where, in 1949, the building was begun of a small chapel that was destined to become the present parish church and Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians. Later the college was opened to provide for the poor youngsters of the area.

At present Puerto Rico has six houses: the parish, oratory and youth centre at Aguadilla (1996); the retreat house and former seminary at Aibonito (1961); the parish of “St Francis de Sales” and the oratory and youth centre at Cataño (1968); the parish of “St John the Baptist” and the youth centre at Orocovis (1978); the parish of “St John Bosco” with the school and social work at Palmera, San Juan, Calle Lutz (1947); and the “Mary Help of Christians” parish with the college and youth centre at San Juan, Cantera (1952).

Haiti

The history of Salesian work in Haiti is linked from the outset with an institute, the “National School of Arts and Trades” at Port-au-Prince, better known by the generic name “St John Bosco”. In October 1934 President Vincent, who had seen the work done by the Salesians in a neighbouring country, invited Mgr Pittini, Archbishop of Santo Domingo, to found at Port-au-

Prince a work similar to that carried out in the Dominican capital. The following year the Rector Major sent to Port-au-Prince an Extraordinary Visitor, Fr. Anthony Candela who, with Mgr Pittini and the Haitian authorities drew up a basic agreement for the new foundation. The Rector Major delegated Fr Marie Gimbert, of French and Breton origin and a former Provincial of Lyons, to implant the Salesian charism in Haiti. He arrived in the country on 27 May 1936, accompanied by an Italian Brother Adrian Massa. Later other confreres came to complete the community.

The workshops, under the direction of young and dynamic Italian Salesians, gave the school a sound start until it soon became the best professional school in the country. The addition of extra personnel from Belgium prompted an effort to promote local vocations. The first Haitian Salesian, Fr Serges Lamaute, was professed in 1946, and in the following year the first Haitian Brother, Hubert Sanon, made his first profession in Cuba. In 1948 a group of five candidates were sent to France for their novitiate and the study of philosophy.

It was only in 1951 that the Salesians were able to begin a work at Petionville and in 1955 that they could go to Cap-Haïtien to found the first parish in Haiti dedicated to St John Bosco.

From its foundation Haiti became successively a part of the Mexican-Antilles Province with headquarters at Havana, then part of the Antilles Province (together with Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) with the provincial house in Santo Domingo. From January 1992, Haiti became a Vice-province with headquarters at Port-au-Prince. At present there are ten foundations, including three houses of formation: the prenovitiate, novitiate and postnovitiate.

Thanks to the witness of the pioneers, Salesian work is well implanted, with significant activity in very poor areas of great need. Today Don Bosco and his charism are at home in Haiti.

North-American Zone

It includes the Provinces of the United States (SUE-SUO) and Canada.

United States: Provinces of San Francisco and New Rochelle (SUO-SUE)

Western United States (SUO)

The first Salesian community was established at San Francisco on 11 March 1897, with the invitation of the Archbishop Patrick W. Riordan to take care of Italian immigrants and their families in the parish of Sts Peter and Paul. There were four Salesians in the group: Fr Raphael Piperni, Rector, Fr Valentine Cassini, Brother Nicholas Imielinski and a cleric Joseph Oreni. They were enthusiastically received, and under the dynamic guidance of Fr Piperni the Church of Sts Peter and Paul began its steady rise to significance and leadership in the North Beach area. After the great earthquake that devastated the city on 18 April 1906, the church had to be rebuilt, an operation completed only in 1924.

Alongside the church is the equally well known Salesian Boys' and Girls' Club, founded in 1921. It rapidly became a centre for the many young people of the area through sport, music and activities of a cultural, religious and social character. Five years later parish schools and a High School were opened. Only 15 months after their arrival the Salesians saw the need to provide another parish for the benefit of Italians working in the southern area of the city. In this way in 1898 the church of Corpus Christi came into being, once again for the service of the Italian community. Later a school and youth centre were built.

In 1902 the Salesians took over the Portuguese parish of St Joseph at Oakland, and their work met with such success that in 1915 the need was felt to build another church at Oakland, dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.

In 1902 the Province of the United States was erected with Headquarters in San Francisco and Fr Michael Borghino as its first Provincial. At the beginning the Province included only five houses: the parishes of Sts Peter and Paul and of Corpus Christi in San Francisco, the parish of St Joseph in Oakland, and the parishes of Mary Help of Christians and of the Transfiguration in New York.

In 1905 the provincial headquarters were transferred to Troy, N.Y., and subsequently to Hawthorne in 1908 and to New Rochelle in 1916. The change of site may have contributed to the fact that there were no further foundations in the West until 1921, when the Salesians took over the college at Watsonville in California. In 1923 they reached Los Angeles, where they took on the care of the church of St Peter. In the following year a second parish was begun, dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. On 28 May 1926 the Province of San Francisco was erected, under the patronage of St Andrew the Apostle.

The work at Richmond dates from 1927, The Salesians bought a property which became a studentate for future Salesians. In 1960 the young Salesians were transferred to Watsonville and the school was opened to students of the county of the West Coast.

The work at Bellflower began in 1938, the year in which the St John Bosco High School was built. In 1954 the adjoining parish church of St Dominic Savio was built and a parish school added.

In 1952, at the request of Cardinal James McIntyre and with the collaboration of Fr Felix Penna, the Don Bosco Technical School was opened at Rosemead. It is now a centre for professional training and a Junior College with a five-year programme leading to an 'Associate of Science Degree'.

The formation house of St Joseph at Rosemead, founded in 1958, was dedicated to the formation of Brothers. In 1989 the

Novitiate was established there, but later, in an effort to provide a response to the changed signs of the times, the house broadened its services for the formation of youth leaders.

