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of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

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“What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?”

POST-CHAPTER REFLECTION
OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS OF SALES

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PRESENTATION BY THE RECTOR MAJOR

My dear confreres,

Four months have passed since the closure of the 28th General Chapter. It concluded three weeks earlier than planned due to the pandemic that made our continued stay at Valdocco impossible. Today I am offering you this presentation with sentiments of profound joy for what we experienced at Valdocco and with satisfaction for what was – I believe – a fruitful work carried out by all of us Chapter members and then completed by the General Council. This is because the Chapter Assembly entrusted the Rector Major and his Council with the task of finishing what had remained unfinished at the time of the early closure.

The document that now reaches all confreres through this publication is subtitled “Post-Chapter reflection” and not “Chapter documents”, as has customarily been the case in the past. This is because the Chapter Assembly did not arrive at the point of final approval of the text by vote. Only a few Chapter deliberations, especially those of a legal nature, saw the light of day during the first four weeks of our work.

As I have said on other occasions, because of the circumstances we had to live through GC28 was a “special” Chapter. Nevertheless, it was not a Chapter without its guidelines and policy directions. In fact, the document I am presenting to you contains a first part that both I and the confreres on the General Council consider to be very important for the animation, government and life of the Congregation over the coming six years.

These are the *programmatic guidelines that the Rector Major offers the Congregation for the six-year period from 2020-2026*. In this wide-ranging proposal you will find, dear confreres, the reflection that followed on from the General Chapter, a fruit of the Chapter itself and a synthesis of the journey taken within our Congregation over the previous six years. It is a rich and wide-ranging reflection that first of all captures the spirit of what is contained in the Message that the Holy Father, Pope Francis, sent to the General Chapter; it also brings

together those elements that the Pope pointed to as essential and that were already part of the reflection developed by the Chapter Assembly on the first two thematic nuclei. The third nucleus – as you know – was drawn up by the General Council.

These programmatic guidelines should certainly be motive for study, analysis and further exploration both by the Provinces and by each confrere, especially by the Rectors for their service of animation and governance of the local communities. I assume that it will be the object of study by the Provincial and his Council.

I maintain that the whole Congregation must follow this path, even if at different tempos linked to the particular nature of each province. It is to do with our identity, is charismatic and offers guidelines and lines of action for our time.

This programmatic text for the six-year period is followed by the *Message of the Holy Father*, which without doubt will touch the heart of every Salesian and above all will be motive for meditation, study, in-depth consideration and personal engagement.

The *three nuclei* proposed as themes for the work of the Chapter were extensively developed, even though they did not go through all the stages of study and development initially intended. The texts offer a wealth of reflections, precise and timely proposals for the life of the provinces and all our presences around the world.

Finally, the *Chapter deliberations* are contained in this document. And as with all General Chapters, there are a number of messages and addresses *appended*.

I consider that the document that you now have in your hands will allow a deeper appreciation of the ecclesial, charismatic and identity-giving motivations that will help us pursue the journey of fidelity that we wish to continue as a Congregation and personally. Our world, the Church and the young along with their families, need us today as they did yesterday, in order to continue on their journey of fidelity to the Lord Jesus. They need us as *significant and courageously prophetic* individuals. May the Lord grant us this gift. Mediocrity and fears would allow us to offer little to the young, and this little would not be able to transform their life and fill it with meaning.

I am also convinced that we all want to belong to a Congregation that feels very much alive, and in which each confrere renews his dedication of himself daily: not just any old how, but by feeling that it is well worth the effort.

I deeply desire that this “special” GC28 will help each confrere to rekindle the apostolic passion that characterised our Father Don Bosco, so that we can be other Don Boscos today, everywhere in the world, in every culture and every situation.

Let me add a request. As I hand over this document, from a perspective of faith and with great confidence, I ask each one of you, dear confreres, to make it an impetus for prayer, an object of patient study, of careful and meditative reading so that it may touch your heart. I am asking you to internalise the spirituality you will find in these Chapter reflections, and to enter into dialogue with the proposals that seek to be *significant and prophetic in our way of taking them on and translating them into our life*. I believe that a significant time of study, getting to know and internalise them, and of heart-to-heart dialogue before the Lord, must be the principal task entrusted to each confrere, each Province and Vice-Province, each Region and Inter-provincial Conference.

My dear confreres, the promulgation of this *Post-Chapter reflection* takes place on 16 August 2020, two hundred and five years after Don Bosco’s birth and a hundred and sixty-two years since our Congregation began. Until today, the journey of our Congregation and the Salesian Family has been a very beautiful one. If our response continues to be one that is faithful to the Lord, there is no doubt that there is much more that will be written for the good of the young through our daily self-dedication wherever there is a young person in need of Salesians who are capable of being friends, brothers and fathers.

May our Mother the Help of Christians accompany us on this journey and, as she did with Don Bosco, may She continue to do everything. Let us learn from Her what it means to listen attentively to the voice of the Holy Spirit and to be docile to Him; let us learn from Her to cultivate a life deeply immersed in God and simple and convinced dedication every day. This will increasingly make us authentic signs and bearers of God’s Love for young people.

Let us entrust ourselves to our Mother the Help of Christians “that we may become witnesses to the young of Her Son’s boundless love” (C. 8).

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ángel Fernández Artime". The signature is stylized with large, flowing letters and a prominent flourish at the end.

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime
Rector Major

Rome, 16 August 2020
Anniversary of Don Bosco's birth

THE RECTOR MAJOR'S GUIDELINES FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION AFTER GENERAL CHAPTER 28

My dear Salesian confreres throughout the world,

I address you all with great pleasure after the General Chapter and following the conclusion of the first plenary session of the new General Council. With this letter, which I have shared with all the General Council, it is my intention to offer you all, dear confreres, a true “road map” for the next six years, given that the interruption of the General Chapter, right in the middle of its proceedings, did not allow us to have the Chapter documents that would have been the norm and guide for the next six years.

Faced with the painful reality of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus which has impacted and still continues to afflict the world, we experienced something unique: the interruption of a General Chapter. This is the first time that a similar event has happened in the history of our Congregation – if we exclude the tragic event of the First World War which made it impossible to hold the 12th General Chapter during Fr Paul Albera’s term as Rector Major; that Chapter had to wait almost twelve years.

Nevertheless, in our case the interruption to the work of the Chapter does not in any way imply that the 28th General Chapter was meaningless and did not produce a wealth of content. And in addition, all Chapter members returned to their provinces (some after waiting several months at Valdocco) enriched by the experience they had accumulated and by a Salesian sense of being nourished and strengthened by the “sources of Valdocco”, the sources of our charismatic birth.

Despite the threat of the pandemic and the risk of the assembly being suspended, the Chapter was able to elect the Rector Major and all members of the General Council during the final week, as well as entrusting us with the task of continuing the reflection on the points that had not been tackled.

This letter of mine and everything contained in the work entitled “*Post-Chapter reflection*” seeks to be a faithful response to the mandate received from the Chapter Assembly.

To that we need to add the sense of deep gratitude to the Lord for what we experienced; especially for having experienced it at Valdocco. Our GC28, indeed, was marked in a special way by the fact that it took place at Valdocco, cradle of our charism, the holy place where our Father Don Bosco “responded to the life of the young with a face and a history”¹. So then, we lived the time of our General Chapter at Valdocco with the clear understanding that this *is everyone’s home*.

This is what the Holy Father, Pope Francis, reminded us of. He wanted to give Don Bosco, in the person of his sons gathered in the Chapter Assembly, the beautiful gift of coming to visit us.

The Pope had disclosed to me some months earlier his personal desire to come to Valdocco. At the beginning of the General Chapter, conversations with those in charge of the Pope’s visit had confirmed the visit scheduled for the 6th and 7th of March. Everything was ready. We expected him to arrive on Friday the 6th of March at midday. He would have been with us at Valdocco until the morning of the 7th and then would have made a visit to his family. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions imposed throughout the Italian State made this visit impossible – it would have been a unique event in our history, at least for the length of time the Holy Father would have been present and for his direct participation in the General Chapter, as he had wanted.

By telephone, the Pope left us with a greeting that I shared with the entire Chapter Assembly; and the following day we were able to have a copy in hand of the Message he addressed to GC28 that you will find as part of this publication.

¹ FRANCIS, *Message to the members of GC28*, Rome 4 March 2020. I will take advantage of this first note to tell you that my letter will be enriched by quotes from the text of the message that Pope Francis gave thought to for us as a Congregation and as a Chapter Assembly, and that he sent us at the most fitting moment of our reflections and work. Given the importance that the Holy Father’s words have, I have decided not to offer them as footnotes but in the body of this document. It is enough to see the text between inverted commas to recognise that it is the Pope’s words.

From the very beginning of GC28 we were living with a strong awareness that led us to place ourselves in an attitude for “the Spirit to rekindle the charismatic gift of [our] founder”. This is what the Holy Father wanted, inviting us not to close the windows to the noise and clamour coming up from the courtyard at Valdocco, evoking the first Oratory. This “background noise” must accompany us, making us restless and intrepid in our discernment.

This is what we will be busy with over the next six years, for the good of young people throughout the world; young people who had an actual, visible face in the splendid group who spent a few days with us in the General Chapter. They challenged us, they spoke from the heart and mind and we were moved by it.

And since everything at Valdocco speaks to us about Don Bosco and his young people, and because today’s young people are calling on us, speaking to us and waiting for us, we are proposing some goals as a Congregation that will put us in a position to give an answer to the reality today, and that will get us out of our fears and our comfort zones, wherever they are and whatever they are.

These guidelines, dear confreres, have the objective of becoming an action programme for the next six years, in absolute continuity with the path previously travelled by the Congregation and which, for this reason too, gives us strength and courage.

There are a number of challenges we have to face up to over the next six years. I am offering them to you as the fruit of reflection carried out during the General Chapter and following on from it. I am offering them to the entire Congregation, having come to a detailed knowledge over the past six years of the real circumstances we are experiencing and, ultimately, of the Church’s journey. I am offering them to all the provinces after having shared them with members of the General Council, because these challenges ***must be the mirror before which every province around the world is called to compare itself. They need to become the criteria defining the aims, objectives, processes and concrete actions for the next six years in all the places where the charism of the sons of Don Bosco has taken root.***

The challenges that we need to give a response to and the objectives to be pursued are as follows:

- 1. SALESIAN OF DON BOSCO FOREVER. Six years for growth in Salesian identity**
- 2. In a Congregation where we are invited by the “DA MIHI ANIMAS, COETERA TOLLE”**
- 3. To live the “SALESIAN SACRAMENT OF PRESENCE”**
- 4. Formation for being SALESIAN PASTORS TODAY**
- 5. ABSOLUTE PRIORITY for the young, the poorest, the most abandoned and defenceless**
- 6. TOGETHER WITH LAY PEOPLE IN THE MISSION AND IN FORMATION. The charismatic strength that the laity and the Salesian Family offer us**
- 7. IT IS TIME FOR GREATER GENEROSITY IN THE CONGREGATION. A universal and missionary Congregation**
- 8. Accompanying the young towards a SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

1. SALESIAN OF DON BOSCO FOREVER: “Monk or no monk, I am staying with Don Bosco” (Cagliero). SIX YEARS FOR GROWTH IN SALESIAN IDENTITY

“The Lord has given us Don Bosco as father and teacher. We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and living ‘as seeing him who is invisible’” (C. 21).

In my last intervention in the Chapter hall during the GC28 closing address, I made reference to a conversation I had with a confrere the day before. He asked to speak with me and said: “Do not leave us alone. We need help to be truly Salesians, so we do not lose our identity”.

I had a profound sense that right at that moment the Lord was also speaking to us through this confrere of ours, and that he was making us understand the importance and urgency of giving growth to and strengthening *charismatic identity* in our Congregation.

The essential and fundamental point of departure is our circumstance as consecrated individuals. The future of consecrated life, and of Salesian life for us consecrated members, has its *raison d’être* in its foundation, **Jesus Christ**. As people who are consecrated, the *sequela Christi*, the following of Christ, shapes our identity, integrating our pastoral formation within it. As consecrated individuals, as Salesians of Don Bosco, God makes of us “a living memorial of Jesus’ way of living and acting”². And the vocational challenge for all of consecrated life and for us in particular as Salesians of Don Bosco, is that of “always returning to Jesus”, renouncing everything that is not Him or that distances us from Him.

With much humility and clarity of vision we need to recognise that the way out of the crises of religious life, of Salesian life, of the difficulties of each province, will not be found in new projects, nor in

² *Vita Consecrata*, 22.

strategic plans, nor in a “planning 3.0”. Most of the time, in the face of disillusionment, existential fatigue, lack of motivation... it is a case of returning to Christ, to religious life, to Salesian consecrated life. Because, we can live by wrongly believing that everything makes sense when we are doing things. No, dear confreres: without Jesus Christ at the centre of our thinking, feeling, living, dreaming, working... there is no future, and we cannot offer anything that is significant. In the words of Pope Francis: “The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence”³.

Let us not forget that the Salesian mission and the Congregation itself came into being from God, raised up by his Spirit: “With a feeling of humble gratitude we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture, but by the initiative of God” (C. 1); and that each one of us Salesians of Don Bosco, is sent to the young by God himself who sends us (C. 15).

After this “special” General Chapter 28, I believe that 162 years after the beginning of our Congregation, we Salesians are expected to be ready and agile in listening to the breath of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. That we are expected to continue to have Jesus Christ the Lord as our foundation and the centre of our life so that we will *renew the prophecy that must characterise our life*, and continue to grow in our humanity. And this until we become those “experts in humanity” who know, to the point of being moved by it, how to see and contemplate the pain and needs of our brothers and sisters (beginning with those in our communities), of the young, of boys and girls and their families. We must seriously take up our prophetic service. Our specific contribution is to be an icon of Jesus’ lifestyle, totally consecrated to the Father and his Plan for humanity: The Kingdom. Therefore, we are expected to be signs and witnesses of God’s fatherly presence – a gentle presence capable of a tender gaze and with arms thrown wide open especially to the poorest, to our young people – making our brotherliness a reality, making it attractive, alluring, and living with simplicity and moderation.

³ FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Rome 19 March 2018, 1.

The Risen Lord invited his disciples to return to Galilee to meet him there and see him once again. This invitation is extremely relevant for us, and expressing myself in Salesian terms, I would like to say that our Galilee for encountering the Lord today, as Salesians of Don Bosco, passes through Valdocco, the beginnings of Valdocco, fragile as they were, but with the strength and passion of the “monk or no monk, I am staying with Don Bosco”, that the young John Cagliero expressed with such ardour and youthful enthusiasm. Valdocco is indeed the spiritual and apostolic atmosphere in which each of us breathes the air of the Spirit, where we nurture and strengthen our charismatic identity. And it is the place of “transfiguration” for every Salesian who, by taking care of all the elements of our spirituality, can contribute to making each of our houses an authentic Valdocco, where it is possible to meet our Lord Jesus Christ face to face in daily life.

Jesus passes by, looks at us with love and calls us to follow him. And in the mystery of this call, in the gaze that does not judge but looks at and searches us from within, in the adventure of walking in his footsteps, everyone can discover the plan that God has designed for each of us in an original form. Today, many of those who decide to abandon the Congregation suffer from the same thing: they have not come into contact with the Lord Jesus and have not had the same passion as the young Cagliero for staying with Don Bosco in order to follow Jesus. That is why sometimes any other pastoral offering that has glimmers of autonomy, self-reliance, independence, management of oneself and one’s own economic resources, exerts in some confreres sufficient fascination to push them to ask to go elsewhere. At times, also the gift of ministerial priesthood is not fully understood and is manipulated and experienced as “power”. This obscures the covenant that God has established with us through the gift of religious consecration that is at the centre of our personal and community life.

PROPOSAL

This six-year period will need to be distinguished by a profound effort in the Congregation to grow in charismatic depth, in Salesian identity in all phases of life, through a serious commitment in every province and every Salesian community to arrive at saying,

as Don Bosco did: “I have promised God that I would give of myself to my last breath for my poor boys”⁴.

Therefore:

- ⇒ At every stage of formation, with the depth that corresponds to it, we will take care of the elements that give every Salesian his charismatic identity and that will see us fall in love with Don Bosco and the young with the heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd.
- ⇒ We will give priority to the traits of our charismatic identity as consecrated individuals that make us prophetic signs: a happy life with its roots in the Gospel, a strong faith anchored in God; a communion that makes our community life attractive, a prophetic attitude in the face of injustice and evil, and an outlook of hope along with the desire for conversion.
- ⇒ In the Provinces there must be a careful discernment regarding the obediences given to the confreres, so as not to risk losing the authentic sense and passion of the Salesian heart and not to fall into forms of charismatic genericism or a leaning towards diocesan pastoral situations that lead to separation from the Congregation.
- ⇒ We will continue to pay great attention so that as a Congregation we are not infected by the “virus of clericalism and career-seeking”⁵.
- ⇒ In the reflection and sharing within each community we will value the first part of the document “*Animating and governing the community. The Ministry of the Salesian Rector*”, that presents us with “The Salesian Consecrated Identity”.

⁴ *MB XVIII*, 258, also cited in the Constitutions, art.1.

⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit*, Rome 25 March 2019, 98. The exhortation has this quote: “Clericalism is a constant temptation on the part of priests who see ‘the ministry they have received as a *power* to be exercised, rather than a free and generous *service* to be offered. It makes us think that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or has anything to learn””, Francis, *Address at the Opening of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (3 October 2018): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 5 October 2018, 8.

2. In a Congregation where the “DA MIHI ANIMAS, COETERA TOLLE” is URGENT

“With a feeling of humble gratitude, we believe that the Society of St Francis de Sales came into being not as a merely human venture, but by the initiative of God. Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth, “that part of human society which is so exposed yet so rich in promise.

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving: ‘I have promised God that I would give for my poor boys’” (C. 1).

Testimonies from the early times of our congregational history, and the reflection it has developed over the course of the years, highlight something very significant: the saying that best expresses the zeal and pastoral charity of the Salesians of Don Bosco is “Da mihi animas, coetera tolle”.

Dominic Savio, the young lad in the presence of the 34-year-old priest Don Bosco, and who saw those words written over the entrance to his office, understood them perfectly: “I understand; here you do business not with money but with souls”⁶. Looking at Don Bosco, we learn of his profound spirituality and those special qualities as an educator that marked his way of relating to teenagers and older youth. In Don Bosco and his history we encounter the basis of his educative and pastoral activity that is characterised by a very concrete proposal of Christian life; by the attention shown to each young person, along with a commitment to offering concrete responses to their needs; and by his trust in God’s presence.

Our task, above all in accompanying the young, must be characterised by the creative pedagogical and spiritual capacity typical of our Father Don Bosco, by means of which we are able to overcome our remoteness from the sensitivity of the new generations, offering them

⁶ G. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico, allievo dell’Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, in ISS, *Fonti Salesiane: I. Don Bosco e la sua opera*, LAS, Roma 2014, 1040 (or *Salesian Sources*, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore, p. 1180).

a loving ear and compassionate understanding, prompting the great questions about the mystery of life and helping them to seek the Lord to meet with him.

It was precisely the 26th General Chapter that tackled all this by reflecting on Don Bosco's motto: "Da mihi animas, coetera tolle". So then, with today's insight and with the understanding of our reality, I think I can say that for us it is necessary and **urgent** that our Congregation live, breathe and continue on its path, endeavouring to make the "Da mihi animas, coetera tolle" a reality through proclamation of the Gospel on behalf of our young people and for our own good.

Our mission very often places us on the frontier where we habitually come into contact with Christians of other confessions, members of other religions, with non-believers or lapsed believers: we would like to carry the mission forward with and for them as well. Every time and every place are suited to the Gospel.

My dear confreres, at this time after GC28

- ⇒ **It is urgent that we give absolute priority to the commitment to evangelise the young with conscious, intentional and explicit proposals. We are invited to introduce them to Jesus and the Good News of the Gospel for their lives.**
- ⇒ **It is urgent that we help the young (and their families) to discover the presence of Christ in their lives as the key to happiness and the meaning of their existence.**
- ⇒ **It is urgent that we accompany children, teenagers and older youth in their process of education to the faith, so that they may personally embrace the person of Christ.**
- ⇒ **It is urgent that we be "true educators" who accompany the young from personal experience in dialogue with God in prayer and in the celebration of the sacraments.**

Without this, dear confreres, other titanic efforts of the Congregation will tend towards the goodness of human development and social welfare – that are always very necessary and belong to our charismatic identity – but they will not lead us to the primary reason for which the Holy Spirit raised up the Salesian charism in Don Bosco: "Faith-

ful to the commitments Don Bosco has passed on to us, we are evangelizers of the young” (C. 6). The first purpose of our youth ministry is the conversion of the individual to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

With all the nuances of historical sensitivity that we need to bear in mind and the linguistic understanding of the era that we consider to be necessary, we cannot ignore the essential and constituent element that characterised Don Bosco’s educative and pastoral activity, which the Rector Major, Fr Vecchi, expressed this way: “The pedagogy of Don Bosco is a pedagogy of the soul, of grace, of the supernatural. Once this energy has been activated, the more profitable work of education begins. The remainder, though valid in itself, is preliminary and contributory to this which transcends it”⁷.

The “coetera tolle” makes us ready to leave behind everything that hinders us from going out to those most in need of us. It is the asceticism that emanates from the previous choice, renouncing much (personal tastes, preferences, and even legitimate actions and services) of what does not allow us to devote all the energies of our pastoral heart to what we have given priority to.

PROPOSAL

Therefore, **I am proposing to our Congregation that for the next six years we be demanding of ourselves in responding to the “URGENCY OF OFFERING INITIAL PROCLAMATION WITH MORE CONVICTION**, because ‘Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation’ (*Christus Vivit*, no. 214)⁸.

Therefore:

⇒ The Rector Major and his Council, and every Province, will be committed over these six years to taking appropriate decisions to *qualify the Salesian presence in evangelisation and education to*

⁷ J.E. VECCHI, *Indications for a process of growth in Salesian spirituality*, AGC 354, 1995, p. 26.

⁸ GC28, *Priority of the Salesian mission among today’s young people*. First nucleus, no. 4.

the faith. This is a genuine pastoral, personal and community conversion to which we are called.

- ⇒ We will promote a youth ministry that accompanies the young with a view to their personal maturity, growth in faith and that has the vocational dimension as its unifying principle (DF 140, ChV 254)⁹.
- ⇒ We will continue to be committed at all levels of the Congregation to bringing about “a *change of mentality in the face of the mission that must be carried out*” (Pope Francis to GC28)¹⁰.
- ⇒ We will make known and esteemed what was essential for Don Bosco and for so many generations of Salesians as a fundamental pillar of our work of evangelisation and education: the beautiful presence of our Mother the Help of Christians in our educational proposals and in our prayer with the young.

⁹ *Final Document of the Synod on Youth*, henceforth DF. ChV is *Christus Vivit*.

¹⁰ Pope Francis told us: “The ‘Valdocco option’ of your 28th General Chapter is a good opportunity to compare yourselves with the sources and to ask the Lord: ‘*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*’. *Tolle* especially anything that has been accumulated along the journey and that remains, and that in other times might have been an appropriate response, but today hinders you from configuring and shaping the Salesian presence in a meaningful evangelical way in the different situations of the mission. This requires that we overcome the fears and apprehensions that may arise from believing that the charism was reduced to or identified with certain works or structures; it implies a *change of mentality* in the face of the mission that must be carried out”.

3. LIVING THE “SALESIAN SACRAMENT” OF PRESENCE

“Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young: ‘That you are young is enough for me to love you very much.’ This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life.

For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health: ‘For you I study, for you I work, for you I live, for you I am ready even to give my life’ (C. 14).

In his Message to the Chapter, Pope Francis spoke to us of the “Valdocco option and the charism of presence”, the charism I freely allow myself to define as the “*Salesian sacrament of presence*”. *The Pope writes that* “Even before things that need to be done, the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes. The gratuitousness of presence saves the Congregation from any activist obsession and from any kind of technical and functional reductionism. The first call is to be a joyful and gratuitous presence among young people”. Our being disciples of the Lord, our profound and authentic way of being apostles of the young first of all passes through our being among the people and, in a special way, among the kids, among the young.

What has been said in colloquial terms cannot be better expressed. Dear confreres, we are talking about recovering the first love of our vocation, the love we experienced when we felt that the Lord was calling us to be a joyful and free presence among the young. I venture to say that there is not a single Salesian who has not felt this love in his heart one way or another.

We reflected on this during GC28. We realised that many young people live in a real situation of orphanhood even though they have parents. The young people themselves told us this in their message to GC28: “we are afraid, confused, frustrated and need to be loved... ours is a hard struggle... We believe that our society is individualistic and that we, too, are often individualistic... We want to... [return] to the first love that is Christ, to be his friends. We want to journey to-

wards spiritual and personal growth and we want to do it with you Salesians”¹¹.

We do not doubt this truth of the young people themselves, a truth we recognised at the same time in the Chapter hall: “They ask us for time and we give them space; they ask us for relationships and we provide them with services; they ask us for fraternal life and we offer them structures; they ask us for friendship and we provide activities for them. All this commits us to rediscovering the riches and potential of the ‘family spirit’”¹².

The young people who accompanied us during the General Chapter addressed a strong appeal to us to be a significant presence for them. They told us explicitly: “Our search for spiritual and personal fulfilment worries us. We want to journey towards spiritual and personal growth and we want to do it with you Salesians... We would like you to guide us, in our situation, with love... Salesians, do not forget us young people because we have not forgotten you and the charism you have taught us! We want to express this with all our hearts. Being here, we have fulfilled a dream – in this special place in Valdocco, where the Salesian mission began, bringing together Salesians and young people for the Salesian mission with our desire to be saints together. You have our heart in your hands. You must take care of your precious treasure. Please do not forget us and continue to listen to us”¹³.

Dear confreres, it is a great privilege to hear the heartbeat of young people’s hearts! I have no doubt that throughout the Congregation there are so many confreres who are true Don Boscos today for the young. But I am not satisfied with this. We must all be like this. We must continue on the way of conversion. This commitment demands from us a change of mentality and rhythms of life, openness of mind and heart, overcoming habits that have struck root and become crystallised. Young people say that they love us, that they need us, that they are waiting for us. Don Bosco’s expression “*studia di farti amare*”, strive to make yourself loved, is fully relevant today. Pres-

¹¹ Cf. *Young people’s letter to GC28*.