In 1965 in the eastern part of Los Angeles, the Salesians took charge of the Church of Saint Mary, built in 1898, and used for the service of Irish immigrants living in that area of the city. Nowadays the immigrants they care for are Mexicans. There are also two other significant works: the Salesian Boys and Girls Club (an extension of the Salesian school), and the Salesian Family Youth Centre, founded in 1998. In addition, in 1978, at the request of Bishop Joseph Drury, our confreres took over the parish of San Louis Re in Laredo.

To this Province also belongs the Don Bosco Hall of Berkeley, once the theologate but since 1986 transformed into a centre of ongoing formation, with a programme of studies and formation in Salesianity. The courses are normally of a year's duration.

In the framework of missionary commitment promoted by Project Africa, Sierra Leone was entrusted to the two Provinces of the United States, who made a foundation at Lungi (Parish of Holy Cross) with an agricultural technical centre at San Agustín. These now form part of the new Vice-province of West Africa.

Eastern United States (SUE)

While Salesian work was beginning in San Francisco in 1897, in the East the Archbishop of New York was trying to persuade the Salesians to come to his own diocese. Cardinal Joseph McCloskey had twice made the request to Don Bosco through his coadjutor Bishop Michael Augustine Corrigan. On the death of the Cardinal in 1885, Bishop Corrigan succeeded him and set about inviting religious Congregations to take care of the immigrants in his diocese. He approached Don Bosco, but the Saint was to die and a further ten years were to pass with numerous letters to Don Rua before the Salesians could give a positive response to his invitation to become established in New York.

Finally, on 28 November 1898, Frs Ernest Coppo and Marcellino Scagliola, with Bro. Faustino Squassoni and an unidentified layman arrived. Their first house was a building on 12th East Street. The beginnings were slow and difficult, but those first Salesians did not lose heart; they continued their work of looking after immigrants, visiting their homes, attending to the sick and organising missions.

About 1920 the Salesians were already working in other parishes for Italian immigrants: that of St Michael at Paterson (NJ), of Holy Rosary at Port Chester (NY) and St. Anthony at Elizabeth (NJ). The original work undertaken in the eastern part of the country, as had been the case in the West, was for the benefit of Italian immigrants to whom they gave every kind of attention.

The first school, founded at Troy (NY) in 1903, was intended for students who showed some inclination for the priesthood. Subsequently another site was sought and found at Hawthorne (NY), where a new building was erected, nearer to other works and with plenty of space. The school was named "Columbus Institute". It succeeded so well that a first year of High School was soon added, with the intention of adding a new course every year. In 1912 the number of Poles and Italians had increased so much that the school had to be divided into two. In 1915 the Polish section moved to Ramsey (NJ), and was originally known as the Don Bosco Polish School; now the title is Don Bosco Prep. From a vocational standpoint, Ramsey is one of the most fruitful schools in all the Congregation, numbering among its past-pupils more than 160 priestly and religious vocations.

A great tragedy befell the Columbus Institute on the morning of 11 December 1917, when the building was destroyed by fire. A new school was built at New Rochelle (NY), on land purchased in 1919. The students of philosophy and theology had no fixed place of residence until the arrival of Fr Richard Pittini as Provincial; he bought a property in the county of Sussex (NJ), and realised

his dream by building there a house of formation for the Province. The building was inaugurated on 12 June 1931, and for the next 50 years "Newton," as it was known, became the heart of the Province.

Meanwhile some of the first parishes were multiplying. At Paterson the parish of St Michael gave rise to that of St Anthony. In the county of Westchester (NY) from the parish of Holy Rosary that of Corpus Christi was established. Other parishes were accepted at Tampa (FL), Mahwah (NJ), Birmingham (AL) and one in the Bahamas.

After repeated requests from Bishop Neve, a new Salesian house was opened at Tampa in Florida in 1928 with the title "Mary Help of Christians". In the meantime a new Middle School opened at Goshen (NY) in 1925, and the Hope Haven orphanage was begun in the thirties in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Two professional training centres, the Don Bosco Tech of Paterson and the Don Bosco Tech of Boston, became ideal structures for the work of Salesian Brothers. A youth centre in East Boston brought a knowledge of Don Bosco to that ethnic area.

Many of the above-mentioned houses are still functioning, and in the meantime the Province has opened new schools and youth centres: the Archbishop Shaw High School at Marrero (LA), a parish in Harlem (NY), the Salesian Boys' and Girls' Club at Columbus (Ohio), and the Marian Sanctuary at West Haverstraw (NJ).

In March 1997 a group of Salesian past-pupils from Mexico living in Chicago had a meeting with the Provincial and asked him to open a Salesian house in their area. The Rector Major, Fr Juan Vecchi, approved the proposal, and on 31 January 1998 the Salesians took on the pastoral care of the St John Bosco parish, which had been established and dedicated to Don Bosco at the time of his canonisation in 1934. In July 1998 two more works were entrusted to the Province in the diocese of St. Petersburg (FL): the St. Petersburg Catholic High School and the Good

Shepherd parish in Tampa. Finally, in 2003 a house was opened in Washington.

Canada

The Salesians entered Canada from the United States: from San Francisco along the Pacific coast and from New York along the Atlantic coast. The fame of Don Bosco had preceded them. After his canonisation the two models of priestly holiness proposed to seminarians were the Curé of Ars and Don Bosco. Even during his lifetime the saintly educator of Turin was known, especially in French-speaking Canada, thanks to the French Salesian Bulletin which dated back to 1881. The well known biography of Fr Auffray also made a great contribution to making the Saint known to the French-speaking clergy. In September 1893 there were already more than a hundred Cooperators in Canada, and Canadian bishops on their way to Rome used to pass through Valdocco to ask for the opening of Salesian work in their dioceses.