¹² GC28, *Priority of the Salesian mission among today’s young people. First nucleus*, no. 5

¹³ *Young people’s letter to GC28*.

ence does not only consist in spending time with young people as a group, but in meeting them individually in a personal way, establishing a relationship that allows us to get to know and listen to their desires, their difficulties and struggles and, at times, their fears and qualms. It is a relationship that seeks to go beyond superficial knowledge, offering friendship characterised by mutual confidence and sharing. Loving kindness or goodness has thus become a substantial form of Don Bosco's charity. He is asking us today, as he did in the Letter from Rome in 1884, for the capacity of encounter, readiness to accept, familiarity. Like Don Bosco, we still have to cultivate the art of taking the first step... eliminating distance and barriers and giving birth to the joy and the desire to see each other again, to be friends... This art also consists in creating, with patience and dedication, an atmosphere rich in humanity, a family atmosphere where young people feel very free and able to express and be themselves, joyfully assimilating the values that are proposed to them. This pedagogy of family spirit is also a school of faith for young people. We offer love and unconditional acceptance so that they may discover, progressively and from an option of personal freedom, trust and dialogue, as well as the celebration and community experience of faith.

And let us not forget that Salesian presence is a special presence, meaning that the Salesian treats young people with deep respect, meets them at their level of freedom, and treats them as active and responsible members of the educative and pastoral community. This is why the Salesian learns a style of listening, dialogue and personal and community discernment. And this applies not only to ministry among the young but also to our houses of formation, where "we learn to be Salesians".

But this mode of presence is not possible if one is distant from young people: far from them physically and far from their psychology and cultural world. This is the danger. The right alternative is to live as Salesians, as sons of Don Bosco, with the same experience of fatherliness as he lived with his youngsters, one that translates into a real love and at the same time real "authoritativeness" in their regard. Starting from the great value that presence among the young has for us. In the Pope's Message to GC28 we read: "Your consecration is,

above all, a sign of the gratuitous love of the Lord, and for the Lord in his young people, which is not defined primarily by a particular ministry, function or service, but by a **presence**. Even before things that need to be done, the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes. The gratuitousness of presence saves the Congregation from any activist obsession and from any kind of technical and functional reductionism. The first call is to be a joyful and gratuitous presence among young people”.

Allow me to remind you that presence today also touches on the digital world, a new real areopagus for us, a habitat for today’s young people. Here too we need to be present with a clear Salesian identity, with the desire to bring the proclamation of the good news, and simply with the joy and simplicity of disciples of the Lord ¹⁴.

PROPOSAL

I propose for this six-year period, as an expression of our CONVERSION, what was already requested by GC26, and that is:

“Let each Salesian find the time to be present with the young as a friend, educator and witness to God, whatever his role in the community may be”¹⁵.

Despite the fact that it seems strange that I have to ask a Salesian to find the time to be with young people, I consider it extremely necessary.

Therefore, the proposal is to:

⇒ Foster an **effective and affective presence among and with the young**, in communion of life and action. And to enhance and relaunch the good experience and the renewed role of the assistant, not only for the practical trainee but for the entire life of the Salesian of Don Bosco.

¹⁴ “The digital revolution asks us to understand the profound transformations that are taking place not only in the field of communication, but above all in the way we set up and manage our human relationships” (Nucleus 1 as drawn up by GC28).

¹⁵ GC26, “*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*”, no. 14.

- ⇒ Ensure the style of the **oratory setting** in every presence: climate of familiarity, welcome and acceptance, spirituality and the dimension of profound joy.
- ⇒ Accompany the energy young people have by fostering their **active role and leadership** in every house and in the Salesian mission that is carried out there.
- ⇒ Ensure the presence of formators in the formation communities where the Salesian spirit is communicated in the first instance through example: being among them, strongly helping the young confreres to be primarily responsible for their own formation.
- ⇒ Engage the Social Communication Department, at various levels, in offering resources and stimuli for a constant process of verification, updating, inculturation of the Salesian mission in the digital habitat where young people live, involving our universities in a network with other centres and agencies that more closely follow and study the transformations that the digital world is bringing among the new generations.

4. FORMATION FOR BEING SALESIAN PASTORS TODAY

“Enlightened by the person of Christ and by his Gospel, lived according to Don Bosco’s spirit, the Salesians commits himself to a formation process which will last all his life and will keep pace with his maturing in other ways. He learns by experience the meaning of the Salesian vocation at the various moments of his life and accepts the ascetical demands it makes on him.

With the help of Mary, his Mother and Teacher, he gradually becomes a pastor and educator of the young in the lay or priestly state which he has embraced” (C. 98).

Formation is truly a precious gift from the Lord that brings to maturity in us, as Salesians of Don Bosco, the inestimable gift of the Father’s call to the Christian and consecrated vocation. Despite the fact that the situation regarding vocation numbers is not uniform throughout the world, every year the Congregation is blessed with the admission of around 450 novices. We thank God because, as our Constitutions say, every call is an indication of how much the Lord loves the Church and our Congregation (cf. C. 22).

Nevertheless, the Chapter Assembly also recognised some of our weaknesses and expressed them thus: “We note, in fact, that at times the Salesian consecrated identity seems weak and not deeply rooted: the primacy of God in personal and community life does not always emerge clearly; forms of clericalism and secularism risk bringing ‘spiritual worldliness’ into the Congregation; the promotion of the lay Salesian in some regions is scant; the lack of trained personnel in the area of Salesianity, despite the abundant material available, is a sign of insufficient attention to the deepening of the charism”¹⁶. In point of fact this emerged very strongly during the work of our 28th General Chapter.

I would dare to say that if this happens in all religious congregations and also in the formation of diocesan seminarians, *the abyssal gap that we perceive between formation and the Salesian mission is,*

¹⁶ GC28, *Profile of the Salesian today. Second nucleus*, no. 1.

without doubt, *a huge challenge for us*. Perhaps this gap is due to the great distance that exists between the situation of initial formation houses and life in the apostolic communities (the ordinary communities in all the provinces); perhaps the phenomenon also depends on the fact that formation does not always succeed in touching the heart of the young Salesian in formation; perhaps understandings and information are passed on in the formation curriculum that do not touch on Salesian life and mission. Growth is a slow process of the individual developing as a whole, an interrelationship of life experiences, existential needs, understandings, mission, relationships, vocation, project of life... In this process of holistic development, we form ourselves to be educators and pastors in a new world and in a renewed mission. Whatever may be the reasons for the limits in formation that we have noticed, we find ourselves faced with a huge challenge that the Congregation has highlighted and that we must tackle decisively over the next six years.

On the other hand, we cannot deny that there is a dangerous belief: that formation ends after completing the initial phases; and, in the case of candidates to the priesthood, finishes once they gain access to the ministry. This misconception does a lot of harm to us and leads us to paying a heavy price in pastoral ministry. It is therefore a matter of understanding formation as a lifelong process of personal transformation, even if it is characterised by particular intensity and specific attention in the early stages. Ultimately, formation is a necessary path for building and safeguarding our vocation.

Often, we do not know how to transform daily pastoral life into an ongoing opportunity for our formation and therefore “both the religious and educative and pastoral community are unable to become the natural and ordinary environment in which one is formed”¹⁷. We are aware of some of the likely kinds of pastoral fragility: superficiality, improvisation, activism. No less important is the danger of individualism. All of this requires humility, lucidity, authenticity and a new impetus in the community understanding of our life and our mission.

¹⁷ *Idem*, no. 3.

As was said at the General Chapter, initial formation is a multifaceted, positive and promising reality. Faced with this situation, the formation of the formators, meaning the formation of confreres who accompany the formation of young Salesians with a “particular vocation within their vocation”, and the setting up of good teams of individuals who can accompany the stages of formation, are a real urgency and priority given that **the community is the first place of formation.**

Perhaps we need to be speaking of adopting a new style of formation? In his Message to the General Chapter, Pope Francis speaks to us of the notion that: “Reflecting on the profile of the Salesian for the young people of today implies accepting that we are immersed in a time of change”¹⁸. There is a need, then, to renew our style of formation, something that needs to be thought of more and more in personalising, holistic, relational, contextual and intercultural terms¹⁹. We will have to continue to make progress in order to set up and really experience formation within the context of vocation and therefore far from being understood, as has been the tendency sometimes, as just a duty that lasts a few years and is necessarily superseded in order to arrive at “real life”, concrete life, the life we were looking for. What a dangerous notion of formation it is when we contrast real life with the formation of the Salesian educator and pastor!

In short, formation is a real work of handicraft, both on the part of the one accompanying the confreres and on the part of each individual in his own process of formation. In this field today there is no more room for “mass-production”. The craftsperson speaks about unique works of art, art that is handmade, one-to-one. And speaking of this handicraft, today we cannot ignore the role of women in our Salesian educative settings. “The presence of the woman in our works is an accepted fact, as regards both those for whom we work and those who share with us the responsibility for education”²⁰. To this effect, Pope Francis addressed a strong appeal to us in his Message, saying: “What would have become of Valdocco without the presence of Mamma

¹⁸ *Idem*, no. 5.

¹⁹ *Idem*, no. 5.

²⁰ *GC24*, no. 166.

Margaret? Would your houses have been possible without this woman of faith?... Without a real, effective and affective presence of women, your works would lack the courage and the ability to transform presence into hospitality, into a home. Faced with the rigour that excludes, we must learn to generate the new life of the Gospel. I invite you to implement approaches in which the female voice, her outlook and her actions – appreciated for her individuality – finds an echo in making decisions; not simply as a helper but as someone fully involved in your presences”.

A renewed style and model of formation, including with the strong emphasis that Pope Francis makes, will not be possible if we forget the unique and most important protagonist, who is neither the formator nor the one being formed, but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God to whom each of us needs to be docile. This is why our Constitutions remind us that “each Salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation” (C. 99). Allow me to add that each confrere must act in such a way that the Holy Spirit transforms his heart throughout his life and at its different moments.

A formative journey lived in this way will allow us to consolidate in the Congregation what I have stated in the previous pages: the “*Da mihi animas*” must be the driving force of our educative and evangelising passion, and also the “energy” of the entire formation process.

In fact, the apostolic nature of our charism is a determining factor in our formation. As Pope Francis reminds us in his Message, “It is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple”.

It is clear that we have before us one of the essential nuclei of the Congregation’s journey for the next six years: to care for the vocation of each confrere in particular, and of the young confreres in formation, in such a way that we all manage to be the Salesians of Don Bosco that our young people and their families need today.

PROPOSAL

That we commit ourselves to overcoming the gap between formation and mission by encouraging in the Congregation a renewed culture of formation in the mission today throughout the Salesian world, with measures and decisions of great significance.

Therefore:

- ⇒ We will promote a renewed commitment to the formative accompaniment of the confreres, one that can touch the heart and make us available for a radical gift of ourselves. To this end we value the aid entitled “*Young Salesians and accompaniment. Orientations and Guidelines*”, which insists that our formation model can only be the Preventive System.
- ⇒ The initial formation communities should preserve a simple lifestyle, one characterised by spiritual depth and a great capacity for service and work, that avoids a tendency to being comfortable and well-off and forms to the needs of the mission. Pastoral accompaniment should be guaranteed as a fundamental strategy for formation for and in the mission.
- ⇒ We will invest energy in being on the lookout for and forming the formators and we will courageously tackle the rethinking of institutional references and formative structures.
- ⇒ The Formation Sector will carry out a serious and demanding work of updating the *Ratio*, strengthening the aspects that favour integration between formation and mission and prevent a gap from forming between the two dimensions. The Sector will guarantee processes of true growth to maturity and personalisation, and accompaniment.

5. ABSOLUTE PRIORITY FOR THE YOUNG, THE POOREST AND MOST ABANDONED AND DEFENCELESS

“The Lord made clear to Don Bosco that he was to direct his mission first and foremost to the young, especially to those who are poorer.

We are called to the same mission and are aware of its supreme importance: young people are at the age when they must make basic life-choices which affect the future of society and the of the Church.

With Don Bosco we reaffirm our preference for the young, who are ‘poor, abandoned and in danger’, those who have greater need of love and evangelization, and we work especially in areas of greatest poverty” (C. 26).

I would like to begin developing this priority by starting from the few lines I was able to dedicate to this topic in my last intervention in the Chapter hall, before the early conclusion of our GC28. I can assure you, dear confreres, that the words were few but the conviction was a strong and great one.

I said: “I dream that today, saying ‘**Salesians of Don Bosco**’ means consecrated ‘crazies’, that is, Salesians who love with a true Salesian heart, who are perhaps even ‘a little crazy’, oriented towards the poorest”.

Dear confreres, it would be the death-knell of our Congregation if we were to distance ourselves from the poorest. Don Bosco told us this when he spoke of our poverty and the danger of wealth. Allow me to be even more frank: *if one day we were to leave behind the youngsters, older youth and, among the poorest*, our Congregation would begin to die, a Congregation that today, thanks be to God, is in good health despite our weaknesses!

So, let us pay attention to what I consider to be an authentic “Chapter deliberation”, although not in the proper sense of the term, given that its content is already found in our Constitutions. It is a question of *asking us for a radical, preferential, personal, institutional and structural option for the most needy, poor and excluded young people*, an

option that must show up in a special way, in the *defence of boys, girls and young people who have been exploited and are victims of any kind of abuse*: from sexual abuse to any other kind of exploitation; from abuse caused by any kind of violence; from the abuse of manifest and clear injustice to any kind of abuse of power. I believe that this challenge is a great commitment that every Salesian must carry in his heart. A period of six years guided by this light will give us much life.

I am convinced that assuming this perspective as an indispensable one will be very significant throughout the Congregation and in all contexts, cultures and continents. Today there are many youth poverties that demand urgent attention from the whole human family, and no doubt from us Salesians in a particular way. In fact, the history of our Congregation is characterised by calls to go out to the poorest young people. “As sons of Don Bosco, we have taken on an historical commitment to serve poor young people”²¹.

Our Father Don Bosco already told us: “Everyone will look on us and welcome us sympathetically, as long as our concern and our requests are for the children of the poor, those most at risk in society. This must be our greatest satisfaction that no one can take from us”²².

Many years ago, GC19 declared: “Don Bosco and the Church send us by preference to the poor, the under-privileged, the ordinary people, especially so nowadays”²³. GC20 also spoke of the absolute priority of the “young” and among these, of the “poor and abandoned” when it asked who were the actual beneficiaries of our mission²⁴.

We ourselves said in our recent Chapter that we are consecrated to God for the poorest young people. Like Don Bosco, we too promised in our religious profession to offer ourselves to God pledging our forces to the service of the young, especially the poorest of them and this is why we must “[listen] together to God’s call coming to us through forms of youth poverty. It also requires spiritual depth, so as

²¹ GC20, no. 580.

²² Cf. MB XVII, 272; MB XVII, 207.

²³ GC19, ACS 244, p. 94 (p. 81 English edition).

²⁴ GC20, no. 45.

not to fall into activism or a corporate mentality; cultural preparation, to understand the phenomena in which we are immersed and the new forms of youth poverty; a willingness to work together, abandoning all pastoral individualism; flexibility in rethinking our lifestyle and our Works, especially when they no longer express the missionary energy of the charism and respond primarily to the logic of maintenance”²⁵.

In short, the appeal I make to everyone is to really look at the faces of our youngsters, our young people, until we get to know their life stories which are often marked by real tragedies. If this happens it is **because we truly love young people and we feel their suffering and pain**. Speaking of the Valdocco option and the gift of the young, Pope Francis has something very precious to tell us, and it has moved me. He writes: “The Salesian Oratory and everything that arose from it, as the *Memoirs of the Oratory* tell us, came about as a response to the life of the young with a face and a history. This moved a young priest to action who was incapable of remaining neutral or unmoved by what he saw happening before him. It was much more than a gesture of good will... I think of it as an act of ongoing conversion and response to the Lord who, ‘tired of knocking’ on our doors, waits for us to go and look for him and meet him... or let him out when he knocks from within. It was a conversion that involved (and complicated) his entire life and that of those around him. Don Bosco not only did not choose to separate himself from the world to seek holiness, but he let himself be challenged by it and **chose how and which world to live in**”²⁶.

PROPOSAL

Over the six years, let the Congregation in all its provinces make the radical, preferential, personal and institutional option – meaning on the part of every Salesian, on behalf of the most in need, boys, girls and poor and excluded youth, giving particular atten-

²⁵ GC28, *Priority of the Salesian mission among today’s young people*. First nucleus, no. 8.

²⁶ FRANCIS, *Message to GC28*.

tion to the defence of those who are exploited and victims of whatever abuse and violence (“the abuse of power, the abuse of conscience, sexual and financial abuse”²⁷).

Therefore:

- ⇒ In every Salesian presence in the world and in every province, the necessary decisions must be taken so that the poorest children and young people in the places where we are present *are never excluded from any Salesian house*, whatever the effort to be made. Thinking, deciding, creating ways to make this choice possible (as our Father Don Bosco always did).
- ⇒ In every Salesian Province and Salesian house there will be a code of ethics for the care, prevention and defence of the minors entrusted to us, with the commitment to protect them from any kind of abuse, wherever it comes from. For us, boys, girls, young people are **sacred in the name of God**.
- ⇒ At the world, provincial and local level, we will commit ourselves to promoting the various networks, activities and best practices concerning our work and presence among the poorest boys, girls and older youth, especially among refugees and migrants. Salesian organisations like DBnetwork, DBGA and RASS must contribute to guaranteeing the protection of minors and to work in ever greater communion with the Congregation’s Youth Ministry Department (Sector).

²⁷ *ChV*, 98.

6. TOGETHER WITH LAY PEOPLE IN THE MISSION AND IN FORMATION

“We bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community which involves young people and parents, parents and educators in a family atmosphere, so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God’s plan for us.

In this community lay people associated with our work make a contribution all their own, because of their experience and pattern of life.

We welcome and encourage their collaboration, and we give them the opportunity to get a deeper knowledge of the Salesian spirit and the practice of the preventive system.

We foster the spiritual growth of each of them, and to those who may be so inclined we suggest a closer of our mission in the Salesian Family” (C. 47).

This article of our Constitutions contains the most essential elements of our mission shared with lay people. We must examine ourselves in the light of this perspective and verify the extent the journey of the Congregation, of every Province and of every confrere is moving in this direction that expresses our charismatic identity so well. We are involved in the formation of the lay people who share the mission with us, supporting their personal growth, their journey of faith and their vital identification with the Salesian spirit. We must also offer them the means that allows them to carry out the tasks entrusted to them. The (re)discovery of the vocation and mission of the laity is one of the great frontiers of renewal proposed by Vatican Council II and reflected in the Magisterium that follows²⁸. Our GC24 was certainly a charismatic response to Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion. We know well that Don Bosco, from the outset of his mission at Valdocco, involved many lay people, friends and collaborators in such a way that they could be part of his mission among young people. He immediately “fostered participation and the sharing of responsibility by ecclesiastics and laity, men and

²⁸ Cf. GC28, *Together with lay people in the mission and in formation* Nucleus 3, recognising, no. 1.

women”²⁹. It is therefore, in spite of our resistance, a point of no return, because, in addition to corresponding to Don Bosco’s actions, the model of the mission shared with the laity proposed by GC24 is in fact “the only practicable model in present conditions”³⁰.

Twenty-four years after that General Chapter, we need to recognise that the reception and implementation of what was decided to have been very different. In some regions, the presence of lay people in the Salesian mission has become more evident. In other regions of the Congregation the progress has been much slower. In other cases, the experience of communion is still in its beginnings – a path newly embarked upon – and sometimes we even find real phenomena of resistance.

Certainly, over these years progress has been made, even in the most diverse cultural situations. Often the relationships between Salesians and lay people are characterised by warmth, mutual appreciation, respect, collaboration and, when there is a clear identity, the reality of educative and pastoral communities is very rich – even if the value of the vocation and mission of the laity is not always perceived. We tend, in fact, to more easily recognise what they do rather than their lay identity.

It is true that there is great variety among the lay people in Salesian presences in the 134 countries we find ourselves in: many works on a contractual basis while many others, especially the youngest ones, as volunteers. There are lay people with a strong Christian and charismatic identity, and others who are far from this. There are Catholics, there are Christians of other confessions, or lay people who profess other religions, and even people who are indifferent to religion.

Similarly, the ways in which communities and works relate to each other are different depending on the existing circumstances, contexts, etc... In the General Council’s reflection, we became aware of this great diversity, as reflected in our contribution to nucleus 3 of the Chapter that had not been developed by the Chapter Assembly due to COVID-19³¹.

²⁹ GC24, no. 71.

³⁰ GC24, no. 39.

³¹ *Idem*, nos. 12-17.

As I have said previously, “from the beginning our Founder was concerned with involving the greatest number of collaborators possible in his operational plan: from Mamma Margaret to work providers, from helpful members of the public to theologians, from aristocrats to the politicians of the era. We were born and raised historically in communion with the laity and they with us. In particular, we must stress the importance that the young had in the development of the Salesian charism and mission: Don Bosco found his first collaborators in the young who thus became, in a certain sense, co-founders of the Congregation”.

So many times I myself – and certainly other Rectors Major – have strongly expressed the belief that the involvement of lay people in the Salesian charism and mission is not a concession on our part, a grace we offer them, and nor is it a means of survival – as many confreres have so very often thought. It is a right bound up with their specific vocation. Of course, here the difference between being a simple worker in a Salesian house and being part, at the same time, of a job, a mission and a vocation is evident. It is a radically different relationship. This demands from us in many cases a decisive change of perspective. As consecrated persons we are a specific incarnation of the Salesian charism, but we are not the only repositories of it.

An absolute priority derives from this: “The sharing of the Salesian spirit and growth in shared responsibility require the sharing of certain formation paths and experiences oriented towards spirituality and mission, obviously without neglecting specific formation paths for Salesian consecrated persons and lay people. Joint formation in shared mission is an absolute priority and should be directed above all to the members of the animating nucleus”³².

Lay people are companions on the journey, not substitutes or surrogates for the religious: they and we have specific identities and mission-related tasks. Therefore, our lay collaborators need to know and experience Don Bosco close at hand, and that is what is lived in Salesian houses where they are found. Such understanding and formation

³² Post-Chapter reflection 42, and cf. also *Animating and governing the community*, 106 and 122.

are not received merely through academic courses, but in another special way, by reflecting, verifying and planning what is experienced together in a presence. It is essential to take further steps in common and joint formation, especially in those aspects that relate to knowing and living our shared charism. Indeed, we know that “the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the EPC”³³.

It remains for me to emphasise in a particular and firm way that the shared mission with lay people reaches its most complete and full development when they are members of one of the 32 groups of the Salesian Family of whom, as we know, twelve are lay groups. In the case of members belonging to the Salesian Family the degree of charismatic identity is often very high, and together we live out a true vocation in the charism. It is one more reason for giving *priority to having members of the Salesian Family in our presences, including as workers, when their professionalism meets the same conditions as others.*

Finally, we must not forget that the future of this charismatic element – shared mission and formation with lay people – passes through the formation of the future Salesians. I do not hide from you, dear confreres, that I am concerned about the tendency of some of our young confreres who yearn, I would almost dare say vehemently, to finish their formative stages in order to see themselves with authority, positions and responsibilities before the laity. It is a tendency that runs totally contrary to the path we wish to undertake as a Congregation. Hence, “Formation in and for the shared mission must also touch on the initial formation of the Salesians not only as a topic for study but also through weekly and summer pastoral experiences. The experience of working with and under the direction of lay people during practical training, as well as taking part in the Educative Pastoral Community Council, are precious moments of formation, especially if well accompanied by the members of the animating nucleus, both lay and Salesian”³⁴.

³³ GC24, 43.

³⁴ GC28, Third Nucleus, *Together with lay people in the mission and in formation*, no. 43.

PROPOSAL

- ⇒ Let the Congregation and all Provinces around the world take “further steps” in witnessing to the shared mission and common formation, improving the situation and functioning of the EPC in all of the Congregation’s presences. One can be further forward or further behind in living the mission and formation in and of the EPC, yet one cannot but go in this direction. What I asked for in GC27 continues to be a priority and urgency: “The shared mission between SDB and lay people is no longer optional – in case anyone still thinks so”³⁵.
- ⇒ Let us go about including lay people in the formation teams in our initial formation communities.
- ⇒ During these six years, in every Salesian province and presence a process of discernment will be carried out jointly between Salesians and those who share the mission and are part of the animating nucleus, so as to:
 - ◆ realistically observe the situation of shared mission and formation (recognising)
 - ◆ be aligned with the path that the Church and the Congregation are taking (interpreting)
 - ◆ draw up and implement processes of growth and transformation in synergy with other provincial, regional and congregational realities (choosing).

Therefore:

- ⇒ Lay people with a strong charismatic identity will be gradually included within province teams, also taking on roles of responsibility, coordination and leadership.
- ⇒ Formation will be carried out in the provinces according to the operational model of animation and governance of the houses already decided on by GC24.
- ⇒ In Salesian Provinces and Salesian presences we will make the evident and strong witness of the Salesian Family within the EPC significant.

³⁵ GC27, *Witnesses to the radical approach of the Gospel. Chapter Documents*: Rector Major’s address at the closing of GC27, no. 3.7, Rome 2014.

- ⇒ With the support of the Youth Ministry and Formation Departments, regional ongoing formation centres will prepare aids suited to the different regional contexts and will encourage this process at provincial and local level. Hence, they will become receivers and disseminators of best practices and materials that will serve as an example and stimulus for other Salesian realities.
- ⇒ At the level of local EPCs, value will be given to the third part of *Animating and governing the community – the Ministry of the Salesian Rector*, dedicated to “The educative and pastoral community” as a pathway for ongoing formation.
- ⇒ This process will be one of the fields to which prior attention will be given in Provincial visitations, Provincial Chapters halfway through the six-year period, Extraordinary Visitations and Team Visits.

7. IT IS THE TIME FOR GENEROSITY IN THE CONGREGATION. In a Congregation that is always missionary

“Each one of us is called by God to form part of the Salesian Society. Because of this God gives him personal gifts and by faithful correspondence he finds his way to complete fulfilment in Christ.

The Society recognizes his vocation and helps him to develop it; and he, as a responsible member, puts himself and his gifts at the service of the community and of its common tasks.

Every call is an indication that the Lord loves the Congregation, wants to see it vibrant for the good of the Church and never ceases to enrich it with new apostolic energy” (C.22).

In the concluding session of GC28 I said that, in my opinion, this **“is the time for generosity in the Congregation”**. I have no doubt that we have a history of 162 years characterised by great generosity that already began with Don Bosco. Nevertheless, it seems to me that today this generosity is more necessary than ever.

Let me try to explain myself clearly.

Today, no less than in the past, the reality speaks to us of the need for evangelisation, pastoral needs and human development that we come to know of in our contact with various contexts. We receive frequent appeals, calls, inquiries because we take on one or other service in many parts of the world. We see boys, girls, young people and families in difficulty in every continent.

- ⇒ God continues to call us throughout the world to be “signs and witnesses” of his saving Love for the poorest young people.
- ⇒ There is a need for our help as evangelisers and educators of the young and adults belonging to the popular classes, in the most diverse of cultural and religious contexts.
- ⇒ There is also an urgent need for education and action on our part to witness to and promote justice in the world.
- ⇒ Poverty and poverties continue to be a cry for us, more often than not a silent, voiceless one: young people with their material and

emotional poverties; true orphans, even though they have parents and families, cultural poverties (without access to school, education), spiritual poverties (without any understanding of transcendent values nor of God).

The hope to be able to work (and at time also to study) more easily continues to result in mass migration to the big cities (and also to other countries) with the natural consequences of maladjustment and social marginalisation. To this is added the chilling reality of the refugees and the camps in which they live; in many of them our confreres share life with the refugees themselves. (Kakuma-Kenya, Juba-Sud Sudan, Palabek-Uganda).

I could extend the list of this set of situations.

Dear confreres, we all belong to God and to our unique Congregation, of which we are joyfully members. We are all Salesians of Don Bosco in the world. Our affection will always be addressed to our confreres in our province of origin where we are “vocationally born”; but our truest and deepest membership is in the Congregation, and it begins with our religious profession.

For this reason, over the next six years the opening of horizons must become even more effective and real, thanks to the availability of the confreres and the generous response of the provinces that have a greater chance of offering help to other confreres. Sometimes with agreements between the Provincials themselves, at other times with the mediation of the Rector Major and his Council when it comes to new foundations, new missionary challenges, new presences in other nations or new missionary frontiers.

Fortunately, the provinces that are poorest in economic terms are the richest in vocations, and the formation of all these confreres is made possible by the generosity of the whole Congregation. Once again this demonstrates that generosity makes all dreams possible.

We live in times when we have to face reality with a renewed mentality which allows us to “cross borders”. In a world where borders are more and more “a defence against others”, the prophecy of our life as Salesians of Don Bosco also consists in this: *in showing that for us there are no borders. The only reality we respond to is: God, the*

Gospel and the mission that has been entrusted to us. It is precisely for this that our international and intercultural communities have great prophetic value today, without hiding the fact that building fraternity in different situations requires a vision of faith and personal engagement.

The missionary reality of our Congregation continues to question us and present us with wonderful challenges, **the missions urge us onwards and make us dream beautiful dreams that come true.**

When, in the '80s of last century, we continued year after year to lose a significant number of confreres, the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, prophetically launched Project Africa, and today it is a wonderful reality. In 2000, at the time of the new millennium, seeing the tough pastoral reality and the need for a new evangelisation for Europe, Fr Pascual Chávez promoted Project Europe with conviction. *These are not times for being worried about survival, but opportunities for being more significant.*

In his Message to GC28 Pope Francis also invited us to be careful about fears that end up “with us being obsessed by a paralysing inertia that deprives your mission of the *parresia* proper to the Lord’s disciples. Such inertia can also manifest itself in a pessimistic outlook and attitude towards everything around us, not only in relation to the transformations taking place in society but also in relation to our Congregation, our brothers and sisters and the life of the Church. This is an attitude that ends up “boycotting” and preventing any kind of alternative response or process”³⁶.

PROPOSAL

I am proposing to the entire Congregation to make this **time for generosity** concrete by naturally assuming the availability of confreres from all provinces (transfers, exchange, temporary help) for international services, new foundations, new frontiers to we want to reach.

Therefore:

⇒ Provinces will be attentive to and available for appeals from the Rector Major for the needs and challenges we take on.

³⁶ FRANCIS, *Message to GC28*.

- ⇒ The 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition to Argentina (that will be in 2025) and the first centenary of the missionary presence in North East India (in 2022), will be the opportunity to continue **our Congregation's missionary project**.
- ⇒ We made the missionary appeal concrete by inviting each province to open a missionary project (refugees, immigrants, border crossings, exploited children...) during the previous six years, giving priority to the significance and the real requests for help from today's youth.
- ⇒ The Rector Major and his Council will indicate the appropriate steps for strengthening the section in the Youth Ministry Department (Sector) of the Congregation that deals primarily with the situation of refugees and migrants (especially unaccompanied minors and young people).

8. ACCOMPANYING THE YOUNG TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We recognise that the focus on a sustainable future is a cultural conversion, not a fashion, and like any conversion needs to be strongly called by its new name.

The Chapter Assembly expressed itself with complete unanimity when it was suggested that a small commission take on the sensitivity, that is in us in the face of this emergency. *Caring for creation is not a fashion*. Humanity's life is at stake, even though many public officials, prisoner to economic interests, look the other way or deny what is undeniable. This sensitivity materialised in a Chapter deliberation approved by the Assembly. Pope Francis insisted that we must avoid a "climate emergency" that risks "perpetrating a brutal act of injustice towards the poor and future generations"³⁷.

Our commitment to an integral human ecology comes from a conviction of faith for which "everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others"³⁸. We cannot separate the care of the environment from the social life of human beings. Therefore, ecology must be integral, human. And, consequently, we are invited to an ecological conversion that concerns not only the economy and politics, but also social life, relationships, affectivity and spirituality.

In recent years we have witnessed disagreements by politicians from various countries in the face of this emergency. The last meeting of the leaders of the countries in Santiago de Chile (but held in Madrid, Spain) had as its only result the agreement to meet again in a year's time. No significant operational agreement.

³⁷ FRANCIS, *To Participants at the meeting promoted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the theme: The Energy Transition and Care for our Common Home* (Rome, 14 June 2019).

³⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, Rome 24 May 2015, nos. 71, 137-162. Henceforth *LS*.

At the same time, millions and millions of people, most of them young, have raised a cry worldwide. Pope Francis, sensitive to all this as he has so clearly shown, reminds us that young people themselves are asking for radical change and are asking “how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded”³⁹.

The proposal for a Chapter deliberation was expressed thus: “Together with Pope Francis, we recognise the evidence provided by science that the acceleration of climate change coming from human activity is real. Air pollution, water pollution, improper waste disposal, loss of biodiversity and other environmental issues that have a negative impact on human life are increasing. Unsustainable production and consumption are pushing our world and its ecosystems beyond their limits, undermining their ability to provide resources and actions vital to life, development and regeneration”⁴⁰.

As I am writing these lines, planet Earth and all countries of the world have been impacted to greater or lesser degree by the COVID-19 virus that to date has caused 624,000 deaths and has infected 15,300,000 people. We know well that the life of a single human person is sacred, and that there is so much sorrow due to so many deaths. But it is no less true that planet Earth has been bleeding for decades, and that every year pollution causes many more human deaths than have been the result of COVID-19. *This fact, unfortunately, is not taken so seriously.*

It is no less true that the poorest (it is always the poorest!) suffer the disastrous effects of deforestation and changes in climate, the ruin of their very poor crops, their only resource for survival. This too is not denounced.

I could go on making a list of these situations. It is not necessary. It is enough to stress that as educators and pastors we cannot be indifferent to this reality. We have to do something.

³⁹ LS 13.

⁴⁰ GC28, *Proposal for a Chapter deliberation on the ecology.*

PROPOSAL

Listening to the worldwide cry of so many young people today, WE SALESIANS COMMIT ourselves to BEING CREDIBLE WITNESSES, personally and as a community, of CONVERSION in caring for Creation and Ecological Spirituality⁴¹.

Therefore:

- ⇒ Every province in the world will respond, through the Provincial Delegate for Youth Ministry, to the request to make our schools, education centres, university campuses, oratories, parishes, **educational models of care for the environment and for nature**. As a Salesian option in education we must include action on behalf of creation: care for nature, climate and sustainable development.
- ⇒ As far as possible, let us expand the network of Salesian institutions to be included in the **Don Bosco Green Alliance**, fostering the participation of the young in global campaigns on behalf of the sustainability of environmental and ecological causes for the care of creation and human life.
- ⇒ Let us accept the request made to GC28 by the Salesian Conference on Renewable Energy in November 2019, that the Congregation **undertake to achieve 100% of renewable energy for all provinces around the world before 2032**. Even though the reality of the Congregation is quite disparate across different countries, we accept this challenge in collaboration with the Provinces' PDOs, Salesian NGOs, the DBN.

⁴¹ *LS*, 217.

CONCLUSION

My dear confreres: let me conclude these guidelines by inviting you to accept them not just as a simple letter, but as a message and programme that seeks to be an expression of the beating heart of the Congregation today throughout the world.

I am proposing two important elements as attitudes with which to tackle the wonderful opportunity of the next six years:

- ⇒ The first of these is to do with a virtue: **hope**. Only with hope can we tackle the future, in the confidence that the Lord will bring to completion, with our humble contribution, what we propose here.
- ⇒ The second has to do with our attitude before God himself. I would like to ask our Congregation that over these six years **we allow ourselves to be guided much more by the Holy Spirit**; that it will be He who truly moves our hearts and our human capacities for animating and governing the Congregation and provinces and communities, so that each of us can end up making all the Salesian houses in the world other Valdoccos that offer a response to the youngsters, the youth of today, as Don Bosco did in his time.

With regard to **hope**, I would like to emphasise that, as we well know, it is a virtue that has so much to do with our Christian faith; it is a different way of looking at the future. Christian hope is a way of living, a way of journeying, a way of looking at things.

Hope is the fruit of an encounter with the Lord Jesus and is the fruit of acceptance of His Spirit in us. Hope is not the result of calculations and forecasts. “Neither pessimist nor optimist, the Salesian of the 21st century is someone filled with hope because he knows that his centre is the Lord who can make all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). Only this will save us from living in an attitude of resignation and defensive survival. Only this will make our lives fruitful”⁴².

On the need to allow ourselves to be guided much more by the Holy Spirit of God, He who is the *true inner Teacher*, I make my words

⁴² FRANCIS, *Message to GC28*, quoting his homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord for the 21st World Day of Consecrated Life, 2 February 2017.

those of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, who met Pope Paul VI (today Saint) in Jerusalem in January 1964. The result of that encounter in the Spirit of God was the abrogation of the mutual excommunications that existed up until that moment and that had deeply wounded the heart of Christ in his Church.

This is the thought:

“Without the Holy Spirit,
God is far away,
Christ stays in the past,
the Gospel is a dead letter,
the Church merely an organisation,
authority power,
the mission propaganda,
liturgy a memorial,
and Christian action a slave morality.

But in the Holy Spirit
the cosmos is mobilised to generate the Kingdom,
the Risen Christ is there,
the Gospel is power and life,
the Church brings about Trinitarian communion,
authority is transformed into service,
the liturgy is memorial and anticipation,
human action is deified”⁴³.

Let us bring this message into our prayer.

My dear Salesian confreres, this is what I felt I had a duty to communicate and ask of you all. I invite you to accept these challenges, this road map for the journey over these six years, with all your heart and with a profound desire to bring it to reality in the provinces and communities. Certainly, with the grace of God and the maternal presence of our Mother the Help of Christians, they will be years of fidelity on the part of the Congregation and of courageous and also prophetic

⁴³ The words are by Patriarch Athenagoras I, even though some attribute the quote to Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim, in 1968.

response to the *signs of the times today*. May our Mother, the Help of Christians, continue to look after our Congregation and to “*do everything*”, as with Don Bosco.

May Her mediation and that of all the Salesian holiness of our Family be for us a blessing in the one important thing of our mission from God: “To be in the Church *signs and bearers of the love of God for young people, especially those who are poor*” (C. 2).

I accompany each and every one of you with a memento and prayer.

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, sdb
Rector Major

Rome, 16 August 2020
205th Anniversary of Don Bosco's birth

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE MEMBERS OF GC28

Dear brothers!

I greet you affectionately and thank God that even from a distance I can share a moment of the journey that you are making.

It is significant that, after a few decades, Providence has led you to celebrate your General Chapter at Valdocco, the place of memory where the founding dream came true and took its first steps. I am sure that the noise and clamour of the oratories will be the best and most effective music for the Spirit to rekindle the charismatic gift of your founder. Do not shut the windows to this background noise... Let it accompany you and keep you restless and fearless in your discernment; and let these voices and these songs, in turn, evoke in you the faces of many other young people who, for various reasons, find themselves like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mk 6:34). This clamour and restlessness will keep you awake and alert to any kind of self-imposed anaesthesia, and will help you to remain in creative fidelity to your Salesian identity.

Rekindle the gift you have received

Reflecting on the profile of the Salesian for the young people of today implies accepting that we are immersed in a time of change, with all the uncertainty that this generates. No one can say with certainty and precision (if ever one could) what will happen in the near future on a social, economic, educational and cultural level. The inconsistency and “fluidity” of events, but above all the speed with which they happen and are communicated, means that any prediction is an interpretation condemned to being reformulated almost immediately. (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, 3-4). This outlook on things is even more marked by the fact that your Works are addressed to the world of young people, a world that is itself in movement and

continuous transformation. This calls for a twofold docility on our part: docility to the young and their needs and docility to the Spirit and to everything He wishes to transform.

Taking up this situation responsibly – both on a personal and community level – involves leaving behind the kind of rhetoric that has us continually saying “everything is changing” and which, by dint of repeating it over and over again, ends up with us being obsessed by a paralysing inertia that deprives your mission of the *parresia* proper to the Lord’s disciples. Such inertia can also manifest itself in a pessimistic outlook and attitude towards everything around us, not only in relation to the transformations taking place in society but also in relation to our Congregation, our brothers and sisters and the life of the Church. This is an attitude that ends up “boycotting” and preventing any kind of alternative response or process, and can give rise to the opposite stance: a blind kind of optimism that can dispel the strength and novelty of the Gospel, preventing us from concretely accepting the complexity that situations require and the prophecy that the Lord invites us to carry out. Neither pessimism nor optimism are gifts of the Spirit, because both come from a self-referential vision capable only of measuring oneself by one’s own strengths, capacities or abilities, preventing us from looking at what the Lord is accomplishing and wants to accomplish among us (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, 35). Do not either adapt to the culture in fashion, or take refuge in an heroic but already disembodied past. In changing times it is good to pay good attention to St Paul’s words to Timothy: “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2 *Tim* 1:6-7).

These words invite us to *cultivate a contemplative attitude*, one that is able to identify and discern the focal points. This will help you to enter into the journey with the spirit and the contribution of Don Bosco’s sons and, like him, to develop a “bold cultural revolution” (Encyclical *Laudato si’*, 114). This contemplative attitude will allow you to outdo and go beyond your own expectations and plans. We are men and women of faith, which presupposes that we are passionate about Jesus Christ; and we know that both our present and our future are imbued

with this apostolic and charismatic force called to continue to permeate the lives of so many young people who are abandoned and at risk, poor and needy, excluded and discarded, deprived of rights, deprived of a home... These young people await a gaze of hope capable of contradicting any kind of fatalism or determinism. They are waiting to encounter the gaze of Jesus who tells them “that in all the dark and painful situations... there is a way out” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 104). That is where our joy dwells.

Neither pessimist nor optimist, the Salesian of the 21st century is someone filled with hope because he knows that his centre is the Lord who can make all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). Only this will save us from living in an attitude of resignation and defensive survival. Only this will make our lives fruitful (cf. *homily*, 2 February 2017), because it will make it possible for the gift received to continue to be experienced and expressed as good news for and with the youth of today. This attitude of hope is capable of establishing and opening up alternative educational processes to the prevailing culture which, in not a few situations – both out of destitution, extreme poverty, and out of abundance, which can be extreme in some cases – end up smothering and killing the dreams of our young people, condemning them to a deafening, creeping and often drug-induced conformism. Be neither triumphalist nor scaremongering, but cheerful and hopeful men and women, crafts-persons, not robots, who can “point to ideals other than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity, perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to our personal vocation, prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, love for the poor, and social friendship” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 36).

The “Valdocco option” of your 28th General Chapter is a good opportunity to compare yourselves with the sources and to ask the Lord: “*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*”¹. *Tolle* especially anything that has

¹ The motto with which the first missionaries were branded. I recall Fr James Costamagna’s letter to Don Bosco where, after telling him about the difficulties of the journey and the various failures they had to deal with, he concludes by saying: “We are unanimous in asking just one thing: to be able to soon go to Patagonia to save countless souls”. The awareness that they were sent to seek souls in the peripheries and to continue overcoming any apparent failure is a feature of identity on the basis of which to compare and measure the charism: “*Da mihi animas, coetera tolle*”.

been accumulated along the journey and that remains, and that in other times might have been an appropriate response but today hinders you from configuring and shaping the Salesian presence in a meaningful evangelical way in the different situations of the mission. This requires that we overcome the fears and apprehensions that may arise from believing that the charism was reduced to or identified with certain works or structures; it implies a *change of mentality* in the face of the mission that must be carried out².

The “Valdocco option” and the gift of the young

The Salesian Oratory and everything that arose from it, as the *Memoirs of the Oratory* tell us, came about as a response to the life of the young with a face and a history. This set a young priest in motion who was incapable of remaining neutral or unmoved by what he saw happening before him. It was much more than a gesture of good will or kindness, and even far more than the result of any “feasibility study on numbers and charism”. I think of it as an act of ongoing conversion and response to the Lord who, “tired of knocking” on our doors, waits for us to go and look for him and meet him... or let him out when he knocks from within. It was a conversion that involved (and complicated) his entire life and that of those around him. Don Bosco not only did not choose to separate himself from the world to seek holiness, but he let himself be challenged by it and chose *how* and *which* world to live in.

His choice and acceptance of the world of children and youth who were abandoned, without work and an upbringing, allowed them to experience God’s fatherliness in a tangible way, and gave them the tools with which they could recount their lives and their story in the light of unconditional love. And in turn they have helped the Church to rediscover its mission: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (*Ps* 118:22). Far from being passive agents or spectators of missionary work, they became, beginning with their own circumstances – in many cases they were “religious and social illiterates” – the main protagonists of the entire founding

² We recall the Lord’s warning: “You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition” (*Mk* 7:8).

process³. Salesianity is born precisely from this encounter capable of arousing prophecies and visions: welcoming, integrating and giving growth to their best qualities as a gift for others, especially for those who are marginalised and abandoned from whom nothing is expected. Paul VI said this: “The Church is an evangeliser, but she begins by being evangelised herself... In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelised, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15). Every charism needs to be renewed and evangelised, and in your case especially by the poorest young people.

Don Bosco’s youngsters yesterday, and those of today’s Salesian were and are no mere recipients of a prior planned strategy, but living protagonists of the oratory which was to be created⁴. It is through them and with them that the Lord shows us his will and his dreams⁵. We could call them co-founders of your houses, where the Salesian will be the expert in summoning and generating this kind of dynamic without feeling that he is the boss. This is a joint effort that reminds us that we are an “outgoing Church”, and that mobilises us to do this: a Church capable of abandoning comfortable, secure and in some cases privileged positions, to find in the least the fruitfulness typical of the Kingdom of God. This is not a strategic choice, but a charismatic one. A fruitfulness sustained on the basis of the cross of Christ, which is always a scandalous injustice for those who have blocked their sensi-

³ Thanks to the help of the wise Cafasso, Don Bosco discovered who he was in the eyes of the young prisoners; and those young prisoners discovered a new face in Don Bosco’s gaze. So together they discovered the dream of God, who needs these encounters to manifest Himself. Don Bosco did not discover his mission in front of a mirror, but in the pain of seeing young people who had no future. The Salesian of the 21st century will not discover his own identity unless he can suffer with “the large numbers of young lads... fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me... Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates” (*Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, 48); and we could add: youngsters of our very Church.

⁴ Today we see how in many regions young people are the first to rise up, organise themselves and promote just causes. Your Salesian houses, far from preventing this awakening, are called to become places that can stimulate this consciousness of Christians and citizens. Let us remember the title of this year’s Strenna of the Rector Major: “Good Christians and upright citizens”.

⁵ I invite you to always keep in mind all those who do not share them but whom we cannot ignore if we do not want to become a closed group.

tivity to suffering or have come to terms with injustice towards the innocent. “As a Church, may we never fail to weep before these tragedies of our young. May we never become inured to them, for anyone incapable of tears cannot be a mother. We want to weep so that society itself can be more of a mother” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, 75).

The “Valdocco option” and the charism of presence

It is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple. The mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest. When we isolate ourselves or distance ourselves from the people we are called to serve, our identity as consecrated persons begins to be distorted and becomes a caricature.

To this effect, one of the obstacles that we can identify does not have to do so much with any situation outside our communities, but rather is the one that touches us directly because of a distorted experience of ministry..., and that hurts us so much: clericalism. Clericalism is the personal quest to possess, monopolise and control things, minimising and nullifying the anointing of the People of God. Clericalism, living out our call in an elitist way, confuses election with privilege, service with servility, unity with uniformity, differences of opinion with opposition, formation with indoctrination. Clericalism is a perversion that fosters functional, paternalistic, possessive and even manipulative ties with all other vocations in the Church.

Another obstacle we encounter – one that is widespread and even justified, especially in this time of precariousness and fragility – is the tendency towards rigorism. By confusing authority with authoritarianism, it claims to govern and control human processes with a scrupulous, severe and even petty attitude towards one’s own or someone else’s (and above all others’) limitations and weaknesses. The rigorist forgets that wheat and tares grow together (cf. *Mt* 13:24-30) and “that

not everyone can do everything and that in this life human weaknesses are not healed completely and once for all by grace. In every case, as Saint Augustine taught, God commands you to do what you can and to ask for what you cannot” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 49). With great finesse and spiritual subtlety, St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that “the devil had deceived many: some by leading them to commit sins, and others by excessive rigour against sinners; so that if Satan cannot get them for having committed sin, he at least destroys those he already has by the severity of prelates who drive them to despair by not correcting them in a compassionate way. Hence, he destroys these, and the others he puts in the snare of the devil. And this happens to us, if we do not forgive sinners”⁶.

Those who accompany others in their growth must be people with broad horizons, capable of holding both limitations and hope together, thus helping them to always see things, ultimately, from a saving perspective. An educator “who is not afraid to set limits and who, at the same time, abandons himself to the dynamics of hope expressed in his trust in the action of the Lord, is the image of a strong man, who directs and guides that which does not belong to him but to his Lord”⁷. It is not lawful for us to stifle and prevent the strength and grace of what is possible, the realisation of which always hides seeds of new and good Life. We learn to work and to trust in God’s times, which are always greater and wiser than our short-sighted measures. He does not want to destroy anyone, but to save everyone.

It is urgent, therefore, to find a style of formation capable of structurally taking on the fact that evangelisation implies the full participation, and full citizenship – with all its potential and limitations – of the baptised, and not only the so-called “professionals” (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120); it is a participation where service, and service to the poorest, is the fundamental pillar that helps to better manifest and witness to our Lord, “who came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (*Mt* 20:28). I encourage

⁶ *Super II Cor.*, Chap. 2, lect. 2 (towards the end). The passage St Thomas comments on is *2 Cor* 2:6-7 where, concerning those who had caused him pain, St Paul writes: “you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow”.

⁷ J. M. BERGOGLIO, *Meditazioni per religiosi*, 105.

you to continue your efforts to make your houses an “ecclesial laboratory” capable of recognising, appreciating, stimulating and encouraging the different calls and missions in the Church⁸.

In this sense, I am thinking concretely of two presences in your Salesian community which can help as elements in comparing the place held by the different vocations among you; two presences that are an “antidote” against every clericalist and rigorous tendency: the Coadjutor Brother, and women.

Coadjutor Brothers are a living expression of the gratuitousness that the charism invites us to safeguard. Your consecration is, above all, a sign of the gratuitous love of the Lord, and for the Lord in his young people, which is not defined primarily by a particular ministry, function or service, but by a presence. Even before things that need to be done, the Salesian is a living reminder of a presence in which availability, listening, joy and dedication are the essential features which give rise to processes. The gratuitousness of presence saves the Congregation from any activist obsession and from any kind of technical and functional reductionism. The first call is to be a joyful and gratuitous presence among young people.

What would have become of Valdocco without the presence of Mamma Margaret? Would your houses have been possible without this woman of faith? In some regions and places “there are communities that have long preserved and handed on the faith even though no priest has come their way, even for decades. This could happen because of the presence of strong and generous women who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries. For centuries, women have kept the Church alive in those places through their remarkable devotion and deep faith” (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, 99). Without a real, effective and affective presence of women, your works would lack the courage and the ability to transform presence into hospitality, into a home. Faced with the rigour that excludes, we must learn to generate the new life of the Gospel. I invite you to implement approaches

⁸ An ecclesial vocation, before being something that differentiates us or makes us complementary, is an invitation to offer a particular gift which helps the growth of others.

in which the female voice, her outlook and her actions – appreciated for her individuality – finds an echo in making decisions; not simply as a helper but as someone fully involved in your presences.

The “Valdocco option” as expressed through many languages

As in other times, the myth of Babel attempts to impose itself under the guise of globalisation. Entire systems create a global and digital communications network capable of interconnecting all corners of the planet, running the serious risk of levelling and homogenising cultures, depriving them of their essential characteristics and resources. The universal presence of your Salesian Family is a stimulus and an invitation to guard and preserve the richness of many of the cultures in which you are immersed without trying to get them all to conform. On the other hand, strive for Christianity to be able to take on the language and culture of the local people. It is sad to see that in many places, the Christian presence is still experienced as a foreign (especially European) presence; a situation that can also be found in formation programmes and lifestyles. (cf. *ibid.*, 90)⁹. Instead, let us be inspired by this anecdote about Don Bosco, who when asked what language he liked to speak in, answered: “The one my mother taught me: it is the one with which I can communicate more easily”. Following this certainty, the Salesian is called to speak in the mother tongue of each of the cultures in which he finds himself. The unity and communion of your family is able to absorb and accept all these differences, which can enrich the whole body in a synergy of communication and interaction where everyone can offer the best of themselves for the good of the whole body. In this way Salesianity, far from being lost in uniformity without nuance, will be expressed in a more beautiful and attractive way... it will be able to express itself “in dialect” (cf. *2 Mac* 7:26-27).