As in the United States, to meet the needs of Italian immigrants, in 1924 the Archbishop of Toronto entrusted to the Salesians the parish of St Agnes. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Salesians had been able to create a model parish for the diocese, in 1934 a number of parishes in the New Rochelle Province were handed back to their respective dioceses after it was considered they were not in line with the spirit of the Founder. The parish of St Agnes was included among them, a painful decision for both the diocese and the small Salesian community.

This episode helps us to understand why the true beginning of Salesian work in Canada is considered to be the opening of the Don Bosco Institute at Jacquet River (N.B.) in 1947. On the west coast the first foundation was the St Mary School at Edmonton in 1951, which was followed by the acceptance of the parish of the Sacred Heart in Vancouver in 1953. An aspirantate was opened at Boucheville, near Montreal, in 1959, and three years later was

transferred to Sherbrooke. Unfortunately this work was opened at a time when the crisis in vocations was beginning.

The two foundations on the Atlantic coast were subsequently abandoned because of profound changes in the country's school system. The Salesians returned to Toronto in 1977 and their work was so much appreciated that they were asked to take on a parish. The purpose of these two works in Ontario was to attract vocations from the English-speaking community.

Eastern Canada was a delegation of the New Rochelle Province from 1961 to 1988, when it was erected into a Vice-province under the patronage of St Joseph. Twelve years later the San Francisco Province handed over to the Vice-province the work at Edmonton and in 2002 that at Surrey (B.C.) In this way the Canadian Vice-province extended "*a mari usque ad mare*". It is certain, however, that Salesian Canada is greatly indebted for its development to the "mother provinces" of New York and San Francisco.

At the present time Salesian work in Canada is fundamentally parochial. But it should be noted that in the parishes preferential attention is given to the young, and the decision to withdraw from certain works was based on this criterion.

2. THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SITUATION

It is immediately clear that in the Region we find two very different situations: the *United States and Canada* in the north, countries among the richest on the entire planet, in which there is a significant distribution of wealth among the population, even though there are groups living in poverty, especially in the United States; and the *Latin-American countries* in the south with enormous social and economic inequalities.

Latin America is a continent rich in natural resources but where the majority of the people are poor, with 45% of them liv-

ing below the poverty line. The native minority (numbering 40 million and representing 11% of the total population) feel themselves excluded from social development and have to struggle to be recognised as autonomous peoples with their own culture, language and territory. Afro-americans (100 million) are much more numerous than the natives, but their condition is generally even worse, and they too have to fight for their identity and dignity. This inhuman poverty is precisely the reason for the continued migration towards the United States and Europe, and especially to Spain and Italy.

As has been said time and again by Latin-American Bishops' Conferences (Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo), the causes of this impoverishment are to be sought in social and economic structures that are not equally just to all citizens, and in corruption and foreign debt. To these must be added the inhuman features of globalisation which has deprived the State of its power to intervene and has allowed the economy to gain the ascendancy over all the factors that regulate social life. Moreover, the implementation of programmes and conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund have served only to deepen the pre-existing mechanisms of social exclusion, to weaken the legitimacy of governments, and to sow conflict in relationships with large groups of people in the region.

It is true that there is macro-economic growth, but wealth is not equally distributed. Indeed the tendency is to concentrate wealth in the hands of a few to the detriment of the majority. The objectives agreed by the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the whole of America at Miami to reduce poverty, illiteracy and sickness by the year 2005 seem a long way off.

As far as democracy is concerned, nearly all the Latin-American countries have freely elected civil governments, but in several countries in the area the population is dissatisfied with the government because of slow economic growth, the increasing inequalities and the deterioration of the legal systems and social services.

The cultural situation of the Interamerica Region is very complex; there are various cultural 'matrices': the Anglo-Saxon, predominant especially in the USA and Canada, the Latin (French and Spanish), the native and the African. On the other hand the migratory movements have brought about a great inter-relationship between the different cultures, creating a true cultural mosaic rather than a 'melting pot' in the United States and Canada.

With a high juvenile population, young people form a group which is not only the most numerous but also the most exposed because of the rapidity and depth of cultural changes, and because of the lack of opportunities for the development of their own all-round potential. A sad and worrying example is presented by the spreading social phenomenon of gangs which are becoming more and more threatening, as witness the "Maras" of Central America. In the case of Colombia a considerable number of young men and women have joined armed groups.

From the standpoint of religion, in North America the majority are Protestant, while in Latin-America they are almost completely Catholic. In the United States more than half the Catholics are of Hispanic origin, the result of immigration. The American continent is home to more than half the Catholics of the whole world. A serious threat to the Church in America is the rapid growth of sects and evangelical groups to which many Catholics give their adherence every year.

The four General Conferences of the Bishops of Latin America and of the Caribbean and the Synod of Bishops from the whole of the American continent have been important points of reference for the life and mission of the Church, and in particular for the preferential option for the poor and for the young. It has already been announced that the Fifth Assembly of CELAM will take place in Brazil in May 2007.

3. SALESIAN WORK AND INFLUENCE

The Interamerica Region, which came into being in 1996 as a result of the reorganisation of the Regions made by the GC24, has tried to respond to the spirit of the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, which asked that the American continent be considered as a single whole, with its differences but at the same time with its inter-relationships.

In the Region there are 12 Provinces and 2 Vice-provinces in 18 countries. While two Provinces are pluri-national (ANT and CAM), six others are in three countries (Colombia, Mexico and the United States). According to the statistics for 2005 there were 2,174 Salesians, of whom 1,496 were priests; 229 perpetually professed Brothers; 102 perpetually professed clerics; 294 clerics in temporary vows and 52 Brothers in temporary vows. There were 79 novices. 525 confreres (including the novices) were in initial formation. At the end of 2005 there were 106 prenovices. The average age in the Region was about 51 years.