⁹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116: “The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, ‘remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.’”

At the same time, the intrusion of virtual reality as the dominant language in many of the countries where you carry out your mission demands, in the first place, recognition of all the possibilities and good things it produces, without underestimating or ignoring its impact in terms of creating bonds, especially at the emotional level. Nor are we consecrated adults immune from this. The widespread (and necessary) “screen ministry” asks us to inhabit the internet intelligently, recognising it as a place of mission¹⁰ which requires, in turn, that we put all the necessary mediations in place so as not to remain prisoners of its circularity and its peculiar (and dichotomous) logic. This trap – albeit in the name of the mission – can lock us in on ourselves and isolate us in a comfortable, yet superfluous virtuality with little or no contact with the lives of young people, with the members of the community or with apostolic commitments. The internet is not neutral, and it has enormous power for creating culture. Behind the *avatar* of virtual closeness, we can end up becoming blind to or distant from the real life of individuals, flattening and impoverishing our missionary vigour. Individualistic withdrawal, so widespread and fashionable in this profoundly digitized culture, requires special attention not only with regard to our pedagogical models but also with regard to the personal and communal use of time, and of our activities and assets.

The “Valdocco option” and the ability to dream

One of Don Bosco’s “literary genres” was his dreams. They were the Lord’s way of entering into his life and into the life of your whole Congregation, enlarging the idea of what was possible. Far from keeping him asleep, his dreams helped him, as they did St Joseph, to embrace another dimension and depth of life, born out of the depths of God’s compassion. It became possible to live the Gospel concretely... He dreamed a dream, and gave it form in the oratory.

¹⁰ Indeed, today “What is called for is an evangelisation capable of shedding light on these new ways of relating to God, to others and to the world around us, and inspiring essential values. It must reach the places where new narratives and paradigms are being formed” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 74).

I would like to offer you these words just like the “goodnights” in every good Salesian house at the end of the day, inviting you to dream and to dream big. Know that the rest will be given to you as well. Dream of open, fruitful and evangelising houses capable of allowing the Lord to show so many young people his unconditional love and also allowing you to enjoy the beauty to which you have been called. Dream... not only for yourself and for the good of the Congregation, but for all young people deprived of the strength, light and comfort of friendship with Jesus Christ, deprived of a community of faith to sustain them, of a horizon of meaning and of life. (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 49). Dream... And get others to dream!

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 4 March 2020

**“WHAT KIND OF SALESIANS
FOR THE YOUTH OF TODAY?”**

1. PRIORITY OF THE SALESIAN MISSION AMONG TODAY'S YOUNG PEOPLE

RECOGNISING

1. *A faith perspective*

As members of the 28th General Chapter, we are convinced that God, through his Spirit, is present in the lives of all the young people of our time. We have first of all sought to recognise his action through discernment, seeking to enter into the rhythm of “a twofold docility on our part: docility to the young and their needs and docility to the Spirit and to everything He wishes to transform” (from *Pope Francis' Message to GC28*).

From the very beginning, this has led us to take a positive perspective, one shaped by humility, sympathy, courage, intelligence, faith and hope, in the certainty that this “is how God the Father sees things; he knows how to cherish and nurture the seeds of goodness sown in the hearts of the young” whom, therefore, we should consider to be “holy ground” (cf. *Christus Vivit*, no. 67).

Called to be fathers, pastors and guides of the young, we wish to make this divine way of seeing things our own, aware that in this way we are following in the footsteps of our beloved father Don Bosco, who carried out his work right here at Valdocco, led by the hand of the Help of Christians.

2. *Listening to the cry of the young*

Who are the young people of today? What is their situation? What are they looking for? What are they asking of us? First of all, we have listened to them in order to answer these questions.

We have had the gift of having some young people from all over the world among us. They represented the very many young people who were present in our Provincial Chapters during the preparations for GC28. We have listened attentively to their voice and been moved by it. They have spoken to us of their spiritual restlessness and their hunger for God, their desire to be key players in and creators of a better world, their struggle to believe and to go against the logic of our time... They asked us to be less “managers” and more “pastors”; to be among them and to have time to accompany them.

In our many opportunities to work together, we have also become aware of the many forms of poverty young people suffer from, which leaves us horrified in the same way that Don Bosco was horrified on his first visit to the prisons in Turin. The cry of so many young people still touches our hearts today: economic, social and cultural poverty; emotional, relational and family poverty; moral and spiritual poverty. In many contexts, unemployment and the inability to study penalise large swathes of young people.

In many ways, the young people have shown themselves to be prophets for us: through their presence the Lord continually makes known to us his expectations and his appeals for the renewal of our mission. It is like Don Bosco, who “did not discover his mission in front of a mirror, but in the pain of seeing young people who had no future. The Salesian of the 21st century will not discover his own identity unless he can suffer with ‘the large numbers of young lads... fine healthy youngsters, alert of mind but seeing them idle there, infested with lice, lacking food for body and soul, horrified me... Public disgrace, family dishonour, and personal shame were personified in those unfortunates’ (*Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, 48); and we could add: youngsters of our very Church” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

3. *In an age of change*

We are experiencing an age of change: today, more than ever, “no one can say with certainty and precision (if ever one could) what

will happen in the near future on a social, economic, educational and cultural level” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). It is clear, then, that it is no longer possible to think of our mission in terms of “this is how it has always been”. While on the one hand this is bewildering for us, on the other, it asks us to humbly and courageously get involved, and asks of us that we recover the youthful dynamics that were so vibrant in Don Bosco. We are more convinced than ever of what Pope Francis told us right here in Valdocco, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, on 21 June 2015: “Your charism is of great relevance today. Look at the streets, look at the children and make risky decisions. Do not be afraid. Do as he did”.

Along with some perennial issues that continue to challenge us, our times present us with some new ones that we must inevitably tackle. The digital revolution asks us to understand the profound transformations that are taking place not only in the field of communication, but above all in the way we set up and manage our human relationships. The area of our emotions, with all the issues related to gender and sexual identity, challenge our anthropological perspective. The situation of women and their role in society and in the Church requires us to reflect more carefully and deeply. Ecological sensitivity, which is growing rapidly in the world of youth, calls on us to be prophetic in this field through clear and coherent choices. Contact with young migrants, refugees and many others deprived of their fundamental rights becomes for us a pressing call to action. Finally, the painful experience of abuse, which also touches our Congregation, is a strong call to conversion.

4. *Passing on the faith*

The rapid change taking place affects the ordinary processes of faith transmission. In this regard we find considerable differences: while in some contexts the life of faith does not pose any problem and young people experience their belonging to the Church in a natural way, in other strongly secularised contexts the Christian faith has become an issue that no longer has any personal or social relevance. In some areas where we are present there is fundamen-

talism, discrimination and even persecution; in others we can freely propose the Gospel. We also work in many multi-religious contexts in which the majority of young people who attend our Works belong to other religions or other Christian confessions. Faced with a global crisis of authority, tradition and transmission, we are challenged regarding style, content and ways of proclaiming Jesus Christ, insofar as we all feel that we are called to be “missionaries of the young”. Convinced of the need to reach their hearts, we feel the urgency of offering initial proclamation with more conviction, because “Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation” (*Christus Vivit*, no. 214)

5. *The desire to journey together*

Young people are bearers of the Salesian charism and help us to know, to deepen our understanding of, and to better take up the mission entrusted to us. From the beginning, “far from being passive agents or spectators of missionary work they became, beginning with their own circumstances – in many cases they were “religious and social illiterates” – the main protagonists of the entire founding process. Salesianity is born precisely from this encounter capable of arousing prophecies and visions,” in the belief that “every charism needs to be renewed and evangelised, and in your case especially by the poorest young people” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

Hence, we feel that it is our duty to involve the young and we uphold their right to be involved within the educative and pastoral community that is first of all a family where everything is shared in an attitude of friendship, listening, respect and cooperation. We recognise that many of them “find themselves in a deep sense of orphanhood to which we must respond by creating an attractive and fraternal environment where others can live with a sense of purpose” (cf. *Christus Vivit*, no. 216). It is precisely in this direction that the recent synodal journeys have helped us rediscover the family nature of the Church, so much so that the latter can be thought of as “a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches” (*Amoris Laetitia*, no. 87).

Finally, we are aware that many times we fail to satisfy this very real “nostalgia for community” that young people and families have: they ask us for time and we give them space; they ask us for relationships and we provide them with services; they ask us for fraternal life and we offer them structures; they ask us for friendship and we provide activities for them. All this commits us to rediscovering the riches and potential of the “family spirit”.

INTERPRETING

6. *Accompanied by Don Bosco*

To interpret what we have recognised so far, we would like to allow ourselves be guided by one of the most significant passages of the “Letter from Rome” in 1884. Don Bosco saw that a physical and spiritual barrier had been created in the Oratory at Valdocco between the Salesians and the young people, which hindered educative activity and betrayed the charism. In dialogue with one of the young people in the dream, he tried to interpret the situation to find a way to resolve it: “How then are we to set about breaking down this barrier?” The reply he received is also enlightening for us: “By a friendly informal relationship with the boys, especially in recreation. You cannot have affection without this familiarity, and where affection is not evident there can be no confidence. If you want to be loved, you must make it clear that you love. Jesus Christ made himself little with the little ones and bore our weaknesses. He is our master in the matter of the friendly approach”. This text illuminates the three fundamental core issues around which we have gathered the interpretation of this nucleus: meeting young people where they are to be found and where they express themselves spontaneously; closeness that creates confidence and makes accompaniment possible; the warm emotional tone of the educational relationship that Don Bosco calls for with a term that comes from family experience. It is in this perspective of faith that we want to look for the reasons for what we experience, with its lights and shadows, to bring out the challenges that await us and identify the criteria for facing up to them.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH TO POOR YOUNG PEOPLE

7. *Two sides of a single problem*

Too often, poverty distances young people and older youth from the opportunity to grow up peacefully, to have a proper education, to decide about their future. Not infrequently, poverty also distances them from the Christian community and from the possibility of encountering the joy of the Gospel, which is aimed at the very least among them: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (*Lk* 4:18). Thus, poverty today becomes an exclusionary barrier that must be overcome.

The prophetic Magisterium of Pope Francis is helping the Church to become increasingly aware that distance from the poor betrays the Gospel and generates many ills in the Christian community. We too feel the need to go deeper into the interpretation of the times we are living in, to the point of recognising that social phenomena and spiritual challenges, appeals of the young and movements of the Spirit are closely linked, without any possibility of separating them. This was Don Bosco’s experience, which made him able to respond to the most urgent needs of his young people and to have them feel the tenderness of God that warms their hearts and instils hope. Where this also happens today, through generous commitment and pastoral creativity, we see a true flourishing of the charism. On the other hand, where communities lose “familiarity” with the poor, religious life becomes lukewarm, risking becoming salt that loses its flavour, a lamp placed under a bushel (cf. *Mt* 5:13,15).

8. *Consecrated to God for young people who are poorer*

Going out to poor young people and doing so as a community of believers is certainly an ever-new challenge, but it is also a prospect that fills us with enthusiasm. Like our father Don Bosco, we too said to God on the day of our religious profession: “I offer myself totally to you. I pledge myself to devote all my strength to those to whom you will send me, especially to young people who are poorer” (*Constitutions*, art. 24).

In the first instance, this demands of us a capacity for community discernment: it is not a question of entrusting new projects to an individual confrere to launch, but of listening together to God's call coming to us through forms of youth poverty. It also requires spiritual depth, so as not to fall into activism or a corporate mentality; cultural preparation, to understand the phenomena in which we are immersed and the new forms of youth poverty; a willingness to work together, abandoning all pastoral individualism; flexibility in rethinking our lifestyle and our works, especially when they no longer express the missionary energy of the charism and respond primarily to the logic of maintenance.

ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE YOUNG FROM A VOCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

9. *A rich tradition*

“You cannot have love without this familiarity, and where this is not evident there can be no confidence”. These words of Don Bosco are enough for us to understand the value it had for him to reach the boy's heart, allowing him an opening in trust and sincere confidence. Don Bosco did not use the word “accompaniment”, but all his actions aimed precisely at this. His educational commitment, rich in proposals and attentive to the different dimensions of growth, aimed at accompanying young people in a simple and concrete way to holiness. To neglect this dimension of the preventive system means to distort it.

While the whole Church, in the Synod on Young People, has re-discovered the value of accompaniment for discernment, we too are invited to re-interpret the riches of our tradition in this regard. It gives us three closely related levels of accompaniment: the setting, the group and personal accompaniment. The first is achieved through the offer of a welcoming, joyful atmosphere, rich in varied proposals and capable of triggering paths of growth. The second fosters a greater commitment to personal maturity and the journey of faith, sees the value of each individual's aptitudes and inclinations, and promotes the spirituality of the Salesian Youth Movement, as well as belonging to it. The third leads the young person to more deeply discern the meaning of his

or her existence before God. In this respect, the Synod on Young People spoke of accompaniment “from a vocational perspective” (*Final Document of the Synod*, nos. 138-143; *Christus Vivit*, Ch. Eight), helping one to think of life not as a project of individual self-realisation, but as a path to discover and respond to the divine call. Pope Francis’ expression “I am a mission” (*Christus Vivit*, no. 254) points clearly to the goal that accompaniment has before it: to help each one to discover his or her uniqueness as a gift for others.

10. Individuals and the goal of accompaniment

Since it arises from familiarity in everyday life, accompaniment involves many people and is not the exclusive task of one individual. The entire educative and pastoral community is involved, even if not everyone has the same aptitude and preparation for guiding personal discernment. In any case, the key player in each act of accompaniment is the Spirit of the Lord, who fills us with gifts and charisms; we are simply servants and mediators of God’s work.

It is very important to emphasise that good accompaniment does not place the young person in a passive or subordinate position, but on the contrary promotes that individual’s active participation in community life and shared responsibility in the service of the poorest. It is therefore an accompaniment for involvement, for active and responsible presence in society and in the Church. The active role young people played in the founding of our Congregation and their active commitment to sodalities at the Oratory in Valdocco still have much to say to us in this respect.

In the certainty that “those who accompany others in their growth must be people with broad horizons, capable of holding both limitations and hope together, thus helping them to always see things, ultimately, from a saving perspective” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*), we are called to foster a renewed commitment to accompaniment that first of all requires that we take greater care of the preparation of confreres and lay people in this delicate area and that we ourselves have the experience of being accompanied. This perspective of the active involvement of young people then

presupposes a greater trust in their resources: we should not be afraid of their healthy restlessness, their questions and their sensitivity to new issues which we are not always ready to face. So, let us learn every day to listen with empathy and to offer our help with humility. The genuine authority of an educator does not consist in the power to manage, but in the strength to promote freedom: this is how Don Bosco exercised his role as father.

JOURNEYING WITH FAMILIES AND AFFECTIVE EDUCATION

11. Being close to families

We are aware that the family is the school of love in which we learn the grammar of the affection through which God makes himself known and encountered. The recent synods on the family and the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* have offered many pastoral indications on the accompaniment of families and on educating emotions, which we too are called to accept and assimilate.

For us Salesians, the interest in the family springs spontaneously from the very heart of our educational charism. We know how much Don Bosco learned from Mamma Margaret, so much so that he wanted her with him in Valdocco as a valued presence for making the Oratory a true “home”. On the other hand, John Bosco as a boy did not grow up in a perfect family: he experienced the suffering of losing his father, the lack of understanding of his brother Anthony, the humiliation of poverty, the need to leave home to work. All this contributed to maturing a fatherly heart in him that was rich in mercy and acceptance.

Today, we too feel the need for great closeness to families, acknowledging their efforts, but above all fostering their strengths. Through our Works we actually meet many families in the most diverse situations: Some turn to us for what we offer by way of education, others share our religious choice and charismatic inspiration, others are in the first years of marriage and ask for accompaniment. Not a few are in situations of poverty, discomfort or are wounded families and the result of second marriages. Then there are young people who have grown up with us and ask us to

accompany them in preparation for marriage, while there are also people who live in new relational configurations who come to our settings.

This complexity is undoubtedly a challenge and requires adequate preparation. However, the presence of so many families in the groups that make up the Salesian Family and others who collaborate with us is a great resource, especially if we are able to listen to their experience and value their witness.

12. Youth Ministry, family, emotional education

The fundamental criterion for our work with families is the educational nature of our mission. We do not want to pursue a family pastoral ministry parallel to youth ministry, but rather to present the educative and pastoral community as the place and form of our journey with families.

Deriving from this criterion is the need to take up the challenge of the emotional and sexual education of young people in a more courageous way. This is a request which the Council had already addressed to the Church's educational institutions (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1) and one we have pursued too little. It is not simply a matter of giving information but of accompanying a journey of self-knowledge and discovery of the call to love. We know the importance that Don Bosco attributed to purity in the growth of children and the delicacy with which he spoke about it. In a context that not infrequently trivialises sexuality, we are called to present a serene, positive and balanced vision of the emotional side of life, to shed light on the languages of the body and on the sense of reciprocity between man and woman in conformity with the Word of God. Seeing to proactive and "preventive" settings, animation capable of involving young people in all their dimensions (theatre, sport, art, play, music ...), personal accompaniment that looks after the profound dynamics of the person, are all tools that our tradition gives us and that we are called to rethink in today's new contexts.

CHOOSING

13. *Community outreach to poor young people*

Let us go out to poor young people by going beyond a pastoral ministry of maintenance and renewing our community dynamics.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From a pastoral care of conservation to a pastoral care of mission that has the needs of young people as its criterion of choice.
- b) From an elitist and exclusive pastoral ministry to one that is popular and inclusive.
- c) From a community that retreats to its comfort zones to a witness of evident fraternity in sharing with poor young people.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Youth Ministry and Missions Sectors* propose a specific plan of attention and acknowledgement of forms of youth poverty.
- e) In reshaping presences, let *Provinces* provide for communities with Salesians that can welcome children and young people in difficulty (migrants, refugees, street children, etc.), to offer them opportunities for study, job training and integration into the world of work.
- f) Let *the Congregation at all levels* ensure that the conditions for the promotion and defence of the rights of young people are guaranteed, especially through the protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) *At central level*, let a coordinated form of networking be developed with other religious, national and international organisations serving the poorest young people.
- h) Let a Code of Conduct be drawn up *at provincial and local level* to ensure real, safe and guaranteed contact with young people, especially the poor.

- i) Let *communities* have specific times and ongoing circumstances that can welcome young people: reviewing timetables, structures, environments and relational styles so they are genuinely open and welcoming communities.

14. Accompaniment of the young from a vocational perspective

Let us promote a renewed commitment to accompaniment from a vocational perspective, seeing to an adequate formation of Salesians and lay people in this area.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From a pastoral ministry of initiatives and activities to a focus on personal paths of growth.
- b) From the fragmentation of pastoral work in many areas to its integration within a vocational perspective.
- c) From a mentality of pastoral self-sufficiency to the involvement of young people according to their degree of maturity.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let *the Youth Ministry and Formation Sectors* propose courses of accompaniment for Salesians and lay people.
- e) Let *the Youth Ministry Sector* animate, support and guide the commitment of the Provinces on vocational issues.
- f) Let every *Province* offer young people a “time destined for the maturation of adult Christian life” to be spent in our Houses, through a precise project of shared life, fellowship, apostolate and spirituality (cf. *Synod Final Document*, no. 161).

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Rector Major with his Council* consider establishing central coordination for vocation animation.
- h) Let *Regions* implement the development and establishment of regional formation centres for Salesians and lay people on accompaniment.
- i) Let the *Provinces* facilitate the inclusion of young people in youth ministry teams, provincial consultative bodies and other structures of pastoral animation.

15. Journeying with families and emotional education

Let us strengthen our journeying with families in the educative and pastoral community and propose more carefully attuned paths for emotional education.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From family considered only as the recipient of pastoral care to the idea that the family is an active participant in the mission that must be involved in the educative and pastoral community.
- b) From a rigid and simplistic mindset to the acceptance and accompaniment of family life while respecting its complexity.
- c) From considering our emotional life as something achieved once and for all, to a Salesian formation that sees it as a path of growth and maturation of the heart.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let *the Youth Ministry and Formation Sectors*, by valuing the experience and contribution of families, give indications for drawing up adequate proposals for emotional and sexual education and see to the formation of Salesians and lay people in this area.
- e) Let the *Provinces* promote family groups inspired by Salesian spirituality, encouraging their apostolic leadership and their active involvement in the educative and pastoral community.
- f) Let the *Provinces* value the reflection already initiated by the Congregation at the International Congress on “Youth Ministry and Family” (Madrid, 2017) and develop tools and paths to support families in their educational task.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Provinces* invest in the formation of personnel for the accompaniment of families and for emotional education.
- h) Let the *Provinces* encourage the inclusion of certain families in the educative and pastoral community council, promoting regular moments of communion and formation.

- 1) Let the *Provinces* foster the apostolic commitment of the lay groups of the Salesian Family in service of the family.

2. PROFILE OF THE SALESIAN TODAY

RECOGNISING

16. Vocation and formation: the power of the charism challenges us

In the dream at nine years of age the Virgin Mary, after pointing out to John Bosco the field he was to work in, invited him to become “humble, strong and energetic”. With these words she was proposing he enter a demanding path of formation closely linked to the vocation received and the mission entrusted to him. We too recognise that formation is a precious gift from the Lord and an indispensable requirement of the vocational journey. This commitment to formation touches on all the dimensions of our apostolic consecration: this is why the 27th General Chapter was consistent in outlining the profile of the Salesian as a mystic in the Spirit, prophet of fraternity and servant of the young.

By examining the statistics of the Congregation, we have learned that in the last decade we have had a yearly average of around 2600 young men in formation. This fills us with joy and hope because it shows that our charism continues to be fruitful. At the same time, the data challenges us and calls on us to be responsible, asking that we assess the quality of our initial and ongoing formation.

We note, in fact, that at times the Salesian consecrated identity seems weak and not deeply rooted: the primacy of God in personal and community life does not always emerge clearly; forms of clericalism and secularism risk bringing “spiritual worldliness” into the Congregation; the promotion of the lay Salesian in some regions is scant; the lack of trained personnel in the area of Salesianity, despite the abundant material available, is a sign of insufficient attention to the deepening of the charism.

17. Formation and mission: a gap to be aware of

One concern clearly emerged in the Chapter reflection on the profile of the Salesian today: the gap between the formative journey in its different phases and the reality of the ordinary educative and pastoral mission. Some speak of a gap between formation and mission, others of a separation between initial and ongoing formation, while some others still speak of a degree of inconsistency between what the Congregation proposes in initial formation and what is in fact experienced in apostolic communities.

Formation as it is now, with its structures, styles and methods, sometimes appears to be more informative than performative, because it does not always succeed in transforming the heart. The apostolic mission, on the other hand, does not always succeed in drawing elements for ongoing formation from the reality of young people and from the concreteness of life: the “university of life” struggles to become a way of interpreting life in the light of faith (*lectio vitae*) and offering elements for a continual renewal of our way of being and working.

We also recognise that there is an urgent need to examine in depth some of the matters that must be fully integrated within the formation journey: enabling individuals for the spiritual accompaniment of young people, which requires the maturation of specific sensitivities; the clear awareness that our mission is shared with the laity and therefore requires new relational skills; the growing attention to ecological issues which requires specific preparation in this area. Finally, the new digitised world calls for a rethinking of the way we approach our fraternal life and apostolic mission as a whole, because “individualistic withdrawal, so widespread and fashionable in this profoundly digitised culture, requires special attention not only with regard to our pedagogical models but also with regard to the personal and communal use of time, and of our activities and assets” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC 28*).

18. Ongoing formation: living life in a formative way

We are thankful for the presence of a good number of Salesians who constantly rekindle the gift of God they have received (cf. 2

Tim 1:6), through “a contemplative attitude, one that is able to identify and discern the focal points” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). This is the only way to overcome the unfortunately deep-rooted idea that formation ends with the conclusion of the initial stages and access to the ministry.

In fact, some confreres lack the conviction that commitment to their own formation is a precise style of taking on the mission, so much so that it is difficult to ignite the desire and passion for ongoing formation. We recognise that at both the central level and at the provincial level there has been an effort to offer resources and paths of formation, but these do not always bear the hoped-for fruits. It is difficult, in particular, to transform daily pastoral experience into a formative occasion, since we have not begun to discern things from the concrete nature of reality. For this reason, both the religious and educative and pastoral community are unable to become the natural and ordinary environment in which one is formed.

However, there is also a need to recognise that there is a degree of confusion concerning the individuals responsible and the paths of ongoing formation: there is often a lack of confreres who have been prepared to accompany this journey, while there is a multiplicity yet weakness of formative references at the provincial and local level. Some warn of the risk of reducing ongoing formation to a few sporadic refresher courses or entrusting it to the delivery of some new manual. Finally, in an ever more fluid world, there is the challenge of “cultural diligence” in the Congregation, because without study, reading, and continuous updating it will not be possible to escape from a pastoral ministry of maintenance and repetition.

19. Initial formation: a reality in progress that must be accompanied

From the data and discussions that emerged at the Chapter, we recognise that initial formation is, as a whole, a multifaceted, positive and promising reality. It is a great mosaic of different situations in which we recognise the presence of new dynamics in the Congregation.

Who are the young people in formation today? By way of summary we can say that most of them come from Asia and Africa;

as a whole they are “young adults”, and not “teenagers” as in the past; they are young men of our times, who therefore bring with them all the potential and fragility of young people today; they are seeking an authentic life and a prophetic fellowship, even if sometimes the motivations that have led them to Salesian life need to mature; being closer to the younger generation, they have an ease of contact and a natural commonality of language with the world of youth. All of this implies a completely different formative approach in our formation houses and study centres.