3.1 *Community life*

After the GC25 the Provinces of the Region showed a growing and effective concern for the strengthening of community life. Salesian communities are on the whole strong and healthy, with a fraternal spirit expressed in their Plan for Community Life. The sense of local communities belonging to the Province and of the Provinces to the Congregation has also increased.

But not withstanding this encouraging situation, some *challenges* remain:

- ❑ *A lack of balance between works and resources*, which implies a danger of activism which, in turn, leads to superficiality, to spiritual emptiness, to individualism, to the weakening of communities, to a lack of educative and pastoral quality that makes what is urgent prevail over what is of greater importance.

- ❑ Here and there one notes a *weakening of the evangelical witness* of the religious community, revealed in a tendency towards an easy life and a lack of spiritual harmony that is in sharp contrast to the lifestyle and level of the population and the typical religious experience of the majority.
- ❑ Also detectable is a *lack of the deeper interpersonal communication* that fosters growth in the spiritual life of the confreres and in fraternal correction; it has a negative effect on perseverance in vocations.
- ❑ *The difficulty in finding Rectors who are real animators of the spiritual and pastoral life* of the religious community and of the EPC. The situation of the Rector being also the Economist is becoming endemic, with negative consequences for a wise animation.

3.2 Formation

The Provinces show a real concern for initial formation. Every Province except Canada has a number of prenovices varying between 1 and 24. Some Provinces have a prenovitiate that lasts for two years, even though it is clear that the prenovitiate in itself is the immediate preparation for the first experience of Salesian life.

There are 11 novitiates (8 of them provincial and 3 inter-provincial) with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 12 novices per novitiate.

The postnovitiates, of three years duration, are 12 in number, of which only one is interprovincial – that in Orange (SUE) which represents a collaboration between the two Provinces of the United States and the Vice-province of Canada. Of the 12 postnovitiates, 9 have their own Salesian study centre, while the others send the postnovices to non-Salesian Universities. Brother postnovices normally follow the same curriculum of philosophical and pedagogical studies as the Salesian clerics.

As is the case also in other Regions, so in the Interamerica the period of practical training is not always seen as a true formative phase. This results in little attention being given to the formative process of the young confrere, and in the choice of communities that are not always the best for the provision of spiritual and pastoral guidance.

With regard to the specific formation of Salesians preparing for the priesthood, the Region has two Salesian centres of studies, one in Central America and the other in Guadalajara (MEG), both of them affiliated to the UPS. In the Andean Zone a process of reflection is at present taking place concerning this phase of formation so as to ensure greater interprovincial collaboration and so lead to a greater sense of identity and quality. At Caracas the students attend an intercongregational study centre (ITER), linked with the UPS and with many Salesians on the staff. Finally, in other Provinces the confreres attend non-Salesian study centres. All these centres conclude the first cycle with a baccalaureate which has ecclesial recognition.

With regard to the specific formation of the Salesian Brother, the experience of the Regional Centre for the Brother (CRESCO) in San Salvador, which has functioned successfully in recent years, does not at present seem to satisfy sufficiently all the needs for the specific formation of the Brothers. For this reason a process of reflection is already taking place by the Regional Formation Commission and by the Provincials themselves to find the ideal solution, given the reduced number of young Brothers and the cultural and linguistic similarities and differences in the American continent.

There has been growing concern in the Provinces about offering a more systematic form of ongoing formation. Some Provinces have organised regular periodic courses for the confreres, adapted to different age groups. This is accompanied by a growing attention to the annual retreats as privileged moments in the spiritual life of every confrere (C 91). Already over the past

six years the Provinces have drawn up their Plan for the Qualification of the Confreres, but it has been only partially implemented on account of the difficulty of finding personnel for the various works.

In the Region there are two Centres of Ongoing Formation: the Institute of Salesian Studies (ISS) at Berkeley (SUO), and the Regional Centre of Ongoing Formation at Quito (ECU). The first falls under the responsibility of the San Francisco Province and is open to English-speaking confreres of any Region; the other depends on the Provinces of the Region for personnel and finance.

Among the problems found in the area of formation are the following:

- On the one hand, the *scarcity of vocations*, as compared with the great number of young people in these countries, and the religious 'fertile ground' present in society; and on the other the vocational frailty, which becomes evident in the fact that in some Provinces the number of confreres who have left is greater than those who have entered.
- To this must be added the already mentioned disproportion between works and Salesian personnel, which often leads to a reduction to the minimum in formation teams or to the unification of the phases of formation, or the lack of qualification of the confreres. All this makes more urgent the need for greater collaboration and a common search for solutions. In particular the study centres (especially those for theological formation) require a high academic standard and a big investment in qualified personnel. Another element demanding great attention on the part of all is the formation in Salesianity, which is rather weak.

3.3 Youth Ministry

The confreres of the Region, sorely tried by huge social, cultural and religious problems, are outstanding for their great pas-

toral activity. Salesian work frequently takes the place of that of the State where the latter cannot ensure social welfare (housing, employment, education, health). In other places, the State favours the Salesian mission through subsidies for schools, training centres for those entering employment, and care for young people at risk.

After the GC23 great efforts were made to draw up the Educative and Pastoral Plan which, once adopted, becomes a true guide for the realisation of the mission. But it often happens that the SEPP has no real impact, either through lack of a formative process or because in practice it is simply forgotten or never updated.