Due to this epoch-making metamorphosis, we understand that being on the lookout for and forming the formators is a real urgency that must be tackled in the best possible way. Recognising that being a formator is a “vocation within a vocation,” there will be a need to shift from improvisation to authentic discernment for the competent choice of formators and teachers: it is not a question of “recruitment”, but of true vocational dialogue. Recognising the community, then, as the first place of formation, Chapter members stressed how decisive the team of formators is, acting collaboratively and under the direction of the Rector who has the task, above all others, of accompanying and coordinating the commitment of everyone involved.

20. The need to take on a new style of formation

As Pope Francis tells us, “reflecting on the profile of the Salesian for the young people of today implies accepting that we are immersed in a time of change” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). There is a need, then, to renew our style of formation, something that needs to be thought of more and more in personalising, holistic, relational, contextual and intercultural terms.

Above all, what is needed is a style that is capable of acquiring its fundamental tenor from the mission, because it is the mission that “sets the tenor of our whole life; it specifies the task we have in the Church and our place among other religious families” (*Constitutions*, art. 3) and also because we are all convinced that “when we isolate ourselves or distance ourselves from the people we are called to serve, our identity as consecrated persons begins to be

distorted and becomes a caricature” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

This new style of formation that we dream of should make the unity of the Congregation shine forth in the plurality of its expressions: it is most important, faced with the “serious risk of levelling and homogenising cultures,” that we recognise that the worldwide presence of our charismatic reality “is a stimulus and an invitation to guard and preserve the richness of many of the cultures in which you are immersed without trying to get them all to conform” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

INTERPRETING

21. *Don Bosco’s experience of formation*

In order to make a healthy discernment of our formation, it is useful to reflect on the experience Don Bosco had of formation. He himself recounts the main moments in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*, with many observations that give a clear glimpse of his outlook in this regard. We dwell here in particular on one of the formative stages for which Don Bosco showed the greatest appreciation, that of the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* or Pastoral Institute. Don Bosco says of that institution:

“*Qui si impara ad essere prete*”, here one learns to be a priest (J. Bosco, *Memoirs of the Oratory of St Francis de Sales*, in ISS, Salesian Sources, 1. Don Bosco and his work, Kristu Jyoti, Bangalore, 2014, p. 1393).

Formation at the *Convitto* put together a solid spiritual and cultural proposal (“Meditation, spiritual reading, two conferences a day, lessons on preaching, a secluded life, every convenience for study...”) and accompaniment in the live encounter with “the malice and misery of human beings” in the places of greatest poverty. The main strength that guided the young priests in achieving a synthesis of prayer and ministry, reflection and pastoral practice, was a group of formators of the highest calibre, among whom Fr Cafasso stood out. Don Bosco met them in the classroom while they were teaching, but he also saw them personally involved in

the most varied and difficult kinds of ministry. For him and his companions they were solid teachers of doctrine, enterprising apostles and true models for life. Today we would speak of an exemplary, compact team that accompanies people as they take up the mission in an integral way.

His years at the *Convitto* were decisive for Don Bosco's growth to apostolic maturity, and it is beautiful to see that they were a choice he made, something he was under no obligation to do. He took on this commitment when he was already a priest and could have already immersed himself in activity on a full-time basis. But on Cafasso's advice he pursued another more demanding but immensely more fruitful path. His example teaches us that formation does not end with the completion of studies, perpetual profession or priestly ordination, but remains an open process to be cultivated with care throughout life. It also reminds us that the true apostle does not mature by swiftly forging ahead, and that the most fruitful investment for the mission is that of a good formation.

FORMATION AND VOCATION: ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHARISM

22. The gift of formation

Formation, in consecrated life, is not reduced to a mere collection of techniques and methods but is a faith experience which has its roots in the very mystery of vocation. God the Father, who chose us before the creation of the world, continues to be at work in us through the power of his Spirit, to make us more and more conformed to Christ. Indeed, the goal of the journey of formation is to arrive at having in oneself the sentiments of the Son, or in other words feeling, thinking and acting in him (cf. *Phil 2:5*).

Understanding formation within the context of vocation helps us to see it not as a duty imposed from without – by rules of the Church or the Congregation – but as a gift of grace that helps us to make the “form” of Salesian consecrated life something that is truly ours, avoiding it being a kind of external habit.

The fact that there are vocational failures reminds us of just how delicate this process is, and how initial acceptance of the

call does not automatically protect us from the risk of losing our way or turning back. What, in fact, are clericalism, secularism and individualism if not deviations from vocational energy which extinguish its beauty and deaden its growth for want of depth, motivation or generosity? Vocation without adequate formation is then confused with a kind of “volunteerism for life” in which the heart is not truly handed over to God and to young people and the formative conversion that this entails is not accepted.

23. The preventive system as a system of formation

Since formation is a pedagogy of grace, it can never be first and foremost a matter of rules and standards. Undoubtedly these are necessary, because they safeguard against errors and point to well-established paths, but they do not suffice alone to create the conditions for an authentic experience of formation. We must therefore be careful not to give mainly normative solutions to a challenge that is primarily charismatic and generative. Formation is something crafted daily, it is practical wisdom, quality of witness, ability to read situations and to touch hearts: all things that no law can guarantee and no manual is enough to ensure. As the venerable Fr Giuseppe Quadrio, an extraordinary model of the formator and teacher, reminds us, these qualities are first of all the fruit of inward *docibilitas* to the Spirit [openness to allowing oneself to be taught], who raises up true masters of life in our charismatic family.

All the indications of practical wisdom that Don Bosco put into practice in education are therefore valid for our formative proposal. The Preventive System must be rediscovered more and more as the principal inspiration and profound soul of our system of formation. This means asserting the primacy of theological charity and trust over all legalism and formalism; passing on vocational values through a genuine family spirit; actively involving the youngest confreres and making them jointly responsible for formative choices. The pedagogy of the Preventive System, in fact, is one of trust that believes in the resources of the young and urges them to a generosity of commitment, without

ever stifling their intuitions or crippling their creativity. This is the logic behind article 99 of our Constitutions where it says: “Each Salesian accepts responsibility for his own formation”. Through fidelity to this inspiration the Congregation shows itself to be a mother to each confrere and helps him to mature on his vocational journey.

FORMATION AND MISSION: A UNIFIED PROCESS

24. *The “da mihi animas” as the energy of the formation process*

The apostolic nature of our charism determines our formation in a decisive way. As Pope Francis reminds us, “it is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*). These words very clearly indicate that formation and mission are closely intertwined and cannot go ahead without each other.

Understanding formation within the context of the mission means first of all highlighting the *Da mihi animas* as the deep energy of the formation process. If this energy is extinguished and no longer radiates zeal for the good of the youngsters, then vocational maturity is seriously compromised. Instead, if apostolic passion is alive, it nurtures human growth, commitment to study, care for spiritual life, growth to pastoral maturity. The *Da mihi animas* is, indeed, the way in which God makes us partakers in his love for the world.

“Don Bosco” says the Pope once more, “not only did not choose to separate himself from the world to seek holiness, but he let himself be challenged by it and chose *how* and *which* world to live in”. Taking up the mission as a formative principle requires developing the shepherd’s gaze and the courage of the prophet who knows how to be with poor young people and to dream of a different world with them and for them. Hence “the mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest” (from *Pope Francis’ Message to GC28*).

25 *For greater integration*

To overcome the gap between formation and mission, it is first of all necessary to get out of the delegation mentality which often tends to unload responsibility in this delicate area onto the formation communities. The passing on of the charism does not occur, in the first instance, in appropriately structured communities, but in the freshness of daily sharing of service to the young. The first source of formation in the Congregation lies in the treasure of the generous life of the confreres. Where communities are lively in service, solid in spirituality and capable of reflection, the proposals of the formation houses are more penetrating because they introduce a way of living Salesianity that the young confreres encounter in the ordinary reality of the houses. This explains the importance that our tradition has always attributed to practical training, which is a typically Salesian formation stage. Instead, where the mission is confused with work and ongoing formation in the community is not taken care of, the entire formation journey is impoverished.

Greater integration, then, requires that we “find a style of formation capable of structurally taking on the fact that evangelisation implies the full participation, and full citizenship... of the baptised,” making of our houses an “ecclesial laboratory” capable of recognising, appreciating, stimulating and encouraging the different calls and missions in the Church”. This is what we are trying to do by implementing the model of the educative pastoral community. How this model can and should affect initial formation is a question that has not yet been clearly answered. The Synod on Young People spoke, for example, of the importance of forming differentiated formation teams, including women, in which different vocations interact. (cf. *Final Document of the Synod*, no. 163). Dialogue between provincial communities and houses of formation can further encourage more meaningful interaction with the journey of the educative and pastoral communities and allow formators greater presence alongside the young confreres in their pastoral exercises. More than a single structural solution which would not take into account the remarkable diversity of contexts, it is therefore necessary to work towards a renewed formative planning in the missionary sense, which will seek its most adequate implementation in each setting.

26. Institutional references and taking care of formation processes

One of the risks of our formation process, repeatedly warned against in the Congregation, is a degree of fragmentation between the different stages. Undoubtedly, the movement from one phase to another of initial formation offers a wealth of new stimuli and contributes to broadening horizons, but it brings with it the strain of having to resume the journey of accompaniment several times over. This strain becomes more onerous when the imposition of formation choices and the instruments offered for accompaniment are not adequately coordinated.

This makes clear the need for the Congregation to clarify and, where possible, simplify the institutional references and to determine more precisely the tasks and responsibilities of the structures of coordination between the different phases and between the different levels of formation. Too often, in fact, important decisions for the formation process are hampered or remain unfulfilled due to uncertainties in the system.

The Ratio and its associated documents do not lack valuable indications for formation work, especially with regard to the objectives to be achieved and admission criteria. On the other hand, the methodology and instruments are weaker. It is therefore important to implement the process of revising formation accompaniment that has been undertaken in the Congregation and to verify its results. Clarity and sharing on this theme are the first condition for a more solid and personalised formation.

27. Formators and formation centres

Any growth process needs the structural conditions that will facilitate it. Following this reasoning, the desire to foster better accompaniment must translate into a generous investment on the part of the Congregation in finding and adequately forming formators who know how to work in a team under the guidance and responsibility of the Rector.

No less important is renewal within our study centres, called to take up with determination the indications in the Apostolic Con-

stitution *Veritatis Gaudium*. They offer an indispensable service not only to the young confreres who attend these centres, but also to the cultural robustness of our provinces. Among these centres, the Salesian Pontifical University stands out in particular as the most authoritative cultural voice of the Congregation in the Church. The renewal it needs requires rediscovering the reasons that led to its foundation eighty years ago.

The regional formation centres offer an appreciated service to the ongoing formation of the confreres and are increasingly called on to take up joint formation with the laity. Regions that do not yet have such centres will have to identify the most suitable ways of guaranteeing this type of service.

CHOOSING

28. Formation and vocation: accompaniment in the light of the charism

Let us foster a renewed commitment to the formative accompaniment of confreres in the light of the charism.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From a view of formation as an “institutional obligation” to a faith perspective that sees it as a gift and a vocational requirement.
- b) From outward formalism to taking care of accompaniment, the rationale for which is the sincere trust and family spirit of the Preventive System.
- c) From an undervaluation of ongoing formation to personal and community concern for one’s own spiritual and apostolic growth.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Rector Major with his Council* study the problem of the discontinuity between the stages of initial formation, to encourage a more unified process of accompaniment.

- e) Let *the Formation Sector* promote the implementation and monitoring of the Guidelines and Directives known as “*Young Salesians and Accompaniment*”.
- f) Let *Initial Formation communities* see to a formative approach consistent with the spiritual and pedagogical guidelines of the Preventive System: family spirit, active involvement of the confreres, pedagogy of trust and confidence; let the *curatorium* monitor and foster this approach.
- g) Let the *Provinces* and *communities* foster a renewed culture of accompaniment, helping confreres to rediscover its importance and value.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- h) Let there be the guarantee in *Initial Formation Communities* of teams capable of passing on the Preventive System in a vital way; let formators propose personal spiritual accompaniment which is consistent with the formation proposal of the community; let there be adequately prepared confessors.
- i) Let *Provincials and Provincial Delegates* see to dialogue and discussion with formation communities, to encourage the continuity of accompaniment in initial formation.
- j) Let the *Confreres in initial formation* be helped to discover the value of personal spiritual accompaniment.

29. *Formation and mission: a unified process*

Let us commit ourselves to overcoming the gap between formation and mission, encouraging a renewed culture of formation in the mission at all levels.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From delegation to the houses of formation to the awareness that the lifestyle of the communities has a strong influence on the formation of the young confreres.
- b) From formation understood as a moment prior to the mission, to caring for cultural and spiritual robustness as an ongoing requirement of apostolic life.

- c) From an elitist style of formation to the commitment to valuing the formative contribution of the laity and the missionary responsibility of every baptised person.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Provinces* see to the quality of formation in practical training, guaranteeing the conditions for the practical assimilation of Salesian pedagogy and formative accompaniment.
- e) Let the *Initial Formation Communities* maintain a simple lifestyle that guards against an attitude of ease and comfort, forms to the needs of the mission, and increases accompaniment of pastoral exercises.
- f) Let the *Provinces* invest in the qualification of confreres in Salesianity and see to greater cultural robustness; let the *local communities* monitor and strengthen their commitment to formation in day to day life.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Formation Sector* offer pointers so that the model of the educative and pastoral community may find adequate implementation in formation communities as well, through involvement of the laity and families in the formation process.
- h) Let the *Practical Training Communities* guarantee the formative accompaniment of the practical trainees, help them to fit into the educative pastoral community, and be committed to monitoring their vocational growth.
- i) Let the *Provincial Formation Commissions* assist communities in monitoring and strengthening their commitment to formation in the mission.

30. Formation and structures: a necessary renewal

Let us invest energy into finding and forming formators and let us courageously tackle the rethinking of institutional references and formative structures.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From retreating into emergencies to courageous investment in the formation of confreres.
- b) From a local needs perspective to a readiness to offer confreres and resources for the formation needs of the Congregation and for collaboration among provinces.
- c) From the risk of superficiality to caring for serious study and cultural robustness on the part of the confreres.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Rector Major with his Council* promote a generous commitment by the Congregation to finding and forming formators; let the provinces invest in the formation of the confreres and preparation of formators.
- e) Let the *Rector Major with his Council* verify the structure of governance of formation to make it clearer, simpler and more functional.
- f) Let the *Rector Major with his Council* review the number and distribution of initial formation communities within a unified project; let them promote the renewal of the Pontifical Salesian University, the strengthening of study centres, care of regional formation centres.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Formation Sector* review the parts of the *Ratio* which need to be adapted to current circumstances, strengthening the concrete indications of shared methods and instruments.
- h) Let the *Formation Sector* study better ways to accompany inter-provincial formation communities; let it specify the tasks of the *curatorium* and follow up how it functions in dialogue with the Regional Councillors; let it accompany Provincials as they take on their responsibility for formation.
- i) Let the *Regions* promote the regional formation centres and monitor what they offer; where they are still lacking, let the sector establish them.

3. TOGETHER WITH LAY PEOPLE IN THE MISSION AND IN FORMATION

RECOGNISING

31. Achievements and resistance in the shared mission with the laity

We recognise that *GC24* is, for everyone, a “point of no return” for the renewal of our way of living and working together. It is at the centre of the Salesian post-conciliar magisterium, and at the same time marks a return to the origins of the Salesian charism: From the beginning, Don Bosco involved so many lay people in his youthful and popular mission.

We recognise that many steps forward have been taken throughout the Congregation, even though at different speeds and in different ways: the involvement of the entire educative and pastoral community; the spiritual, pedagogical and pastoral formation of the laity; the inclusion of young people in animation teams; entrusting a number of Works to lay people. This perception of growing mutual involvement, of shared wealth, of the strength of mutual assistance and of the fruitfulness of the charism is gradually materialising, *shifting from the perspective of involving the laity in educative pastoral activity to one of sharing our spirituality with them.*

At the same time we note that some difficulty still remains, because we do not always succeed in getting the laity to share in the Salesian spirit and mission: many provinces still need to *shift from utilitarian involvement of the laity to the strategy of evangelical co-responsibility.* At times we even encounter situations of real resistance: some confreres complain about the excessive prominence of the laity while some lay people show opportunis-

tic motives in their offer of collaboration. Then, for the lay people most committed to educative and pastoral activity, it is not easy to reconcile the needs of the Salesian mission with personal and family life. Finally, in some situations we note the tendency to level out the different states of life, to the extent that some think that consecrated Salesians are no longer needed to keep the charism alive.

32. Reciprocal relationships between Salesians and lay people

Very often the relationships between Salesians and lay people are inspired by esteem, respect, cordiality and collaboration, especially where there is clear vocational identity, a systematic proposal of formation and a shared journey with the appropriate bodies and instruments such as the Educative and Pastoral Community Council and the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project.

There is not always an acceptance and appreciation of the particular contribution of the laity, taking into consideration their identity and vocational experience: *we know what they do but we do not appreciate what they are*. Where there is a lack of clarity about the respective identities, we see a kind of “clericalisation of the laity” and a “laicisation of the consecrated members”. In this case, instead of bringing out the specific nature of each, daily collaboration leads to a flattening of identities. Sometimes lay people are simply classified and positioned within a hierarchical and pyramidal model of “Salesian Work”.

Sometimes we find a certain unease among Salesians in the management of complex Works that demand managerial ability, and a lack of preparation for the challenges that come from the pastoral model of sharing with lay people. We recognise that *faced with epoch-making change we really are not able to “discern”*, and hence risk remaining trapped within the logic of pastoral maintenance based on “things have always been done this way”.

We note that *there are different types of lay people*: employees, volunteers, young adults, Catholic Christians or of other denominations, practising or more distant from the Church. The same word “laity”, which in ecclesial language indicates the baptised (*Christifideles laici*) is sometimes also used in reference to people

who are involved in our Works but who belong to other religions. To avoid confusion or inflexibility, it is important to deal seriously with the theological and pastoral issues underlying such complexity. In this way it will be possible to better illuminate the form which the educative pastoral community is called to take in multi-religious or secularised contexts.

33. *Joint formation of Salesians and lay people*

Over these years, *some fine initiatives of joint formation of Salesians and lay people have emerged*. With regard to formation courses there are some excellent proposals at local, provincial and regional level. Sometimes there is a lack of a systematic approach to formation programmes that then manifests itself in the weakness of educative and pastoral planning. Indeed there is a lack of a more systematic formation that aims at integrating all aspects of the Salesian charism (spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral and professional). The formation of collaborators belonging to other religions and beliefs remains an open question.

In daily life, joint formation occurs mainly through options chosen by the educative and pastoral community, with its various bodies and processes of animation, discernment and governance. The life of the educative and pastoral community is one of the most effective areas for joint formation of Salesians and lay people and is *an excellent example of "formation in the mission"*.

We note a degree of resistance on the part of some confreres to being involved in formation with lay people, and the difficulty in setting aside an attitude of presumed superiority. Another source of difficulty in joint formation is fatigue, excessive activity and the accumulation of tasks and roles. There is little awareness of their task in the Church for some lay people, and therefore little willingness to take on the formative responsibilities that come with it.

34. *The various kinds of relationships between the religious community and the Salesian Work*

At the moment in the Congregation there are various kinds of relationships between the religious community and the Salesian

Work: there are some Works or work sectors entrusted *jointly* to the Salesian community and to lay people; there are Works *entrusted to lay people* within the framework of a provincial plan; there are also Works where *pastoral animation*, but not the management, is entrusted to a nearby Salesian community. There are still Works where the number of confreres allows them to hold all roles of responsibility: in this case there are many lay collaborators with little or no responsibility; here, the animation structures of the educative pastoral community are very weak or absent.

Where it is a case of a Work jointly entrusted to the Salesians and lay people, what GC24 says in nos. 149-159 is not always carried out. When it is the case of a work managed by lay people under the direction of the province, in many cases the provinces have made a great effort of reflection and creativity to face the challenge of accompaniment.

While recognising the positive aspects, there are also problems that are quite serious: the difficulty of Salesians guaranteeing systematic accompaniment; the struggle lay people have in combining the commitments required by these Works with the demands of family life; the difficulties linked to the turnover of lay people, the absence of criteria and control mechanisms; the need to initiate management evaluation practices; the need to find an appropriate legal framework; the need for a change of formation culture on the part of both parties in order to be better prepared for managing these new situations. There are even situations in which the role, skills and functions of the Salesians and lay people with responsibilities in the houses are neither clear nor well defined.

The entrusting of a Work or work sector entirely to lay people forms part of the province's planning and responsibility. There are situations where the province entrusts an activity, a work or sectors of a work and the use of real estate belonging to it to a legal entity (foundation, association, cooperative, society). In this case an agreement regulating legal and economic relationships is not always concluded.

INTERPRETING

35. Don Bosco, father and teacher in involvement and co-responsibility

The fundamental elements for a deeper exploration of the theory and practice of communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco are provided in the GC24 text. It continues to be an essential reference in this area.

From an inspirational point of view there are some valuable paragraphs demonstrating that throughout his life our Founder was concerned with involving the greatest number of collaborators possible in his plan of operation, giving rise to “a vast movement of persons who in different ways work for the salvation of the young” (*Constitutions*, art. 5): from his close friends to fellow students, from Mamma Margaret to potential employers, from helpful members of the public to theologians, from aristocrats to the politicians of the time (cf. GC24, 69-86).

We were born and raised historically in communion with the laity and they with us. In particular, we must stress the importance that the young had in the development of the Salesian charism and mission: Don Bosco found his first collaborators in the young who thus became, in a certain sense, co-founders of the Congregation!

In this constant process oriented towards the search for communion, sharing and co-responsibility we still find one of the qualifying features of our call to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world.

A SYNODAL CHURCH FOR THE MISSION AND SPECIFIC VOCATIONS

36. At the root of achievements and resistance

Much of the resistance to the serious acceptance of sharing the Salesian spirit and mission is rooted in the *weak reception of the two great pillars of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council*: the reality of the Church as the people of God on a journey through history and the consequent ecclesiology of communion

that highlights the reciprocal and complementary nature of different vocations in the Church.

Coming from this perspective, it is clear that the laity's participation in the Salesian charism and mission is not a generous concession made on the part of consecrated Salesians, nor is it a survival strategy. St Paul clearly teaches that charisms are gifts that the Spirit distributes for the common good (*1 Cor 12*); they are not the prerogative of a certain state of life, but enrich the life of the Church in the diversity and complementarity of its vocations.

Convinced that there is no higher dignity than that which has been conferred through baptism, such that "All the baptized... are agents of evangelization" and that "it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 120), we feel called – Salesians, members of the Salesian Family, lay people and young people – to live out our vocation, each in his or her specific way, with a view to mutual edification. Where this ecclesiological approach is welcomed with joy and developed with conviction the results are clearly visible: the educative pastoral community flourishes and becomes an experience of the Church that lives communion and mission in an attractive and fruitful way.

37. The “missionary synodality” of the Church

The rediscovery of the Church's synodal nature was one of the defining points of the recent Synod on Youth: "The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with the young, going out towards everyone, so as to bear witness to the love of God. We could describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, or missionary synodality" (*Final Document of the Synod*, no. 118). More than asking us to do something for them, young people have asked us to walk with them!

Pope Francis is even more radical when he declares that "it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium" (cf. *Address for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 Octo-

ber 2015). Consistent with these statements, the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – still in its preparatory stage and to be held in October 2022 – will have synodality as its theme: “*towards a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission*”.

Such words cannot leave our Salesian settings indifferent. Instead, they demand conversion of heart and mind, combined with a renewed readiness to change practices. It is precisely youth ministry – which “has to be synodal” (*Christus vivit*, no. 206) – that should advance without delay in this direction, opening new paths for the benefit of all. It is increasingly clear that only men and women of communion will build the spirit of family and share the mission.

38. Reciprocity of relationships, charism of the laity and the role of the religious community

Good identification with one’s own vocation and an adequate understanding of the vocation of others are fundamental, in order not to reduce the shared mission to executive collaboration. Salesians who live their specific calling with joy and freshness are capable of an effective and fraternal animating presence and are able to offer the laity emotional and effective support in the difficulties they encounter. The lay people who assume their baptismal call to witnessing to the Gospel with conviction are free from the complex of being relegated to second-degree pastoral services. Together they become an “ecclesial laboratory” and a prophetic sign of communion for the Church and society.

Sometimes young people understand the testimony of the laity better because it is less obvious, and it is presumed they are not speaking and acting out of a sense of belonging. The laity’s vocation, by placing them in the heart of the world, sometimes makes them more suitable for responding to the new cultural demands of young people. In this way the laity speak a language more suited to the ordinary situations of life and often possess professional skills which make them valuable in the mission.

The change in the role of the religious community will depend on various factors, but among them the following will become increasingly more relevant: the willingness to reinterpret its role regarding

the fundamental charismatic option; the readiness to question its role as manager and its sole responsibility for the work, given shared responsibility with the laity; the ability to reinterpret the significance of its presence within the context in which it finds itself.

MANAGEMENT OF THE WORK, COMMUNITY LIFE AND ANIMATING NUCLEUS

39. Two models and the centrality of the animating nucleus

Today the Congregation recognises only two models of relationship between the Salesian community and the work. The first and most important one, which must be considered the reference standard, is made up jointly of the Salesian community and the laity; the second refers to “activities and works of the laity accepted within the provincial project” (cf. GC24, nos. 180-182).

We believe that there is no longer the model – which could be considered valid before Vatican Council II – that provides for the animation of the Work by Salesians alone. We strongly reaffirm that the Salesian mission is structurally communitarian and is entrusted to an educative pastoral community and its animating nucleus, which will be made up of Salesians and lay people in different and complementary ways and proportions: the mission that Don Bosco has given us is never an individual action nor is it self-referential!

In each of these two models the “animating nucleus” or “educative and pastoral community council” is central. It is to be considered as the engine and heart of the entire educative pastoral community, because the smooth running of the work depends on its quality and proper functioning. It is a very valuable animation body and key to the life of the work: we are talking about “a group of people who identify themselves with the Salesian mission, educational system and spirituality, and together take up the task of assembling, motivating, and involving all those who are concerned with a work, so as to form with them the educative community and to carry out a plan for the evangelization and education of the young” (cf. *J.E. Vecchi* in AGC 363, p. 9; *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, V,1,3; *Animating and governing the community*, nos. 121-122).