In recent years more attention has been given in thought and practice to "paying particular attention to those marginalised",³ which implies three things: preferential attention to young people at risk, the opening of all the works to deal with situations of youthful marginalisation, and the formation of a social sensitivity and a commitment to the transformation of situations of injustice. Nevertheless this effort must be intensified by increasing the number of works dealing on an ad hoc basis with those who are marginalised, by broadening the scope of our works so that they have a greater effect on the local area, and by the formation of truly active citizens committed to the building of a more just and fraternal society.

The GC24 was followed in our works by the setting up of the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC) and its council, called to be a true animating nucleus with the active participation of lay people, even if in some cases it became reduced to a working group. For years the Region has witnessed a growth in certain pastoral procedures through the regional coordination of schools, of emarginalisation sectors and of Delegates for Youth Ministry.

³ Cf. ACG 380, Project of Animation and Government of the Rector Major and his Council, Third priority, and third area of animation in the Youth Ministry Section (PROMOTION OF SOLIDARITY AND OF JUSTICE).

Salesian works

- Schools

Salesian activity in schools takes first place in the framework of the Region's works. There are 172 scholastic institutions in all, between kindergarten, elementary, primary and secondary schools, with more than 200,000 pupils. There are 56 vocational training centres and agricultural schools, with about 25,000 pupils.

The schools operate on a zonal and regional basis of coordination, so as to implement the guidelines set out at the meeting of American schools at Cumbayá (Quito, Ecuador) in the year 2001, which sought to renew our educative and pastoral work.

The situation of schools with regard to their relationships and agreements with individual States varies widely. In some countries the State contributes financially to the running of schools. In others schools belonging to the State are entrusted to the Salesians for their administration. In these two cases it is easier to ensure that our efforts are directed to the poorer classes. An innovation becoming more accentuated in recent years is the presence of girls in our schools, which brings with it the further challenges of coeducation.

- Parishes

Without including the mission stations, the Salesian parishes in the Region number 168 with about 3 million parishioners. In some Provinces most of our works are of this kind. In general, parish work includes an Oratory or Youth Centre, a school, a training centre for those about to enter employment, a social and welfare centre (with a medical dispensary) and facilities for taking care of youngsters at risk. This means that in practice none are just parishes entirely on their own.

Almost all the parishes are in densely populated areas. Many of them have adopted a pastoral method aimed at ensuring a more solid and effective evangelisation, e.g. the "Proyecto de Renovación

Diocesana y Evangelización" (PRDE), known originally as the "New Parish Image" (NIP), or the Integral System of New Evangelization (SINE). All things considered, I think the Salesian identity of the parish is an element that could do with strengthening.

- *Oratories and Youth Centres*

Oratories and Youth Centres, especially those that are open daily, try to offer, in addition to catechesis and cultural and sporting activities, an integral response to the needs of youth, preparing them for work and for finding their place in society. Particular importance attaches to the Oratories opened along the frontier between the United States and Mexico.

In this pastoral area can be included the seasonal activities such as Summer Camps in the United States and Canada, which offer various ways of spending free time constructively, as well as providing an opportunity for the further formation of young people by giving them an opportunity for educative and pastoral activity on behalf of other youngsters.

- *Preparation for entering the work force*

The reference here is not to technical schools but to centres of formation for those about to begin work, such as the Centres for Occupational Education in Peru; the Preparation Centres in Colombia; the "John Bosco the Worker" centre in one of the most densely populated parts of Bogotá, which by agreement with the government helps some 4,000 boys and girls; the "Training Centres for Work" in Venezuela, which form a network embracing more than 60 institutions, of which only a few in fact belong to the Province.

In some cases the training for work is combined with production and marketing, as in the "Industrial Polygon" in San Salvador, where a group of micro-enterprises are productive while at the same time providing work-training. In Ecuador a network of productive cooperatives has developed very well in rural areas.

- *Care of youngsters at risk*

Care for youngsters at risk, which is one of the prides of the Region, has increased in all the Provinces, inspired by the work of Fr Xavier De Nicolò, creator of the "Bosconia" complex. Other new initiatives have begun along the same lines: the "Hogar Don Bosco" at Santa Cruz (Bolivia), the "Casitas Don Bosco" in Peru, the "Chicos de la Calle" project in Ecuador, the "Ciudad Don Bosco" at Medellín (Colombia), the "Casas Don Bosco" in Venezuela, the "Proyecto Inspectorial Muchachos y Muchachas con Don Bosco" in the Dominican Republic, the "Ciudad de los Niños" of Santa Ana in El Salvador, the "Hogar Nazaret" of Mexico City and the "Ciudad del Niño" of León (MEG).

At Port-au-Prince, in Haiti, the network of schools founded by the Dutch Salesian missionary Fr. Laurent Bohnen continues to provide a daily meal for more than 20,000 young children. In the Dominican Republic an effort is being made to get parents to accept more responsibility, by training mothers of families and enabling them to find work, and so avoid their children having to make a living on the streets.

A leading kind of work worthy of praise is carried out by the two Colombian Provinces at Armenia, Cali and Bogotá with young men and women who have left armed groups, to whom is offered an opportunity to recover the true meaning of life through training for honest work.

- *Works for Social Advancement*

Although every Salesian work for the benefit of boys and girls at risk is obviously a work of human and social advancement, there are certain works doing this in a particular way, because the activities are carried out with young and older children and even adults who need to recover an awareness of their dignity, potential and responsibilities. In some of our centres they are encouraged to develop community-based working practices and become organised so as to find the answers to their needs together.

They work together on the production and marketing of their products commercially. Everything takes place in a context of sharing and through a process in which the individuals feel themselves part of a community. Moreover, some of these initiatives operate within a network involving European organisations that encourage eco-solidarity in commerce.

Many Provinces have works of this kind. I want to mention especially those in Bolivia and Ecuador. Equally worth mentioning is the work in the missionary areas of Valle Sagrado in Peru, of the Amazonian and Andean missions, of the missions of the Upper Orinoco in Venezuela, of the missions of Upper Verapaz in Guatemala, of the Prelature of the Mixes and Chinantecos in Mexico, and of the work among the Afro-Ecuadorians at Esmeraldas (ECU) and at Condoto (COM).

- Care of migrants

The care of immigrants was one of the original characteristics of the Salesians in both Provinces of the United States and in Canada at the beginning when they began by working for Italian immigrants, and later through parishes for other ethnic groups: Chinese, Filipinos, Slovenes, Croats. Hungarians, Vietnamese and Koreans. Both the Province of New Rochelle and that of San Francisco have parishes for the Christian faithful from Spain, Portugal, Latin-America, and particularly Mexico.

This challenge, however, is not exclusive to North America. Migration has become an irresistible phenomenon which results in thousand of Haitians being in the Dominican Republic, of Dominicans in Puerto Rico, of Cubans in the United States. I think that the Provinces of Latin America must find some way of meeting the needs of emigrants from their areas to the United States, Canada and nowadays also to Europe.

- Universities

The university provides a new frontier for the Salesian mission. The Rector Major and his Council have outlined for the In-

stitute of Salesian Universities (IUS) the profile of the Salesian identity of our universities and the institutional plan they should develop to ensure fidelity to our charism.

Various Provinces of the Region have work of this kind in their territory. I recall the "Universidad Don Bosco" of El Salvador and the "Universidad Mesoamericana" in Guatemala, both of them in Central America; the "Universidad Salesiana" in Mexico; the "Universidad Politécnica Salesiana" in Ecuador; the "Universidad Salesiana" in Bolivia. Other Provinces have Institutes of higher education at university level: the "Istituto Universitario Salesiano Padre Ojeda" in Venezuela; the "Politecnico Salesiano" at Lima in Peru. Still others are examining the pros and cons of launching university centres. The challenge on the one hand is that of maintaining the quality of our cultural work, and on the other the availability of Salesians capable of working at such a level, and so ensure pastoral care and consequently the Salesian identity of the university. The Rector Major has appointed Fr Charles Garulo to coordinate matters in this sector; he will try to consolidate what has already been done and to promote and implement the policy of the Congregation in the IUS.

Pastoral activities

Group activity. The Salesian Youth Movement.

In all the Provinces there has been a great development of group activity among young people, even though it must be added that not all such groups develop a serious programme from an educational and pastoral standpoint. Unfortunately the frequent changes of Salesian personnel responsible produce highs and lows that detract from the quality of the work in this area.

Little by little the idea is growing and being implemented of gathering all such groups into the Salesian Youth Movement. In several Provinces there is coordination at provincial and even national level, and also with the FMA, with the organisation of meetings, congresses and activities for the planning and evalua-

tion of the progress of the SYM. Some Provinces have managed to draw up a scheme for the formation of youth leaders.

Pastoral work for vocations. The Volunteer Movement.

In the countries of North America pastoral work for vocations frequently meets with considerable difficulties because of the environment, so strongly imbued with consumerism and hedonism, and also on account of the scandals linked with the abuse of juveniles alleged against members of the Catholic Church. In the countries of Latin America the situation is much different. There is still a fruitful religious foundation, a firm Catholic background which combined with the great challenges in society make the idea of a vocation still very attractive. But it must be acknowledged that in candidates from these countries the human and Christian foundation is not always such as would lead to the building of a sound religious personality.

Nevertheless all the Provinces are concerned about vocational pastoral work, which is carried out in a variety of ways. In some cases a vocation promotion team has been organised, sometimes drawn from different groups of the Salesian Family, which tries to encourage communities to draw up their own pastoral plan and develop a programme for young people. I think that many vocations are lost at this stage through the lack of a real process for maturing in faith and of the personal guidance that helps the young person to make life choices directed to Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

The volunteer movement is present in every Province, with different degrees of intensity and quality; it has a threefold aspect: that of a social volunteer movement which is certainly the most widespread, that of the missionary volunteer movement, and that of the vocational volunteer movement. It is interesting and encouraging to see that some Provinces have succeeded in systematically organising the volunteer process, from preparation to continuing accompaniment and to subsequent follow-up.

Formation of lay people.

In line with the directives of the GC23 and GC24, lay people are taking on ever greater responsibility for the management of our works. They receive a formation which if it is to be effective needs to be more gradual and systematic. From this point of view, even though it may be true that formation of lay collaborators in our works needs to be done at local and provincial level, I consider very valuable the service offered by some specific formation centres.

3.4 The Salesian Family

The Salesian Family is well developed in the Region, where in fact 12 different branches can be found: Salesians (SDB), Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA), Salesian Cooperators, Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Daughters of the Divine Saviour, Sisters of the Resurrection, Sisters of Charity of Miyazaki, Don Bosco Volunteers, Volunteers with Don Bosco, Past-pupils, Association of Mary Help of Christians, Association of Damas Salesianas (ADS).

Indeed, four of these branches were born in the Region, beginning with the Institute of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, founded by Blessed Luigi Variara at Agua de Dios (Colombia); the Daughters of the Divine Saviour, founded by Mgr Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio at San Vicente (El Salvador); the Association of the Damas Salesianas, founded by Fr Miguel González at Caracas (Venezuela); and the Sisters of the Resurrection, founded by the Indian missionary Fr George Puthenpu-
ra at San Pedro Carchá (Guatemala). And there is also the group of Volunteers with Don Bosco (CDB), which received ecclesial recognition from the Archbishop of Caracas (Venezuela).