40. Works entrusted to Salesians and the laity

In Works entrusted to the religious community and to lay people, the community is a significant part of the animating nucleus and the charismatic point of reference: “Such a sharing of the spirit and mission of Don Bosco with lay people is a new phase in the development of our charism. From it follows the need for the Salesian religious community to reflect on and assume fully its relatively new role within the EPC... This involves a momentous shift from a pyramidal structure of authority to a more participative style, where personal relationships and processes are of the greatest importance” (*Animating and governing the community*, no. 124).

The concrete form of the relationship of the religious community with the Work as a whole cannot be reduced to a single model (cf. GC26, no. 120). Hence it is necessary to take into account certain determining factors: the different levels of belonging and sharing and the Salesian spirit and mission; the different degrees to which shared responsibility is achieved; the kind of Work; the voluntary or contractual nature of the presence of lay people. And finally, it should be remembered that “the precise relationship between the Salesian community and the Work, as also the authority of the Rector, is codified in the provincial and local Salesian Educative and Pastoral Plan (SEPP)” (*Animating and governing the community*, no. 125).

41. Activities and Works managed by the laity within the framework of the Salesian provincial project

Twenty-four years ago, GC24 placed this second kind of Work among “Some particular new situations” (cf. GC24, Chapter III). Today we can say that those new situations have become part of the ordinary patrimony of the Congregation at the world level, even though with very different proportions, forms and procedures among the regions and provinces.

It is important to restate the two essential conditions for entrusting a work to lay people: first of all criteria of identity, communion and Salesian significance must be ascertained; secondly the constant and competent accompaniment of the provincial and his

council must be guaranteed (cf. GC24, nos. 180-182; *Salesian Youth Ministry Frame of Reference*, VIII, 2,2; *Animating and governing the community*, no. 126).

These conditions must be carefully considered when discerning and entrusting the work to lay people. A charismatic choice and appropriate formation are necessary, especially for those in top positions, as well as fair and just remuneration and working conditions. Finally, it should not be forgotten that this journey undertaken with the laity, as well as being accompanied, must be constantly monitored.

JOINT FORMATION FOR THE MISSION

42. An absolute priority that engages the different levels of government and animation

The sharing of the Salesian spirit and growth in shared responsibility require the sharing of certain formation programmes and experiences oriented towards spirituality and mission, obviously without neglecting specific formation programmes for Salesian consecrated persons and lay people. Joint formation in shared mission is an absolute priority and should be directed above all to the members of the animating nucleus. (cf. *Animating and governing the community*, nos. 106,122). Our lay collaborators need to experience and know Don Bosco closely, and to reflect on the lived experience in our Works.

It is the task of the Province and Region to offer appropriate formation paths for Salesians and lay people. The province is called to develop a joint formation plan at provincial level and accompaniment of processes at the local level, guaranteeing adequate resources of personnel and means. At the local level, one of the first objectives that the Salesian Rector pursues, together with the Salesian community council and the educative and pastoral community's animating nucleus, is the development of a formation plan which ensures specific attention to the theme.

Experience confirms that it is very positive to entrust the organisation of the various formation initiatives to mixed teams made

up of Salesians and lay people,; the Salesians offer the wisdom acquired in formation, assistance and spirituality; in turn the lay people offer, in addition to their specific skills, the fruits of contact with the professional world, a greater attention to family life, a style of simplicity and friendship in relationship with women and an evangelical sense of everyday life.

Finally, it is good to remember that formation does not just happen through academic courses, but above all from the experience of living and working together, because “the first and best mode of self-formation to participation and shared responsibility is the correct functioning of the educative and pastoral community” (GC24, no. 43).

43. Initial and ongoing formation of Salesians

“It is important to say that we are not formed *for* the mission, but that we are formed *in* the mission. Our whole life revolves around it, with its choices and priorities. Initial and ongoing formation cannot be a prior, parallel or separate instance of the identity and sensitivity of the disciple. The mission *inter gentes* is our best school: beginning with this we pray, reflect, study and rest. When we isolate ourselves or distance ourselves from the people we are called to serve, our identity as consecrated persons begins to be distorted and becomes a caricature”. These strong statements by Pope Francis in his *Message to GC28* speak to us of the importance of a radical change of perspective in the formation of all the confreres, and in particular of those who are experiencing initial formation: we must learn more and more to reflect critically on the pastoral experience we have among young people!

Formation in and for the shared mission must also touch on the initial formation of the Salesians not only as a topic for study but also through weekly and summer pastoral experiences. The experience of working with and under the direction of lay people during practical training, as well as taking part in the Educative and Pastoral Community Council, are precious moments of formation, especially if well accompanied by the members of the animating nucleus, both lay and Salesian.

44. Collaborators belonging to other religions and beliefs

In secularised and multi-religious contexts, our educational commitment is shared by people of different religions and beliefs. Many of them are also included in the animating nucleus of the Educative and Pastoral Community. Their formation is a delicate challenge that requires wisdom, courage and creativity. The Church's doctrine teaches that the revelation of God in Christ, while surprisingly surpassing human wisdom and the experience of other religious traditions, brings to completion the seeds of truth that they contain and invites in many ways to engage in inter-religious dialogue. For this reason, it is possible to identify common values which lay the foundations for a differentiated, inculturated and contextualised formation without losing the originality of the Christian faith.

GC24 had already dedicated a rich reflection to this issue (cf. GC24, nos. 113,183-186), identifying two fundamental elements that form the basis for working with people of other traditions and beliefs: first of all the sharing of the Preventive System (in its human and lay values for those who do not believe in God; in its religious values for those who accept God and the Transcendent; in the Gospel of Christ with Christians of other Churches and ecclesial communities); secondly, openness to the search for God by those who do not profess a faith (cf. GC24, nos. 185,100). Since "the mission to youth leads us to an education which is at the same time evangelisation", GC24 had also recognised that positions hostile to the Catholic Church such as are found in certain ideologies, sects or movements, instead are incompatible with our mission (cf. GC24, no. 185).

Following on from the experience of these decades It would be useful to verify the implementation of these criteria and the concrete results that they have in terms of education and evangelisation, so as to highlight the good practices to be enhanced and the risks to be avoided. Certainly, the fundamental condition is the consistent presence of Salesians and, where possible, of lay Christians who live their vocational identity with joy and authenticity. (GC24, nos. 183-185; *Animating and governing the community*, no. 135), without hiding what constitutes the heart and the under-

lying motivation of their life. Equally important is the climate of respect, patience, acceptance and friendship which avoids both the imposition of values and beliefs and the fear of touching upon issues that characterise our identity.

We are convinced that we can share with all people of good will who wish to share in the Salesian mission, in Don Bosco's fatherly loving-kindness, in the reasonableness inherent in his educational system and his trust in the resources of the young, and in the privileged choice of the poorest and the commitment to a culture of acceptance that knows no limits of race, colour, nation, culture and religion.

CHOOSING

45. Synodal Church, shared mission and educative pastoral community

Let us decisively take up the mission shared between Salesians and lay people, valuing the reciprocity of vocations.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From a mission entrusted to the “personal roles” of the consecrated members to the awareness of the ecclesiology of communion and the rediscovery of the role of the laity.
- b) From seeing the laity as simple “collaborators” for better implementation of apostolic work to considering lay co-responsibility as a foundational charismatic criterion.
- c) From seeing the young as mere beneficiaries of our educational interventions to feeling that they share responsibility for the one mission.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors* facilitate the drawing up of some guidelines for the animation and accompaniment of the educative and pastoral community, based on the Congregation's “best practices”.

- e) Let the *Provinces* pay particular attention to strengthening the understanding of the educative pastoral community, see to the formation of its members and the preparation of the Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project, and periodically monitor the road traversed.
- f) Let the *Provinces* gradually entrust institutional roles of responsibility to charismatically founded and professionally prepared lay people at the local and provincial level, involving them in pastoral planning and economic management.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Provinces* study and define management models for the various kinds of tasks entrusted to the laity within a provincial plan (Overall Province Plan, Provincial Salesian Educative and Pastoral Project, Provincial Directory), with particular reference to duties, appointments, fair remuneration, duration of office and decision-making bodies.
- h) Let the *Provinces* carry out a serious accompaniment of lay-managed Works through the presence of the provincial and provincial animation team and draw up a charter for this purpose.
- i) Let the *Provinces* involve Salesian Family Groups in planning the reshaping of Salesian presences, preparing experiences of collaboration on behalf of those who are poorest.

46. Joint formation for the mission

Let us ensure spaces and times for joint formation and sharing of life between Salesians and lay people for a better educative and pastoral service of the young.

ATTITUDES AND MENTALITIES TO CONVERT

- a) From a sporadic and casual joint formation to a more systematic formation that aims at integrating all aspects of the Salesian mission (spiritual, pedagogical, pastoral and professional).
- b) From a formation given only by consecrated persons to a formation designed and carried out together with the laity.

- c) From a mentality of self-sufficiency to the real experience of the need for joint formation.

PROCESSES TO PUT IN PLACE

- d) Let the *Formation and Youth Ministry Sectors* promote reflection at regional level for a renewed understanding and appreciation of joint formation in the context of the shared mission.
- e) Let the *Missions Sector* coordinate reflection to explore the necessary conditions for the participation of lay collaborators of other religions and beliefs in the Salesian mission, proposing suitable and differentiated paths of formation focused on the pillars of the preventive system.
- f) Let the *Provinces* invest in joint formation – including in initial formation – with the help of regional ongoing formation structures and ensuring economic support to encourage lay participation.

STRUCTURAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO GUARANTEE

- g) Let the *Provinces* develop a joint formation plan that distinguishes levels of formation, contents, recipients and participants through diversified formation paths (human, spiritual, Salesian and professional).
- h) Let the *Local community* carry out formation processes for Salesians and lay people able to share spiritual and fraternal life as well as educative and pastoral activity.
- i) Let the *Local community* undertake ways of building the educative and pastoral community and educative pastoral community councils as an animating nucleus and an effective place for initiating systematic experiences of spirituality, communion and service with lay people and the young.

DELIBERATION OF THE CG28

MODIFICATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTIONS¹

1. Election of the Rector Major (C. 128)

The Rector Major is elected by the General Chapter for a term of six years and may be re-elected only for a second six-year period. He may not resign his office without the consent of the Apostolic See.

2. Election of the Vicar of the Rector Major and General Councillors (C. 142 §1)

The Vicar General of the Rector Major remains in office for six years and can only be elected to the same office for a second six-year term.

At the end of the first six years, the Vicar of the Rector Major can be elected General Councillor or Rector Major.

At the end of the second six-year period, he can only be elected Rector Major.

The General Councillors remain in office for six years. They can be elected to the same office or to another office, as General Councillors, only for a second six-year term.

At the end of the first or second six-year period, the General Councillors can be elected Vicar General of the Rector Major or Rector Major.

¹ The following modifications to the articles of the Constitutions were submitted to the Holy Father for approval by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life. They were approved by the Holy Father on 7 March 2020 (*Prot.* No. T. 9⁻¹/2002).

MODIFICATIONS TO THE GENERAL REGULATIONS

3. Tasks of the Regional Councillor (R. 135)

The regional councillors will keep in touch with the individual provinces: they must visit them periodically, arranging meetings of provincial councils. In agreement with the provincials, they may meet with rectors and other groups of confreres and lay people to point out to them whatever they consider more opportune for the welfare of the Congregation and for the provision of a better service for the province and for the particular Church.

They shall have at least one annual meeting with all the provincials of the Region and liaise with bodies in the Region, formation communities and any Provincial Conferences.

4. Use of an electronic system for voting at elections (R. 131)

The election procedure is to be carried out by means of an electronic system (intranet). All Chapter members are to have access to the personal details of the individual members who can be elected. The individual voters will express their vote by selecting the surname of the member for whom they wish to express a preference.

If there is a technical malfunction of the system, the procedure for election by means of a paper ballot will be used.

The scrutineers will verify that the number of votes in the electronic system corresponds to the number of voters. If the number of votes exceeds the number of voters, the ballot shall be null and void; if, on the other hand, it corresponds to or is lower, the scrutiny is to begin. The secretaries will record the names as they are read out by a scrutineer”.

DELIBERATION

5. Manner of carrying out the Extraordinary Visitation (R. 104)

“The Rector Major and the General Council, at the beginning of the six-year period, will establish the times and ways for carrying out extraordinary visitations in each region, exploiting the possibilities offered by art. 104 of the General Regulations, so as to ensure, in any case,

- the possibility for each confrere to have a personal chat with the delegate of the Rector Major,
- knowledge of the local situations in which our mission is carried out;
- the effective exercise of the powers of jurisdiction required by the nature of the visit;
- the presence of the Regional at least at some moments during the visitation, if made by another Visitor.
- communication between the Visitor and the Regional to ensure further accompaniment by the Regional after the visit.
- adequate time for the Regional Councillor to carry out the tasks proper to his office in the service of the region and the individual provinces (C. 140 and 154; R. 135-137)”.

APPENDICES

ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR FR ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME AT THE OPENING OF THE GC28

Greeting to invitees

Your Eminence,
Cardinal João Braz de Aviz
Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies
of Apostolic Life

Your Eminences
Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Cardinal Riccardo Ezzati
Cardinal Raffaele Farina
Cardinal Oscar Andres Rodriguez Maradiaga

Your Excellencies, the Salesian Archbishops and Bishops,

Very dear Mother Yvonne Reungoat, Superior General of the Daughters of
Mary Help of Christians,
beloved leaders of the various Groups of the Salesian Family.

Highly esteemed civil authorities of the City of Turin and the Region of
Piedmont,

In the name of all the members of the General Chapter I thank you for your
presence and the availability with which, significantly, you have sought to
accompany us on this official opening day of the 28th General Chapter of the
Society of Saint Francis de Sales (Salesians of Don Bosco).

Knowing that each of you is accompanying us is both an honour for us and
at the same time a reminder of the responsibility we have before the Church
and before the whole Salesian Family of Don Bosco, and in particular before
the Salesian Congregation. All this encourages us to begin this task with *a
prophetic and hopeful outlook*.

At the same time, I extend an official welcome to all Salesian confreres here
present, who have come from the ninety juridical circumscriptions of the

Congregation: provincials and canonical superiors of vice-provinces, provincial delegates, Salesian observers and other invitees. That each of you is here is important. For in the light of the vision of faith that each of us has in the depths of our heart, we know and are aware of one fact: that it is the Lord who has brought us together here through the “mysterious” ways of his Providence.

During the First General Chapter of our Congregation, and I will refer to this in the following point, Don Bosco began by saying: “It is of extreme importance for our Congregation”¹... Well, we too have been called for a very special and important task on behalf of our Congregation. Today, as was the case then, what will become the fruits of our GC28 will be of extreme importance. Undoubtedly, each one’s positive attitude will be decisive for the fruits of this Chapter Assembly.

1. The Society of Saint Francis de Sales’ GC28

Our Father Don Bosco convened the first General Chapter on 5 September 1877 in Lanzo Torinese. There were twenty-three participants and the Chapter lasted three whole days. Other General Chapters followed, as we well know. Some here in Valdocco. Today, sixty-two years after the last General Chapter celebrated at Valdocco, the cradle of our charism, we return with great faith in the Lord and his Holy Spirit who continues to assist our Congregation and the Salesian Family. Taken by the hand of our Mother, the Help of Christians, who “continues to do everything”, Don Bosco is making an appeal to us here, in this holy Salesian place, one that resonates in a significant way and with strong emotional content.

At the opening of that First General Chapter, Don Bosco told our confreres: “Our Divine Saviour tells us in the Gospel that where two or three are gathered in His name He will be there among them. Our sessions have no other purpose than God’s greater glory and the salvation of souls, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. And so *we may trust that the Lord will be in our midst and will personally lead our discussions to His greater glory*”².

Our desire, and one we have to do, is to tackle the important task that the entire Congregation entrusts to us in this GC28 with the same conviction and faith outlook that I sought to emphasise by putting that last expression of Don Bosco’s in italics.

¹ BM XIII, 183 (English [New Rochelle] edition).

² BM XIII, 183.

In our Constitutions we read: “The General Chapter is the principal sign of the Congregation’s unity in diversity. It is the fraternal meeting in which Salesians carry out a communal reflection to keep themselves faithful to the Gospel and to their founder’s charism, and sensitive to the needs of time and place.

Through the General Chapter the entire Society, opening itself to the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, seeks to discern God’s will at a specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service”³.

I am deeply convinced that it will be a time in which the Spirit of the Lord will guide us and make His presence felt, as only God knows how, to support us in this desire of ours to be ever more faithful to Jesus Christ along the way traced out for us by Don Bosco.

1.1. With responsibility for guiding and animating one of the Church’s charisms raised up by the Spirit, for the Church and the world.

Before referring to the General Chapter itself, allow me to point out some of the elements that could be taken for granted as being obvious, but which are undoubtedly **essential** and of great importance. The first of these has just been announced.

We are faced with a great responsibility: the charism of caring for young people with all the means at our disposal is not our exclusive property, does not belong to us, because it is *a gift of the Holy Spirit for the Church and the world*. Just the same, it demands that we Salesians of Don Bosco take the greatest care and show the greatest fidelity. Earlier, I recalled the article of our Constitutions which says that the General Chapter should prompt us to discover and recognise *God’s will* at this specific moment in history for the purpose of rendering the Church better service. Our work of reflection, study and discussion, in a climate of research and discernment, has no other purpose than that of attempting to discern God’s will for us today, faced with the great question of how we can be authentic consecrated individuals today, and how we can be the Salesians that Don Bosco himself would like us to be for the young people of today and those who will come tomorrow.

I have no doubt that we carry in our hearts a deep desire to continue to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Salesian charism is *rich in the power of the Gospel*. I have no doubt that we have in our hearts the desire to be coura-

³ C. 146.

geous and very much free to seek what leads us along the path of *fidelity*. I have no doubt that the prudence with which we will tackle so many things is far removed – and must continue to be so – from fears that paralyse, and constraints that have nothing to do with proclaiming the Gospel and educating young people in the faith, nor with their preparation for life and happiness. Let us not forget that fears and personal and institutional constraints kill fidelity and prevent the charism from being ever the same and ever alive, even given the passing of decades and centuries.

1.2. With responsibility for guiding communion and unity of life in our Congregation

One of the graces that the Lord has granted us abundantly over these six years has been – as we will see in the report on the state of the Congregation – a great communion and unity that goes beyond the natural difficulties characteristic of each human group, and even more so for a large Congregation like ours. We are growing in unity – not uniformity – and communion. And this is a gift and a great value that must be preserved today and always. For this reason, the General Chapter must be witness to this full communion of spirit and mission. Differences in cultures and contexts, nationalities and languages are a wealth and an opportunity for a charism that has extended its roots today to one hundred and thirty-four nations.

It is truly enlightening to see how our Father wanted this unity to be so firm. During the First General Chapter, Don Bosco told Chapter members: “We are still a fledgling Congregation, as yet relatively few in number. To date the Oratory has been the one and the only center for all of us ... but with time, if we do not heartily exert ourselves to strengthen these ties, a diverse spirit will seep in so that there will no longer be absolute unity among us”⁴. Fortunately, and through the *grace of God*, this has not happened, and in fact the contrary has been the case. The search for unity and communion continues to grow and become stronger, since the charism, our holy Founder, our state of life, our rule of life all come down to one thing: the Constitutions and Regulations of the Salesians of Don Bosco.

1.3. To look after God's interests

Allow me to take the expression of Fr Luigi Ricceri as Rector Major literally, in his opening address to the 20th and Special General Chapter, because it

⁴ *MB XIII*, 286.

splendidly reflects the clear and profound awareness that we should have about the nature of our task. All General Chapters are important. They all help us to walk the path of fidelity over time. They all urge us onward with courage. They all open a path or consolidate the existing one. And at the same time, in all of them outlook of faith must be the most important.

This is what I am proposing and asking for in a very special way for our GC28, especially for the issues that will concern us and for the results of our decisions. I am convinced that the task entrusted to us as men of faith who love the Church and the Congregation will help us to focus on the profile of the Salesian of whom, in fidelity to the Constitutions, today's world and the young people of today continue to be in need. And I am convinced that this will be of great importance in the ongoing formation of all Salesians and in particular in the initial formation of young Salesians who today want to be like Don Bosco.

Hence we have to be very free, courageous, have an outlook of faith and a heart which is attentive to perceiving the voice of the Holy Spirit with the greatest sensitivity.

“Ours is not an assembly of shareholders of an industry, it is not a political meeting with factions with conflicting economic interests, prestige, ambitions. Here we are Church, or rather, an assembly of consecrated men gathered in the name of the Lord, totally dedicated to a supernatural ideal: we feel that we are men of faith whose concerns have their roots in faith and whose activity, including this activity, is fully enlightened, enlivened and motivated by faith. For we are here not because of any human interests, but for the interests of God, of his Kingdom, of his Church”⁵.

When thinking about the fruits of our General Chapter, what I have just mentioned is decisive: what does not lead to an encounter with God in the person of his Son Jesus Christ does not come from God and will not serve us. What does not make us more faithful to the charism and to Don Bosco himself, our Founder, is destined to fail even if the mirages of the moment seem to be proclaiming something else. We are not a Congregation with many centuries of life; but neither are we the last to arrive, and our 160 years of history have already taught us much. It will only by letting itself be guided by the Spirit of God that the Congregation will find a way to provide the best response in the here and now. Only a free and lucid outlook in the face of strongly secularised and hedonistic mentalities allows a sure path. Sooner or later other attempts will fail, wear out and make the ideal of life that led

⁵ *SGC20, Address of the Rector Major at the opening of the Special General Chapter, Rome 1971, 554.*

to the fundamental decision of young Cagliari languish.: “Friar or no friar, I am staying with Don Bosco”.

2. Theme and objective of GC28

All those present, including our guests who honour us so much with their presence, are familiar with the theme of the General Chapter that we officially declare open today: ***“What kind of Salesians for the youth of today?”*** The theme responds to the urgent need we have of focusing our attitudes at this moment in our history on the person of the Salesian. As a man of God, a consecrated individual and apostle, he must be able to attune himself as best as possible to the adolescents and young people of today and to their world in order to walk with them, in education and formation in the faith, help them to be good believers – also in consideration of the fact that often they profess other religions – and prepare them for life, accompanying them in their search for meaning and their encounter with God.

And we are aware that it is not only we, the Salesians of Don Bosco, who are responsible for this mission. In fact we carry it out by relying on numerous other forces, male and female educators, the many lay people involved in all our presences around the Salesian world.

The theme that will occupy us over these seven weeks is a single one that has been articulated through three core sub-themes:

- *The priority of the Salesian mission among today’s young people*
- *The profile of the Salesian for today’s young people*
- *Together with lay people in mission and formation.*

The world in which we live in this twenty-first century, characterised by the diversity of cultures and contexts, needs – expects, we could say – to encounter consecrated Salesian apostles who are prepared and willing to live their lives with the mind and heart of Don Bosco. Salesians capable of continuing to give their lives for the young people of today’s world, with their languages, their visions and their interests. Without doubt, many of these adolescents and older youth are in Salesian houses, while many others frequent “other courtyards” or playgrounds: we are Salesians for them too.

I think that what Pope Francis told us on 21 June 2015, the year of the Bicentenary of Don Bosco’s birth, in this same Salesian holy place which is Valdocco, continues to resound with great force, and it is a very timely appeal. He asked us *not to disappoint the deep aspirations of the young*: their need of life, openness, joy, freedom, a future; the desire to collaborate in

building a more just and fraternal world, development for all peoples, protecting nature and their living environments ... The Pope asks us to help the young to experience that it is only in the life of grace, meaning friendship with Christ, that the most authentic ideals are fully implemented⁶.

What has been put to the General Chapter as a challenge for the whole Congregation, we hope to achieve in the only possible and valid way, as I have already said and I stress once more: in the journey of fidelity to the Lord and to Don Bosco and in fidelity to the young. Many of these young people, with greater or lesser awareness, ask not to be abandoned to their destiny, an uncertain destiny, as people who are shipwrecked due to our inability to be educators, friends, brothers and fathers – as Don Bosco was for the young people of his time – capable of perceiving their needs or listening to their call.

Hence, reflection by the Chapter must focus on the following elements.

2.1. Giving absolute primacy to the Salesian mission with today's young people, and among these giving priority to the most needy, the poorest and most abandoned. A predilection for today's adolescents and young people who, in a certain sense are undoubtedly different from those of ten years ago; as different as are the social and educational contexts in which they live and which therefore *objectively affect our mission*. We are well aware that when we speak of this predilection for young people we are referring to something essential and constitutive of our charismatic identity. Quoting the text of the letter of convocation to the GC28, I remind the Chapter Assembly of this priority: "The new General Chapter will be an opportunity to courageously undertake a discernment process to see whether our houses, our works and our activities are at the service of the poorest young people; whether they find a place in our hearts and are the centre of our concerns and interests; whether we are concentrating our energy and our efforts on them"⁷.

2.2. Giving equal priority to the profile of today's Salesian

What is asked of us Salesians and what is expected of us Salesians will only be possible if we are able, as I said in my commentary on the Strenna that

⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, *Come Don Bosco con i giovani e per i giovani. Lettera di Papa Francesco al Rettor Maggiore dei Salesiani*, LEV, Città del Vaticano, 2015, 9.

⁷ AGC 427 (2018), 11.

I offered to the Salesian Family, to be “*like Don Bosco, with the young and for the young*”. So, a decisive part of our reflection and our Chapter deliberations will have to pay particular attention to the person of the Salesian and to our formation, both initial and ongoing.

With Don Bosco as our model:

- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *a consecrated man of deep faith*
- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *apostolic passion for the young*
- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *a son of God who knows how to be and feels that he is a father to the young*
- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *charismatic identity of each one that enriches the Church with Don Bosco’s charism and creates ecclesial communion*
- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *an ever faithful, ever flexible and creative apostle of the young*
- saying Salesian today should be the same as saying *ever the educator, ever the friend of the young.*

2.2.1. A profile of the Salesian that is not improvised but is formed

This is one of the major reasons that led us to see the importance of this Chapter theme. The vocation of each one of us is a response to a call; a call of love and grace that we receive with gratitude and amazement, not as a right or a merit of ours. It is a personal call at a concrete moment in the history of each individual, in the warp and weft of time and often with multiple mediations, or even just one; it is a call in a specific family, social, religious, cultural context; it is a call that comes into the world of each individual, with its own diversity and, perhaps, complexity.

And in such different contexts and conditions, each of us must follow a path that will lead us, in following the Lord Jesus, to shape our hearts and our personalities in such a way that we have in ourselves the same pastoral heart as Don Bosco, in imitation of Jesus the Good Shepherd, and with the desire to give ourselves generously to others, especially the young. Without living in a *generic sort of way*, which would be worrying and dangerous, but as consecrated Salesians of Don Bosco in the Church for the young.

This is why I affirm with deep conviction that the profile that the Salesian must have cannot be the result of improvisation but must pass through the mediations of the different formative stages, with their experiences, times and people.

2.2.2. With the help of quality formation teams and with personalised processes

We are well aware that this path cannot be taken without the help of *mediations*. Frequently these mediations are many and varied. I imagine that, bearing in mind the profile of today's Salesian, our Chapter reflection will become aware of the way in which it becomes more important than ever to count on *authentic discernment and accompaniment*. And for this reason, the role of the community or the local Salesian communities, the role of lay people, of the pastoral and educative communities and that of the confreres of the Province will be of fundamental importance.

Reflection and understanding of our formative reality in today's world will lead us, during the work of our Chapter, to ask ourselves what *formative renewal* we need, since the young Salesians of today are all "*digital natives*", coming from cultural contexts perhaps very different from our own, and certainly very different from the formative context in which those who are speaking to us live. We profess the same Salesian Constitutions but in very different nations, cultures, languages and contexts. All this should lead us to think about *personalised formation processes* which, perhaps, are the only guarantee of a good vocational journey with a perspective for the future.

Clearly linked to this is the need to continue having the best formation teams; consolidated, stable teams, not makeshift ones, teams made up of people who have been prepared for this specific service.

2.3. Together with lay people in mission and formation

We are all aware of the theme of GC24: "Salesians and lay people. Communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco" in 1996. After many years of this journey in the shared mission in pastoral and educative communities, as a Congregation we feel the need to carry out a verification of the road taken, the results and the resistances we have encountered.

We certainly believe that the mission shared with lay people is a path to the discovery of our charismatic identity, clarified in a particular way by GC24, and that today it manifests itself as the only possible way to carry out the Salesian mission in the complexity of our world, in the diversity and complexity of so many national and cultural situations, and in the multiplicity of contexts.

My understanding is that on this very important part of the reflection that awaits us, and which goes hand in hand with reflection on the profile of the Salesian that is needed today and that the young people expect – together

with the lay people who share the mission with us – the Chapter will perhaps consider some of these points on which to impel our discernment:

achievements and resistances in the shared mission with lay people;
necessary reciprocity in relations between Salesians and laity;
joint formation of Salesians and lay people;
the new situations in today’s reality, twenty-four years after GC24, and the guidelines and criteria we need to consider.

3. The “Hour” of the 28th General Chapter

My dear Chapter confreres, over these months I have not hidden the hope with which I await the celebration of this General Chapter of ours, since I believe it will be very significant and of great importance. All the previous ones have been. I think it will be the same for GC28. As I also stated in the letter of convocation: “we will be called to discern with realism, courage, and determination the direction of the path to be followed in this 21st century, at a very special time of renewal and purification in the life of the Church”⁸.

- We are called to give primacy and centrality in our decisions and deliberations to what refers to the Salesian mission on behalf of the poorest and neediest children, adolescents and young people, the least, those who are often ignored or discarded.
- We are called to live in an ongoing attitude of formation, of openness to realities that always change, to do everything possible, at any age, so as not to stop being for and with young people.
- We are called to accompany the formation of the young Salesians of today and tomorrow so that they may be authentic consecrated individuals, passionate about Christ and this humanity which often suffers, wishing to be today, in the simplicity and generosity of their assignment, “other Don Boscos”.
- We are called to have a vision and a big heart to enhance all the apostolic potential we have as Salesians and lay people together. We are called to analyse and diagnose and be courageous in the decisions we have to make in order to fully develop the prophetic vision that the Congregation has had for years, calling us to walk together on a path which benefits the mission, and service to those for whom we were charismatically brought into life.

⁸ *ACG* 427 (2018), 31.

CONCLUSION

I conclude the presentation of these challenges which will occupy us, with a final reference to Don Bosco and our Mother Help of Christians.

Our Founder, aware of the fact that not everything would end with him, but that surely it would be just the beginning of a long road yet to hoe, told Fr Giulio Barberis, one of his close associates, one day in 1875: “You will complete the work that I begin; I will sketch it, you will colour it... I am now sketching a rough copy of the Congregation. I shall leave it to those who come after me to perfect it”⁹.

I believe that with GC28 that we are beginning today, we will clean up other parts of the sketch that Don Bosco left us, because the Holy Spirit continues to enlighten us even today to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in fidelity to the charism of our origins, with the faces and music and colours of today.

We are not alone in this mission, and we know and feel that Mary, the Mother Help of Christians, the “Help of Don Bosco”, is guiding us. On the day of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception in 1887, two months before he died, looking back in contemplation of the long and not easy journey of his life, he told the Salesians around him, who were very much moved: “Until now we have walked on a sure path. We cannot go wrong; it is Mary who leads us”¹⁰.

She is the Mother of us all, the Mother of the young and their families (if they have one). She is the one who is most sensitive to the poor and needy. It is she who tells us, including in this “hour” of GC28: “Do whatever he tells you”¹¹ as happened at Cana in Galilee.

May our Mother, the Help of Christians, enlighten us and guide us as she did with Don Bosco, so that we may be faithful to the Lord and never disappoint the young, especially the neediest of them.

Turin, 22 February 2020

⁹ *BM XI*, 289 (English edition).

¹⁰ *BM XVIII*, 373 (English edition).

¹¹ *Jn* 2:5.

INTERVENTION OF CARD. JOÃO BRAZ DE AVIZ PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

The identity of consecrated life and its contribution to the life of the church and the world

The Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) has brought together the guidelines that emerged at the Dicastery's Plenary Assembly in November 2014 and during the reflection that followed, in a small volume¹. Starting from Jesus' *logion* "nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and the skins too. No! New wine, fresh skins!" (Mk 2:22), we sought to take up the broader horizons opened up by the Second Vatican Council, to become aware of the ongoing challenges – which we have identified by exploring the vocation and identity of consecrated life – for formation choices, by looking at relationships in the *humanum*, that is, the reciprocity that exists between man and woman, the service of authority and obedience, relational models and witness regarding the possession, use and administration of goods.

After this overall glance at the challenges, we then asked how to prepare the new wineskins, seeking fidelity in the Spirit, identifying formation models and seeing the formation of formators, to achieve a gospel-based set of relationships that manifests itself in reciprocity and multicultural processes, the service of authority in its relationship with relational models and Council and Chapter structures.

¹ CIVCSVA, *Per vino nuovo otri nuovi. Dal Concilio Vaticano II la vita consacrata e le sfide ancora aperte. Orientamenti*, [New Wine in new wineskins - The consecrated life and its ongoing challenges since Vatican II] Vatican City, LEV 2017. (Tr. Note: citations are taken from the English translation of this text, available at <http://www.congregation-consecratedlife.va/content/dam/vitaconsacrata/LibriPPDF/Inglese/New%20Wine%20in%20new%20Wineskins.pdf>)

1. Post-conciliar renewal

More than fifty years have passed since the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis, a religious like ourselves, has offered words and gestures that are a powerful incentive for us to carry forward the renewal that Vatican II proposed for consecrated life, bearing in mind today's needs². The theological and ecclesiological foundations of renewal were implemented by the Council Fathers in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, in Chapter VI (nos 43-47). It is about the spiritual, ecclesial, charismatic and institutional updating of consecrated life in the Church.

Today we can say that the Second Vatican Council has generated impulses and methods of great effectiveness in *aggiornamento* or updating. It has generated a new understanding of consecrated life. In fact, before the Council, its manifestations and structures were of "the united and operational force for the life and mission of a militant church seen to be in continual opposition to the world.

In the new season of openness and dialogue with the world, consecrated life felt pushed to the forefront of exploring the coordinates of a new Church-world relationship to the benefit of the whole ecclesial body... Along these lines of dialogue and acceptance, consecrated life has normally, if not always, willingly embraced the risks of this new adventure of openness, listening and service"³.

The charisms and the spiritual patrimony of consecrated life, in this new climate, have been confidently put at the disposal of this new relationship, but at the same time, it has required taking the risk of these new paths⁴.

In this post-conciliar period, the normative texts and institutional forms were reworked in order to comply with the new Code of Canon Law (1983). "Great effort was put forth by each religious family in rereading and interpreting the 'original spirit of the institutes' (PC2). This work had two main purposes: to faithfully preserve 'the mind and designs of the founders' (CIC c. 578) and 'to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world" (VC, 37)"⁵.

² Cf. Decree *Perfectae caritatis*, 1.

³ *New Wine in new wineskins* cit., pp. 18 ff.

⁴ Cf. *idem*, p. 19.

⁵ *New Wine in new wineskins*, cit. p. 20.

New formation approaches, adaptation of governance structures and management of economic assets and activities have been implemented with great responsibility and faith. The Popes of this period have generously supported the journey of consecrated life with their Magisterium, helping to “consolidate new convictions, discern new paths, and guide new choices regarding presence and service with wisdom and ecclesial sense in constant listening to the promptings of the Spirit”⁶. In a very special way, the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1996) with its contemplation and reference to the Mystery of the Holy Trinity as a source, enlightens the meaning of consecration, understanding it as *confessio trinitatis* “also in its grappling with the challenge of fraternal life ‘whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with *one heart and soul* (Acts 4:32)’ (no. 21)”⁷.

Pope Francis asked the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) and the Congregation for Bishops, to prepare a revised version of *Mutuae relationes*⁸. Meanwhile, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published *Iuvenescit Ecclesia*⁹. This letter carries out a lucid detailed exploration of relations between bishops and consecrated individuals, in the light of ecclesiology and spirituality of communion and in the light of the two co-essential principles of the Church: hierarchy and charisms. Thus the new text of *Mutuae relationes*, which is already in its final draft to be presented to the Holy Father, has been providentially enriched.

Now the experience of the year of the consecrated life and the jubilee of mercy are pushing us to open up new paths. We are challenged by social, economic, political, scientific and technological evolution. Sectors that were once taken up by the zeal of consecrated life are led by the State today. New and unprecedented emergencies, new forms of poverty, the multiplication of voluntary work, the opening to new frontiers of mission, especially the founding of new churches – all these create a new context for consecrated life. We have gone from mono-cultural situations to the challenge of multiculturalism, with international communities present in unknown or multi-religious contexts, inserted within difficult contexts and at risk of various

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Idem* p. 22.

⁸ SCIVCSVA, *Criteri direttivi sui rapporti tra i vescovi e i religiosi nella Chiesa*, Città del Vaticano 1978.

⁹ CDF, *Iuvenescit ecclesia, lettera sulla relazione tra doni gerarchici e carismatici per la vita e la missione della Chiesa*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 2016.

kinds of violence. In many cases, traditional formation schemes are in crisis. These novelties, seen as enrichment, also bring tensions and generate a widespread feeling of fatigue, with the consequent temptation to settle for survival strategies. We understand more and more that we will not be able to make this necessary transition on our own¹⁰.

2. Ongoing challenges

Let us begin with a fairly obvious observation: “Every stabilized system tends to resist change and works to maintain its position. Sometimes this is done by concealing inconsistencies, other times by accepting to tarnish old and new, by denying reality and frictions in the name of fictitious harmony, or even by concealing its own objectives through superficial adjustments. Unfortunately, there are plenty of examples of adhesion that is purely formal, while lacking the proper conversion of heart”¹¹.

At a time, such as the present one, when there is a high degree of abandonment of consecrated life, both after the formative process and in old age, and in every geographical and cultural context, it is important to look for the causes of this phenomenon. It is not only a question of emotional crises, but also of disappointment at a life of community without authenticity. Sometimes the values proposed do not correspond to concrete experience, or the number of activities is excessive and does not allow for a solid spiritual life. There is also the isolation of young people in communities predominantly made up of the elderly. Although there is an openness to transcendence, a capacity to become passionate about the values of the gospel in many young people, a very standardised style of consecrated life blocks them. Thus, often the heart is not touched and transformed.

Integration between different cultures has become a problem in some Institutes: on the one hand, there are a few senior members and on the other a large group of young people from different cultures who feel marginalised, with only subordinate roles. “It is becoming increasingly clear that the most important thing is not the preservation of forms; it is the willingness, in creative continuity, to rethink consecrated life as the evangelical memory of a permanent state of conversion from which intuitions and concrete choices originate”¹².

¹⁰ Cf. *New Wine in new wineskins* cit. pp. 23-31.

¹¹ *Idem*, pp. 33 ff.

¹² *Idem*, p. 37.

In the context of the renewal of the experience of authority and obedience, in the midst of the current crisis in various Institutes, we can say: “It is no coincidence, according to the experience of this Congregation that the main reasons for abandonment are: the weakening of a vision of faith, conflicts in fraternal life and a life of fraternity that is weak in humanity”¹³.

One field where current challenges are particularly ongoing is that of **formation choices**. The concrete effort of the Institutes and Conferences of Major Superiors (national and international) is remarkable. One of the significant difficulties is that there is still “little integration between theological and anthropological points of view regarding formation, the formative model, and educational pedagogy... (that) does not allow for interaction and dialogue between the two essential and indispensable components of a journey of growth: the spiritual dimension and the human dimension”¹⁴.

A sensitivity is needed, where formators are concerned, to the values of the various cultures, the new generations, the various contexts of life. And here there is also need for attention to the discernment of vocational motivations present in the various cultural and continental areas.

The urgency of works, in many institutes, especially women’s institutes, prevails over the systematic approach to the formation journey. In addition to this, there is often an imbalance between theological and professional formation and thus the formation for discipleship and consecrated life is lacking.

If we look at the formators, we see that insufficient preparation is not uncommon, but also an insufficient number of people. The formation of formators thus becomes one of the most important current challenges. How can we guarantee a personal pedagogy, that is, a personalisation of formation, in which, in the initial period, the formator walks alongside the disciple daily in trust and hope, especially as an expert in the search for God?

The community plays an important role: “It is through the fraternal life that one learns to accept others as a gift from God, accepting their positive traits along with their differences and limitations. It is through the fraternal life that one learns to share the gifts received for the building up of all. It is through the fraternal life that one learns the missionary dimensions of consecration (cf. VC 67)”¹⁵.

With regard to ongoing or continuous formation, it has yet to become a true culture, in which the enunciation of theoretical concepts and the ability to

¹³ *Idem*, pp. 55 ff.

¹⁴ *Idem*, pp. 37 ff.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 41.

review and verify concrete experience in the community go together. It is here, too, that a serious initiation into governance takes place, in order to overcome improvisation, and the improper and deficient exercise of governance.

Remaining still with the human dimension of challenges to consecrated life, a particularly important field is that of **reciprocity between men and women**. “We are heirs of the ways of life, organisational and governing structures, languages, and collective imagination of a mentality that emphasised profound differences between man and woman, to the detriment of their equal dignity. Even in the Church and not only in society, numerous unilateral prejudices prevented the recognition of the gifts of the true *female genius* (cf. VC, 58) and the original contribution made by women. This underestimation especially affected consecrated women who were marginalised in the Church’s life and pastoral and missionary activity (cf. VC, 57)”¹⁶.

This scenario began to change beginning with the Second Vatican Council, but “we have yet to reach a balanced synthesis and a purification of the patterns and models inherited from the past. There are still obstacles in the structures and more than a little misgiving when an opportunity arises to give women ‘room... to participate in different fields in various sectors and at all levels, including decision-making processes, above all in matters that concern women themselves” (VC, 58) in the Church and in the practical management of consecrated life”¹⁷.

There is still a lack of maturity in our consecrated life environments in the reciprocity between man and woman which is particularly necessary in our time. The distance caused even through spiritual and ascetic motivations has caused a mutual impoverishment and a loss of sensitivity to the different views the one has of the other. There is also a reflection of this in consecrated life in the different sensitivities of the young and the elderly: “There is cognitive dissonance between old and young religious. For one group, relations between the feminine and the masculine are characterised by reservedness and even phobia; for the other, by openness, spontaneity and even naturalness”¹⁸.

We still need to mention “the institutes’ weakness *ad intra* concerning this anthropological and cultural process of true integration and mutual complementary between the feminine and masculine elements and sensibilities.

¹⁶ *Idem*, pp. 42 ff.

¹⁷ *Idem*, pp. 44 ff.

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 46.

St John Paul II considered women's desire for 'room ... to participate in different fields and at all levels' (VC,58) to be legitimate, yet in practice we still have a long way to go. We also run the risk of gravely impoverishing the Church herself, as Pope Francis said: 'Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the Church, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community. If the Church, in her complete and real dimension, loses women, the Church risks becoming sterile' (Address to the Brazilian Episcopate, Rio, 27.07.2013)¹⁹.

Another ongoing challenge concerns **the service of authority**. Still today in various communities of consecrated life we find "the tendency towards a vertical concentration of the exercising of authority, on both the local and higher levels, thus avoiding the necessary subsidiarity. In some cases, the insistence of some superiors on the personal nature of their authority, almost to the point of thwarting collaboration of the Councils, convinced that they are answering (autonomously) to their own conscience, might seem suspect. Consequently, there is a weak or inefficient corresponsibility in government practices, or even the absence of proper authority. The government may not be centralised in the hands of only one person, thereby circumventing canonical bans (cf. CIC, c. 636). There are still superiors in many institutes who do not take into due account the decisions of their Chapters"²⁰. Pre-arranged majorities, use of the logic of taking sides to resolve serious issues are governing behaviour that falls outside of any evangelical logic. Superiors who are so fossilised in power to the point, in some cases, of even changing the Constitutions, cause great damage to their charisms and neutralise the growth of many other brothers and sisters who could help the community more. The conversion of so many superiors so that they can truly help to discern God's will, is indispensable today. In some more extreme cases there are superiors who destroy the maturity of an entire generation of consecrated men and women by building evil relationships of dependence and slavery. We often have to intervene, as a Dicastery, to heal these situations²¹.

Still speaking of the service of authority "it must be kept in mind that true obedience always puts obedience to God first, before authority and the person who obeys, just as if it refers to the obedience of Jesus: obedience that includes his cry of love: *My God, my God, why have you deserted me?* (Mt 27:36) and the Father's loving silence"²².

¹⁹ *Idem*, pp. 46 ff.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 47s.

²¹ Cf. *idem*, pp. 50-52.

²² *Idem*, p. 55.

Finally, among the ongoing challenges of consecrated life today, we need to say a word on the **management of ecclesiastical goods of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in the Church.**

It was Pope Francis who called the attention of consecrated life to the administration of ecclesiastical goods. In recent years, CIVCSVA has held two Symposia in Rome on the theme, with the aim of perfecting and updating the care of the goods that have come into possession of consecrated life in the world. From the number of participants, we were able to measure the interest shown. Some of the contents of the first Symposium (2014) have been published²³.

“Throughout its long history, consecrated life has always been able to oppose prophetically when economic powers risked humiliating people, especially the poorest people. In this current global financial crisis that Pope Francis often talks about, consecrated people are called to be truly faithful and creative to not fail the prophecy of inward common life and outward solidarity, especially towards the poor and most fragile.

We have passed from a domestic economy to administrative and managerial processes that are getting almost out of control, and that highlight our precariousness and, more than that, our unpreparedness. We must immediately focus again on transparency in economic and financial matters as the first step in recovering the authentic evangelical meaning of the real communion of goods within communities and practical sharing of those goods with those who live around us”²⁴.

Conclusion

Three indications of the Second Vatican Council in particular are at the heart of the reform of consecrated life at this moment in our history: the *sequela Christi* [discipleship] lived in the light of the words of Jesus with transparency of witness; the return to the core of the charism of our founders and foundresses, dropping those things that are not essential; ongoing dialogue with today’s men and women, to keep us constantly updated on the questions of our time.

A central role is played by the necessary transition to a spirituality of communion lived with intense generosity and conviction in every direction of our relationships.

²³ *Sequela Christi, La gestione dei beni ecclesiastici degli Istituti di vita consacrata nella Chiesa*, 2014/01, Studi e commenti, pp. 89-148.

²⁴ *New Wine in new wineskins*, cit. pp. 58s.

The Chapter that begins today for you Salesians can truly be a moment of grace to urge the renewal of the Society of St Francis de Sales onwards.
Best wishes

Turin, 22 February 2020

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LETTER TO CG28¹

Dear Salesian fathers, teachers and friends,

We are writing this letter from the heart. We have spent this week at the 28th General Chapter listening, discerning and taking part in the discussion on what kind of Salesian for today's young people. We know we are not perfect, therefore we do not claim this perfection. We beg you to understand this letter as if it is a son or a daughter writing to their father to tell him how things are and how they feel. As a group we have focused on two questions. What follows is the result of our work.

What is the current state of young people today in our respective regions?

The world in which we live is a complex one, and it presents significant challenges. There is a difficulty in remaining authentic, and that is why we are afraid, confused, frustrated and need to be loved. Living a life of faith requires us to walk the paths of the Gospel, but the secular culture challenges us to live differently. This contrast presents a difficulty for being rooted in faith.

As a result of our fear, ours is a hard struggle. One of the most common questions we ask ourselves is: "What do I do with my life?" This can be seen when we reflect on our vocation. The pressure for success can cause uncertainty and does not allow us to achieve true happiness. The reality we experience is one of unemployment, abandonment of academic institutions, lack of motivation with studies.

We believe that our society is individualistic and that we, too, are often individualistic. Because we do not feel loved by society, we take refuge behind masks and escape human contact. We do not want you to think that we are not interested in the world around us, but it is difficult in our fluid and sometimes dehumanized society to selflessly engage in what the other needs. But

¹ In the week from February 28 to March 7, 2020, some young people from the seven regions of the Congregation shared the days of work with the Capitulars. At the end of this experience they left this letter.

you still have the capacity to awaken the Christian vocation for our neighbour in us young people, and that can transform our life and the world around us, just as Don Bosco did with Michael Magone.

We are critical, and we want the Church to take a position with us on issues that concern us. We feel uncomfortable and often do not understand what the Church says and does on issues of gender, women, sexual diversity, sustainable ecology. In addition, we consider the conversation about cognitive, social and emotional well-being and climate change that the Church hesitates to talk about, to be something normal. This is not just a claim by youth, but a demand of the Gospel.

However, with our challenges we find that we are more dynamic than ever, in tune with trends, which include the digital world, and we are creative and ready to explore, but we want to be accompanied in a holistic way (mind, body, soul).

For us, being young is a state of heart and is not defined by our age. We want to be, as the Pope says in *Christus Vivit*, 34 years old, capable of returning to the first love that is Christ through being companions and friends of young people. Our search for spiritual and personal fulfilment worries us. We want to journey towards spiritual and personal growth and we want to do it with you Salesians.

How do we want the Salesians of today to deal with the different realities of young people?

We have succeeded in getting our hearts and our dreams to follow the same rhythm. You Salesian have given us the opportunity to connect with you, and we want you with us. You have done it with your Salesian style. Being with us, side by side, has allowed us to be protagonists.

We understand that the Salesians are parents who accompany us. We would like you to guide us, in our situation, with love. A love that does not tell us what to say, a love that does not impose on us what we must do, a love that offers us opportunities that help us grow in spirituality and transform our lives. We want you to live in our world, in the same way that we want our family to be part of every aspect of our daily life, and this includes both physical and digital reality.

We want you to enable us to be leaders in the transformation of the Church together. We believe in empowering women in the Church. We believe that

it is impossible to grow as Salesians without the role of women in our lives. Take for example the significant contribution of Margaret Occhiena as a mother in the oratory. We believe that women can collaborate with the Salesians to learn to accompany all young people in an appropriate and effective way. We believe that Salesians should practise a culture of inclusion. We believe that Salesians should take the initiative to learn to work effectively for all young people regardless of preference (LGBTQ+, race, migrants, indigenous, ethnicity, religion). We want an integral accompaniment of each person in their context.

We believe that a continuous and genuine experience of accompaniment is necessary. We believe that the Salesians themselves need accompaniment and we are here to do so with you. We believe that this kind of experience and encounter is beneficial for the whole Salesian Family. We support Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit* nos 242-245 when he makes direct reference to the importance of accompaniment.

It is very important for us that the Salesians return to their roots to be present outside their administrative roles and to be with young people in all contexts. We remind you that you are not limited to your role or position in your community.

However, we believe that it is crucial for the Salesians to have clear boundaries. As young people, we have been and continue to be concerned about the scandals of abuse in the Church. Salesians, be leaders in this area and take the initiative to protect your youth.

It is vital for our growth that spiritual development continues to take place. As we go through our journey of life, we would like to express our desire to be at God's service with the Salesian charism. We ask the Salesians to involve us in an essential and important decision-making process. We are complementary to the mission, not a separate part of the mission.

Salesians do not forget us young people because we have not forgotten you and the charism you have taught us! We want to express this with all our hearts. Being here, we have fulfilled a dream – in this special place in Valdocco, where the Salesian mission began, bringing together Salesians and young people for the Salesian mission with our desire to be saints together. You have our heart in your hands. You must take care of your precious treasure. Please do not forget us and continue to listen to us.

Turin, 7 March 2020

ADDRESS OF THE RECTOR MAJOR FR ÁNGEL FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME AT THE CLOSING OF THE GC28

My dear confreres,

Do you not think that God has really spoken to us, and extensively so, over these four weeks, even though, due to the early closure of our work because of the coronavirus pandemic, we have not arrived at a voted and approved Chapter document?

Thinking back over this General Chapter of ours, don't you think that God spoke to us by having us feel the presence of Don Bosco, our beloved father? Do you not believe that God spoke to us through the beautiful experience of fraternity that we have had?

The answer to these questions, that I posed to myself before I put them to you, is a convinced yes!

The gifts of the Chapter

Dear confreres, I believe we are all in agreement in recognising the beauty of our fraternity, our fellowship, and the joy of encountering our brother just as he is. This is not the result of some strategy. It is the fruit of the Spirit, a mature expression of the Congregation and the commitment of those who have responsibility for the government and animation of the Provinces.