In most of the Provinces the Advisory Group of the Salesian Family has been set up and is functioning well; it has helped to promote a greater sense of unity, awareness of the spiritual and apostolic family of Don Bosco, and collaboration in working together in a given area, even though there is still a long way to go.

In this sector the two biggest challenges are, on the one hand the care and promotion of the Association of Salesian Past-pupils and, on the other the awareness among us Salesians of our responsibility for the animation of the Salesian Family (C 5).

3.5 Social Communication

In this Region the area of Social Communication finds one of its successful achievements, especially when one bears in mind all the different fields in this sector. Productive enterprises abound: there are 10 schools of printing, 9 printing establishments, 5 publishing houses for school books, 3 for catechetical works, 4 for general publishing, 10 bookshops, 4 audiovisual centres, 2 centres for the production of programmes, 12 radio stations, 6 television channels, 4 magazines and 3 centres for web projects. The "Catholic Biblical Apostolate" Publishing House of Bogotá distributes its books from the Sanctuary of the Infant Jesus with a production that for some titles reaches millions of copies.

A special influence on the cultural world is wielded by the publishing houses of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia that publish school texts. The "Abya-Yala" Publishing House in Ecuador enjoys worldwide recognition for its publications on cultural and social issues. The two Mexican Provinces have set up a Society with the EDEBE of Barcelona (Spain) for the publication of school texts.

The Salesian Bulletin is published regularly in all the Provinces except the Vice-province of Haiti, The Mexican edition comes out monthly; the others at two-monthly or three-monthly intervals. The New Rochelle Province publishes editions of the Bulletin in both English and Spanish. Over the whole Region more than 700,000 copies of the Bulletin are printed: 204,000 in Mexico, 128,000 in the San Francisco Province and 100,000 in the New Rochelle Province of the United States, 76,440 in the Province of Central America and 63,000 in that of Canada.

Although there are in the Region so many focal points of Social Communication, and even though there is concern for the forma-

tion of Salesians for this sector, much more could still be done.

3.6 Missions and missionary promotion

Missionary work in the Interamerica Region is of great importance, both for the number of Provinces involved and for the high quality of the work carried out in some areas. Particularly significant is what is done among the natives at Kami in Bolivia, at Valle Sagrado and San Lorenzo in Peru, in the Andean missions and the Vicariate of Méndez (which is the oldest in the Congregation), in Ecuador, in the Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho in Venezuela, in Alto Verapaz in Guatemala and in the Mixepolitana Prelature in Mexico. Of importance too is the apostolate among the Afro-Americans at Condoto and Buenaventura in the Province of Colombia-Medellín, at Esmeraldas in Ecuador and in a parish of the New Rochelle Province in Washington.

In the missions great efforts have been made in inculturating the Gospel, in developing processes of evangelisation, of catechesis and of the formation of animators for implanting the Church. Deserving of special mention is the work done among the Shuar (ECU), the Achuar (ECU and PER), the Yanomami (VEN), the Mayas (CAM), the Mixes and the Chinantecos (MEM).

The presence and work of Salesian missionaries has been decisive for the survival and progress of the native peoples. In mission territories the Salesians were for many years the only institution able to carry out a project of evangelisation from an ecclesial point of view and programmes of education and human advancement from a social standpoint. The presence of the Salesians, moreover, guaranteed respect for the fundamental rights of these people, one of which was the ownership of land.

Side by side with typical missionary work, research has been and still is being undertaken by specialists into the native culture of the people, their language and ideas of the world. In this connection numerous publications have been produced by the "Abya-Yala" publishing house, the leader in this field.

As is only natural, problems are not lacking, caused especially by tiredness of the missionaries often forced to lead a very hard life, by their advanced age and lack of replacements. It is urgently necessary that the Province should grow in the awareness that all its members are called to be and feel themselves missionaries.

The Provinces of the Interamerica Region, like all those of Europe and some of Asia, have been involved in Project Africa: those of the United States in Sierra Leone and the Latin-American Provinces in Guinea-Conakry. These two now form part of Vice-provinces in Western Africa.

In the Region there are also two Mission Offices which fulfil an important role for the development and support of missionary projects. They are those of Sherbrooke in Canada and of New Rochelle in the USA - the latter is well known; it was the first of the Salesian Missions Offices. In Quito in Ecuador there is an Office that raises funds for vocations, begun by Fr John Porter; it helps all the Provinces of Latin America, including those of the South Cone Region.

4. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

After presenting this Region I would like to point to what I consider to be the main challenges it must face, and consequently where its future prospects lie. As a starting point I take the words of the prophet Isaiah with which I headed this letter: *"You who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried"* (Is 51,1). It is a reminder to go back to our origins, to our charismatic identity, to our vocational fidelity, to the apostolic thrust and zeal of the *"Da mihi animas"* of Don Bosco and of the founders of Salesian work in this part of the world.

In the first place, the Region is called upon to *strengthen the Salesian identity* of confreres and communities as *consecrated*

apostles, so that they can bear witness to the radical following of Christ and fulfil the mission with apostolic zeal.

John Paul II had begun to speak of the pressing need for a *new evangelisation* for the whole Church. This is an urgent task which, combined with that of *education to the faith*, must ensure that gospel values are assimilated and personally accepted, with the consequent passing from a natural goodness to a positive choice of faith, consciously made and interiorised. It is a commitment that leads to promoting the process for the transformation of Latin America (*cf. Documents of Medellin and Puebla*), to work for human advancement and contribute to the building of an alternative culture centred on persons and not on things (*Santo Domingo*), so that our peoples can find in Jesus Christ the way for conversion, communion and solidarity (*Ecclesia in America*).

All this has a great deal to do with the *formation of Salesians*, and must help the confreres to purify and deepen their motivation, to personally assume the values involved, to make conscious choices, and hence to organise their lives around the commitments involved in Salesian religious life. It must provide them with theological and cultural strength. Therefore interprovincial solutions must be found for the problems of formation communities and Salesian study centres. It does not seem that individual Provinces have either the capacity or the resources to fulfil their responsibilities in this field on their own. The specific formation and specialisation of Salesian Brothers are also matters requiring further study.

To face up to these challenges I propose to the confreres of the Region, and also to the whole Congregation, the following guidelines.

4.1 Witnessing to the primacy of God among young people in today's world

The complex nature of the present time calls for a continual return to the origin of our apostolic life, i.e. to God. This implies

the rediscovery of our own vocation as a lifeplan centred in Christ, and zeal for the mission so as to be “signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor” (C 2).

To maintain this “high level of ordinary Christian life” we need to “programme our holiness” (E. Viganò) at both a personal and community level. And so it will be indispensable to attend to:

- ❑ *The spiritual life of the community*: the absolute primacy of God must find expression in a deep expression of faith shared and lived in daily life.
- ❑ *The animating role of the Rector*, whose first responsibility is precisely that of fostering vocational growth among the confreres, encouraging fidelity of the religious community and animating the Educative and Pastoral Community (cf. C 55).

4.2 Giving new life to Don Bosco and his zeal for “*Da mihi animas*”

Of great importance in every work is the drawing up and implementation of its own particular project, in which are defined and clarified the strategic priorities in evangelisation and education to the faith that best respond to the needs of the youth situation of the Region, and the practical steps for making them more effective in practice. This presupposes the study and practice of the Constitutions and the efficacious fulfilment of the mission with joy and conviction.

The proper criterion leading to such a discernment will be the rediscovery of Don Bosco, mystic and prophet, and the vital assumption of his great convictions: 1) the importance of taking care of poor and abandoned youngsters; 2) the value of education as a means for the effective transformation of society; 3) the need to involve as many people as possible in the plan for the salvation of the young.

4.3 Giving new meaning to our work in the Region, prompted by the option for those we work for by preference⁴

The option for young people who are poor, abandoned and at risk, has always been a matter of concern for Don Bosco and his spiritual and apostolic family right down to the present day. The young are at the centre of our mission; they are our *raison d'être*; their needs and aspirations must shape the kind of presence we offer them. In consequence what is important is not the maintenance of structures but their educative validity, social significance and evangelical effectiveness.

This conviction should lead us to restructure our existing activities so as to continue our work where we are already, but in a new form and, if necessary, create other forms of service and apostolate. A fundamental criterion for the improvement in the significance of our work is the constitution of communities that are consistent as regards both the number and quality of the confreres. To this must be added the need to bring about greater communion and participation with the Salesian Family and with our lay collaborators, so as to create new models for the management of the works.

In practical terms, our educative and pastoral plan for today must be so expressed as to ensure the following lines of action:

- *In all our works and foundations* we must be present in a new and welcoming way for everyone, with a new and integral service centred on the individual, the promoting of a culture of solidarity and a commitment to justice and the transformation of society.

And so, care for those who are poorer cannot be reduced to a sector of works of a social nature; it is rather an overall feature running through all our works. This will necessar-

⁴ In other Letters there are also guidelines for improving the effectiveness of our works (Cf. AGC 385, p. 26; AGC 387, p. 50-52).

ily lead us to ask ourselves questions about the kind of culture we are fostering in our schools and parishes, in our oratories and youth centres, and in our centres of social activity.

- ❑ *In specific works in the field of youthful marginalisation*, we must offer to young people in difficulty concrete suggestions within a process of integral growth.

These works or activities call for professional competence, specialised programmes, collaboration with other agencies and civil institutions, and the overcoming of an individualistic way of working. Here a greater integration of confreres and initiatives is needed in the Provincial Structural Plan.

4.4 Creating synergy by uniting efforts, means and commitment for the provision of opportunities through collaboration.

Nowadays more than ever before it is fundamental that we grow in solidarity and interprovincial collaboration in the different sectors at the service of life and of the Salesian mission. Society in general, and young people in particular, have the right to see us as a united group functioning in communion, working in a network, and carrying out a shared project.

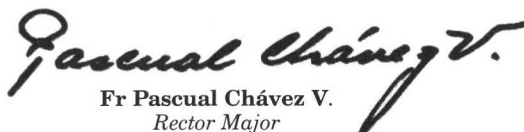
Paraphrasing the words of Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper, I invite you to be “one in heart and soul” so that the young may believe that we have been sent to them by God (cf. Jn 17,21). This implies passing from a mentality of Province to a mentality of Region and of Congregation. We must never forget that what matters is Don Bosco and his presence in the locality, and that all the organisation and structures are at the service of the mission. Oh, how much I would like to feel and see such availability and unity!

CONCLUSION

I finish, dear confreres, by inviting all of you to live this period of reconciliation and conversion that we call Lent with openness of heart and generosity of commitment, so that nothing can prevent the explosion in our lives of the joy of the Lord's Resurrection, and that we can put to good use the newness of life made possible for us by the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

Our future is going to depend on our fidelity to our origins. Hence the validity of the appeal the prophet Isaiah makes to all of us today: *"You who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried"*.

May Mary increase our ability to gaze with pure and limpid eyes on God's special plan for each of us and for the whole Congregation. May she obtain for us the grace to know ourselves to be, and to want to be, sons who seek only to do the will of the Father.


Fr Pascual Chávez V.
Rector Major