Let me ask you again: do you not believe that God has spoken to us so much through the atmosphere of faith and the honesty with which discernment and voting occurred? I say yes. Do you not believe that the Lord has spoken to us through the extraordinary protection of Mary Help of Christians? I say yes. God spoke to us very much at this General Chapter, even though we could not complete the journey required to arrive at a document to be submitted for the final approval of the assembly.

Dear confreres, do not let disappointment prevail in your hearts just because you are returning to the provinces without having completed the work of the Chapter. I believe that this "failure" is not the most essential thing. We are

not leaving empty-handed: we carry with us *the reflections we have shared* over these weeks and that we have distilled in a first draft, handed over to the Rector Major and the General Council. Besides, we have the *magisterium of the Congregation up until today, in particular that of GC24* which was especially on the topic of the mission shared between Salesians and the laity. And finally, we have received the very beautiful and agenda-setting *Message of the Holy Father* to GC28.

These are the things that allow us to broaden our perspective on the reality that awaits us, with serenity and great trust.

Looking to the future: objectives and challenges

The second part of my reflection, a very brief one, seeks to be a glimpse into the future.

Let me start by telling you that I was very impressed by a thank you I received last night, just before entering the Basilica to pray.

A Chapter member from Eastern Europe came up to me and said: “Dear Rector Major, I want to thank you for making possible the recovery of these Salesian Holy Places... And I would like to tell you that *we need help with our identity: don't leave us alone*”. I replied: “I would like to thank you too; however, much of this recovery is the fruit of the previous General Chapter, with its deliberation, which for many reasons I consider to be prophetic, *to renew and strengthen the Salesian Holy Places, the heart of our charism*. Afterwards, some of us have been able to do something to implement this deliberation”.

Speaking of the Salesian places, dear confreres, in my opinion the most beautiful thing you can do is this: go back to the Provinces and tell all the confreres that *everyone's home is here*. These places are the places of our *charismatic dream*, the cradle where all Salesians around the world were born, because this is where the charism was born. These are the places everyone can turn to, because all Salesians have the right to experience the emotion of being here in Valdocco at least once in their lives. I warmly thank the Piedmont Provincial, who provides for the custody of these places. I have promised and I continue to promise him and the ICP, that we will not leave them alone in taking care of this extraordinary patrimony that belongs to the entire Congregation.

Returning to yesterday evening's exchange, I then told the confrere: “I promise you that we will not leave you alone in your *journey of identity*”.

1. This is the first objective, the *first challenge* that lies before us: growing together, in all the Provinces, in all the Regions, in our **charismatic identity**, in our Salesian identity and spirituality. We all need this, some Provinces and some Regions in particular. Let us be careful: the fact of having new Salesian professions is not, in itself, a guarantee of strong identity. Salesian identity must be ensured through specific attention and greater care. In recent years we have clearly seen that in certain cases, small or greater difficulties of the confreres depend to a large extent on a lack of identity, as I said in the initial report. I am convinced that in the programme of animation and governance for the next six years this will be a priority: to guarantee charismatic identity in all Salesians. As I said, it is not enough to make our first profession to say, “I have full Salesian identity”. It is a journey, at times a very demanding one; but it is a fascinating challenge that gives so much beauty and strength to our Congregation.
2. A *second challenge* for the six-year programme: returning to Don Bosco, as Fr Pascual Chávez urged us during his time as Rector Major. We must **return more and more to Don Bosco**, and this means: loving the young. They themselves have asked of us that they be loved. Consequently, *as Salesians we are all called to be present in the midst of the young*. It is what I call the **“Salesian sacrament” of presence**, an expression I consider to be intuitive. It is an essential “sacrament” for making a journey with youngsters and older youth, letting them know that God loves them, that truly “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). For us and for them. Only this way can we really be *evangelizers of the young*. This, I believe, is the significance of “returning more and more to Don Bosco”. Today it is both a task and a challenge, even though we are not starting from zero.
3. A *third challenge is to form Salesians as Don Bosco would do today*. Dear confreres, Chapter members, I am convinced that formation, not just any clerical formation, but **good Salesian formation**, is a priority. This is why the commitment to continue to form formators is also a priority. We must take greater care of the teams in our formation houses, so they will be truly Salesian and not elitist: this attention will be the guarantee of an authentically Salesian future. *No genericism: all our formative commitment must be marked by the true Salesian spirit*. This third challenge involves all Salesian formation, *be it ongoing, and in a particular way initial formation*.
4. A *fourth challenge*: I dream that today, saying “Salesians of Don Bosco” means consecrated “crazies”, that is, Salesians who love with a true

Salesian heart, who are perhaps even “a little crazy”, oriented towards the poorest. Dear confreres, if we distance ourselves from the poorest, this will spell the death of the Congregation. Don Bosco said this when speaking about poverty and wealth. Allow me to specify this further: *if one day we were to let go of the youngsters, and the poorest of them among these, the decline of our Congregation will have begun.* A Congregation which, thanks be to God, enjoys good health today, despite our frailties! Let us therefore pay attention to what I consider to be an *authentic “Chapter deliberation”*, even if not in the proper sense, because its content is already found in our Constitutions: *a radical, preferential, personal, institutional and structural option* – in short, from all points of view – *for the most needy, poor and excluded youngsters.* It is an option that manifests itself in a special way *in the defence of children and young people who are exploited and victims of all forms of abuse:* from sexual abuse to violence, from injustice to abuse of power. This fourth challenge is a beautiful commitment, which we must carry in our hearts. Six years guided by this light will give us so much life.

5. *Fifth challenge.* I believe that this is **the hour for generosity within the Congregation**; not just with money but especially *with the generosity and availability of confreres*, so that we are able to open new presences. For at least three reasons: first, our work is being requested from all sides, especially in the poorest contexts; second, we can establish presences and be involved with refugees, a terrible new poverty; third, we can establish ourselves in new places of mission. Dear confreres, we all belong to God and to the one Congregation, we are all Salesians of Don Bosco for the world. I believe that in the next six years this openness of horizon will become even more a reality: with the availability of the confreres, with the generous response of the Provinces that have greater possibilities to offer resources to other Provinces, sometimes with the guidance of the Rector Major and his Council, always with an eye to universality. We are living in times that must be tackled with a renewed mentality, one that knows how to cross borders. In a world where borders are more and more in danger of closing, the prophecy of our life also consists in this: *showing that there are no borders for us. The only reality we have is God, the Gospel and the mission.*
6. *A final challenge* concerns the **Salesian Family**. Over these years we have worked well, despite the tiredness of some of the delegates for individual groups. During the Chapter we saw that the time does not yet seem ripe for taking further steps. Nevertheless, **the Salesian Family**,

together with the **reality of the shared mission with the laity**, will be the *point of arrival and guarantee of the Salesian mission*. It cannot be just a field of action to keep some confreres busy, or to make friends. *It is an essential charismatic element, much stronger today than in Don Bosco's times*, because over 160 years there has been great development. For this reason, I invite you to continue to believe with conviction in the Salesian Family. It does not have the same consistency in all the places where the Congregation is present. In some parts it is a beautiful reality, elsewhere we are still at the beginning. Also, in this area, therefore, a great commitment awaits us.

Some brief concluding matters

- a) Thanks to all of you for **the gift of the new General Council**. It is a renewal that we must *welcome with an outlook of faith*. I believe that one of the *most beautiful fruits* of this Chapter, as has always been the case, is the gift of a General Council. I am convinced that, as a Council, we will take on a profound faith perspective, the desire for a strong fidelity to the Lord and to Don Bosco, with a great capacity for planning. Everything else we can do with our abilities, our relationships and the talents of each individual. With great serenity I say thank you for the new Council.
- b) Over these days I have been reflecting and I believe that my first commitment as Rector Major for the animation of the Provinces will be to animate the Spiritual Exercises, the Retreats for Regions or for Conferences in Regions, for Provincials and members of Provincial Councils, to transmit the fruit of GC28, a very special General Chapter, to take on the great challenges that we are identifying and that await us.
- c) Thank you once again for the **great communion** that there is among us.
- d) This is the great hope that we bear, and of which we are deeply convinced: we seek to enrich the Church with the gift of the Salesian charism for the salvation of the young.

Dear confreres, with all my heart, thank you!

Turin, 13 March 2020

CHRONICLE OF WORK CARRIED OUT BY CG28

Saturday 15 February: arrival at Valdocco where there is a large logistical and computerised system set up for reception and accommodation.

Sunday 16: afternoon, beginning of the General Chapter with words of welcome from the Rector Major, some items of information and technical procedures, the Chapter's opening Eucharistic concelebration at which the Rector Major presided and preached a homily based on three key words: docility - fidelity - hope.

First week: 17-22 February

Monday 17 February: presentation of reports by Sector and Regional Councillors (first part), with a goodnight by Card. Cristobal López S.D.B., Archbishop of Rabat (Morocco).

Tuesday 18: presentation of reports continues, concluding with the Rector Major's report. Other than summing up the six years and examining the Congregation's state of health, he recalls the challenges that the Congregation has had to face, at the same time offering a hopeful perspective for the future to overcome any temptation to discouragement.

Wednesday 19: first spirituality day with a reflection by Fr Rossano Sala on the theme of the first nucleus "Centrality of the mission among the young". The morning concludes with the Eucharist at which Fr Sala is main celebrant. Study of the Rector Major's report begins in the afternoon with reference to Sectors. After supper there is a concert in the Basilica for the 250th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's birth.

Thursday 20: second spirituality day with a reflection by Fr Eunan Mc Donell on the theme of the second nucleus "Profile of the Salesian for today's youth". This is followed by the Eucharist at the end of the morning, at which Fr Eunan is main celebrant. As with the previous day, the report is studied in the afternoon, this time by Regions.

Friday 21: third spirituality day with a reflection by Koldo Gutiérrez on the theme of the third nucleus "Together with lay people in the mission and in

formation”, with the Eucharist at the end of the morning at which Card. Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga is main celebrant. In the afternoon the conclusion of study by Regions of the Rector Major’s report on the state of the Congregation.

Saturday 22, official opening day of GC28, beginning with the Eucharist in the Basilica, at which Card. Joao Braz de Aviz is main celebrant, then after breakfast, the ceremony in the *aula magna* (henceforth ‘the hall’) with greetings, Card. Braz de Aviz’s message as Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and the Rector Major’s opening address.

The morning ends with lunch, followed by a meeting-free period until Monday 24 February.

Second week: 24-29 February

Monday 24: the first part of the day in assembly for the choice of place in the hall, election of secretaries and moderators, then to see how translations, voting, presentation of Chapter Regulations and choice of commissions are to work. In the afternoon, comments on changes to the Regulations and then the first meeting of commissions to elect the president, spokesperson and secretary. In the evening before Vespers and the goodnight, the Rector Major lets us know that due to the coronavirus emergency we are asked to be very responsible in avoiding exposure of ourselves or others, and in obeying orders from the State prohibiting, amongst other things, any group movements by bus. Hence we will be skipping the day trip to Colle Don Bosco and Chieri for the day of retreat scheduled for Ash Wednesday.

Tuesday 25, Feast of the Salesian Protomartyrs in China, Saint Aloysius Vergiglia and Saint Callistus Caravario. In the first part of the day, presentation of the working document on the Chapter theme by Fr Andrea Bozzolo, followed by the second summary of challenges identified by the Regions after studying the report on the state of the Congregation, then the working document on juridical matters, followed by a vote on the Regulations. In the second part, replies from the Rector Major and General Council to questions from the Regions, and from confreres, as a result of the study of the report on the state of the Congregation.

Wednesday 26: Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. In the morning a celebration of the Word led by Fr Pascual Chávez, offering a meditation on the Letter from Rome, 1884 – Don Bosco’s gospel, followed by time for personal

prayer, Eucharistic adoration and confessions. In the afternoon, commissions meet to choose their representative on the editorial commission, and to organise working groups. The day concludes with a Eucharistic celebration at which Fr Pascual Chávez is main celebrant.

Thursday 27: first a meeting in assembly to approve the minutes of the preceding days and information on procedure for work in commissions, then commission meetings for the rest of the day to study the first part ('recognising') of the first nucleus "The priority of the Salesian mission among today's youth".

Friday 28. all day in commissions to study the second part ('interpreting') of the first nucleus "The priority of the Salesian mission among today's youth", concluding with the Stations of the Cross organised by the East Asia-Oceania Region.

Saturday 29: first of all in assembly for Lauds and *lectio divina* led by Fr Andrea Bozzolo on the Beloved Disciple at the Last Supper, and later, commission work on the third part ('choosing') of the first nucleus, concluding at midday with the Eucharist at which the main celebrant is the Archbishop of Turin, Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia. Free time until Monday 2 March.

Third week: 2-7 March

Monday 2: commission work in the morning to conclude work on the first nucleus, also involving the young people who have come for this week. In the afternoon, assembly to read and approve minutes, present an aid prepared by the Formation Department: "Young Salesians and Accompaniment. Orientations and Guidelines", and to present proposals from the juridical commission, followed by a return to commissions.

Tuesday 3: morning in assembly to approve the minutes, present the summary drawn up by each of the 4 commissions on the first nucleus of the theme, followed by time for discussion. In the afternoon, commission work on the first part of the second theme: "What kind of formation of the Salesian for today's youth?"

Wednesday 4: the morning in assembly to approve the minutes, a technical trial of the electronic voting system but given the many interventions and some discomfort it is decided to postpone this, then the first discussion on juridical topics which sees many Chapter members intervening on a range of issues. In the afternoon, commission work still on the first part of the second theme.

Thursday 5: a morning of commission work, again on the second part of the second nucleus. In the afternoon, first of all a meeting in assembly to pass on important information from the Rector Major concerning the emergency situation in Italy due to the coronavirus epidemic (take seriously the measures prepared by the Italian state, offer a low profile as a group of Chapter members, give no information to anyone about what is happening in the Chapter, cancel all visits and meetings, and cancel the presence of the laity who were invited to the Chapter), he then lets us hear a greeting from Pope Francis who wanted to come and meet us, but since he can't do this he has sent us a message; and finally he offers the possibility of anticipating the elections for the Rector Major and General Council, given the uncertainty of how the epidemic will evolve which could possibly lead to a premature closure of the General Chapter without having elected the governing body of the Congregation. After this information, we move on to two straw votes on proposals of the juridical commission. In the final work session the third part ('choosing') of the second nucleus begins.

Friday 6: first work session in the hall for the reading and approval of the minutes, a vote on anticipating the elections, with a positive result, then a second session to vote on juridical matters. In the afternoon, commission work on the third part of the second nucleus.

Saturday 7: in assembly in the morning for Lauds and a *lectio* offered by Andrea Bozzolo on the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross. In the first work session, reading and approval of the minutes, followed by the final vote on juridical matters presented the day before. In the second work session, the young people are listened to. They are asking for our presence among them, to listen to them, accompany them, to trust and share with them by journeying alongside them and above all, love. At the end of their intervention the Rector Major blesses the statue of Mamma Margaret located in front of the *Palazzo Pinardi*; we then move into the Basilica for the Eucharistic celebration at which Fr Fabio Attard is the main celebrant.

Fourth week: 9-14 March

Monday 9: first part in assembly for reading and approval of the minutes, followed by presentation of the first draft of the first nucleus: "Priority of the Salesian mission among today's youth". In the second session, study in commissions for a first reaction and some suggestions. In the afternoon, in assembly, Fr Pierluigi Nava, SMM, Undersecretary of the CIVCSVA, is invited to guide the discernment for the elections, and introduces this stage of the GC with a reflection on "Discernment from an ecclesial perspective",

followed by a time for prayer and personal reflection, with Vespers in the Basilica and time for Eucharistic adoration after supper.

Tuesday 10: Eucharist in the Basilica in the morning, at which Fr Nava is the main celebrant, and then in the first work session in the hall he presents a second reflection: “Election, discernment and forming consensus”, followed by a time of prayer and personal reflection. In the second session, in commissions, discernment in view of the election of the Rector Major. In the afternoon, in the first session, continuation of this process concluding with handing over prospective names to the guide, who in the fourth session in the hall presents the result of discernment in commissions with two names that had gained the greatest number of preferences: Fr Ángel Fernández and Fr Fabio Attard. After supper, an hour of Eucharistic adoration.

Wednesday 11: morning Eucharist in the Basilica and in the first work session in the hall, election of secretaries and scrutineers for voting, then the vote to elect the Rector Major. Fr Ángel Fernández Arttime is re-elected for a second six-year term. In the following two work sessions, back to commissions for discernment for election of the Vicar of the Rector Major. After Vespers, the Rector Major gives the goodnight. After supper, an hour of Eucharistic adoration.

Thursday 12: morning Eucharist in the Basilica at which the Rector Major presides, preaching a homily focused on the figure of the ‘good shepherd’. In the first work session in the hall, the straw vote for candidates for election as Vicar of the RM - Fr Stefano Martoglio. Immediately afterwards, commissions by Regions to select candidates as Councillors for the different Sectors (Formation - Youth Ministry - Social Communication - Missions and Economy). There is a meeting of a small group of Chapter members (Frs Stefano Martoglio, Enrico Stasi, Pier Fausto Frisoli, Rossano Sala, Pascual Chávez) convened by the RM to study the choice to be made given the Government’s obligatory measures in this coronavirus emergency and that leads to the decision to conclude GC28 on Saturday morning with the Holy Mass, after which confreres may depart. This means that all elections for Councillors have to be finished by Friday evening and, in a decision made in assembly, the Rector Major and his Council are entrusted with the work done on the working document in view of a Chapter document. So, before lunch there is a return to the hall for the Rector Major’s official communique on the decision taken regarding conclusion of the Chapter.

In the first part of the afternoon, work continues in commissions by region, who then hand over their names of candidates for Councillors. In the second

part, in assembly, straw vote and election of Councillors: Formation, Fr Ivo Coelho; Youth Ministry, Fr Miguel Ángel García Morcuende (SSM), who is not a Chapter member; Social Communication, Fr Gildásio dos Santos (BBH); Missions, Fr Alfred Maravilla (PGS); Economy, Bro. Jean Paul Muller. After Vespers, Fr Stefano Martoglio gives the goodnight.

Friday 13: in the morning, Eucharist in the Basilica, main celebrant Fr Stefano Martoglio and in the first work session, work in commissions by region to choose their candidate for Regional Councillor, and, in the second work session, voting. Results as follows: Africa-Madagascar, Fr Alphonse Owoudou (AFO); America South Cone, Fr Gabriel Romero (ARN); East Asia-Oceania, Fr Joseph Phuoc Nguyen (VIE); South Asia, Fr Michael Biju Pulianmackal (ING); Europe-Centre North, Fr Roman Jachimowicz (PLN); Interamerica, Fr Hugo Orozco (MEG); Mediterranean, Fr Juan Carlos Pérez Godoy (SSM).

In the afternoon a photo record of GC28 in front of the monument to Don Bosco, followed by the film, in the hall, on Artemides Zatti, and in the final work session, the Closing Address of the Rector Major and Declaration of closure of GC28.

Things come to an end in the Basilica with Vespers, the singing of the *Te Deum* and the handing over of the cross of the Good Shepherd. After supper, festivities for the Rector Major and the new General Council.

Saturday 14: in the morning in the Basilica, the final Eucharist with the Rector Major as the main celebrant.

After breakfast Chapter members begin to depart for their various places of origin.

At lunch time there is a very simple commemoration of the 80th anniversary of UPS. And at the end, Fr Ángel invites a group of Chapter members to visit the works going on in the *Casa Museo Don Bosco*, that has been made very beautiful and will be a great gift to the Congregation and the entire Salesian Family because it reconstructs the different stages of this “mother house”, its development and current presence in the world.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE 28th GENERAL CHAPTER

General Council

1	P FERNÁNDEZ ARTIME Ángel	<i>Rector Major - President</i>
2	P CEREDA Francesco	<i>Vicar of the Rector Major</i>
3	P COELHO Ivo	<i>Councillor for Formation</i>
4	P ATTARD Fabio	<i>Councillor for Youth Pastoral</i>
5	P BASAÑES Guillermo	<i>Councillor for the Missions</i>
6	P GONZÁLEZ Plasencia Filiberto	<i>Councillor for Social Communication</i>
7	L MULLER Jean Paul	<i>Economer General</i>
8	P CHAQUISSE Américo	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
9	P KANAGA Maria Arokiam	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
10	P KLEMENT Václav	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
11	P MARTOGLIO Stefano	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
12	P PLOCH Timothy	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
13	P ROZMUS Tadeusz	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
14	P VITALI Natale	<i>Regional Councillor</i>
15	P VANOLI Stefano	<i>Secretary General - Moderator</i>
16	P FRISOLI Pier Fausto	<i>Procurator General</i>
17	P CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA Pascual	<i>Rector Major Emeritus</i>

Salesian Region: AFRICA - MADAGASCAR

18	P JIMÉNEZ CASTRO Manuel	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Congo Congo
19	P ITSIEKI MANZANZA Alfred	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Congo Congo
20	P TESFAY Hailemariam Medhin	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Ethiopia
21	P LAVENTURE Ignacio	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Ethiopia
22	P KITUNGWA Albert	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa Central
23	P CABALA UMBI Didier	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Central
24	P KALUMBU BESA Dieudonné	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Central
25	P LIPUKA Simon Asira	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa East
26	L NJUGUNA Ngigi	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa East
27	P SELLAM Augustine	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa East

28	P THEKUMCHERIKUNNEL Joy Sebastian	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa South
29	P TLAILE Lingoan	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa South
30	P ELÉGBÉDÉ José	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa West French-speaking
31	P BADJI Jésus Benôit	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa West French-speaking
32	P KARIKUNNEL Michael	<i>Provincial</i>	Africa West English-speaking
33	P KPEN-ANA Peter	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa West English-speaking
34	P NGOBOKA Pierre Célestin	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Great Lakes
35	P TURABANYE Jean-Pierre	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Great Lakes
36	P SEQUEIRAGUTIERREZ Victor Luis	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Angola
37	P LUCAS Manuel Cambanje	<i>Delegate</i>	Angola
38	P OWODOU Alphonse	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Africa Tropical Equatorial
39	P ELA ENAM André Young	<i>Delegate</i>	Africa Tropical Equatorial
40	P RANDIMBISOA Charles Armand	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Madagascar
41	P BIZIMANA Innocent	<i>Delegate</i>	Madagascar
42	P SARMENTO Adolfo de Jesus	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Mozambique
43	P MATAVELE Arlindo Alberto	<i>Delegate</i>	Mozambique
44	P RYCHCIK Krzysztof	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Zambia-Malawi-Namibia- Zimbabwe
45	P KUNDA Christopher	<i>Delegate</i>	Zambia-Malawi-Namibia- Zimbabwe

Salesian Region: AMERICA SOUTH CONE

46	P ROMERO Hector Gabriel	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina North
47	L SAADE Osvaldo Fernando	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina North
48	P PERERA Darío Ramón	<i>Provincial</i>	Argentina South
49	L CAMILETTI Agustín	<i>Delegate</i>	Argentina South
50	P SANTOS Gildásio	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Belo Horizonte
51	P SACRAMENTO Ricardo Sávio do	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Belo Horizonte
52	P CARLOS Ricardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Campo Grande
53	P OLIVEIRA Ademir	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Campo Grande
54	P SANTOS Jefferson Luis	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Manaus
55	P DA CUNHA Daniel Olivera	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Manaus
56	P DA SILVA Gilson Marcos	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Porto Alegre
57	P SANTOS Renato dos	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Porto Alegre

58	P PESSINATTI Nivaldo Luiz	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil Recife
59	P VIEIRA Francisco Inácio	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil Recife
60	P PICCININI Justo Ernesto	<i>Provincial</i>	Brazil São Paulo
61	L OLIVEIRA Marcelo dos Santos	<i>Delegate</i>	Brazil São Paulo
62	P LIRA Carlo	<i>Provincial</i>	Chile
63	P ALBORNOZ David	<i>Delegate</i>	Chile
64	P VILLALBA Mario	<i>Provincial</i>	Paraguay
65	L CÁCERES Cristóbal	<i>Delegate</i>	Paraguay
66	P BAUER Alfonso	<i>Provincial</i>	Uruguay
67	P PÉREZ Jorge	<i>Delegate</i>	Uruguay

Salesian Region: EAST ASIA AND OCEANIA

68	P MATTHEWS William	<i>Provincial</i>	Australia
69	P GRAHAM Bernard	<i>Delegate</i>	Australia
70	P NG Joseph	<i>Provincial</i>	China
71	P LEONG Domingos	<i>Delegate</i>	China
72	P MARTIN Gerardo	<i>Provincial</i>	Philippines North
73	P CAMAYA Joel	<i>Delegate</i>	Philippines North
74	P ATIENZA Godofredo	<i>Provincial</i>	Philippines South
75	L VILLORDON Edward	<i>Delegate</i>	Philippines South
76	P HAMAGUCHI Jacobo	<i>Provincial</i>	Japan
77	P LAP Michael	<i>Delegate</i>	Japan
78	P WONG Andrew	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Indonesia
79	P BELO Lino	<i>Delegate</i>	Indonesia
80	P CHOI Timothy	<i>Provincial</i>	Korea
81	P BAEK Marcello	<i>Delegate</i>	Korea
82	P SAW Charles	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Myanmar
83	P ZEY AUNG Bosco	<i>Delegate</i>	Myanmar
84	P MARAVILLA Alfred	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands
85	P PARAPPILLY Robinson	<i>Delegate</i>	Papua New Guinea & Solomon Islands
86	P THEPHARAT PITISANT John Bosco	<i>Provincial</i>	Thailand
87	P NIPHON SARACHIT Peter	<i>Delegate</i>	Thailand

88	P NETO Apolinário	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	East Timor
89	P De SOUSA Mario	<i>Delegate</i>	East Timor
90	P NGUYEN VAN QUANG Giuseppe	<i>Provincial</i>	Vietnam
91	P LÊ AN PHONG Barnaba	<i>Delegate</i>	Vietnam
92	L NGUYEN DUC NAM Domenico	<i>Delegate</i>	Vietnam

Salesian Region: SOUTH ASIA

93	P SILVEIRA Savio	<i>Provincial</i>	India Mumbai
94	P FURTADO Adolph	<i>Delegate</i>	India Mumbai
95	P PINTO Anthony	<i>Delegate</i>	India Mumbai
96	P GOMES Nirmol	<i>Provincial</i>	India Kolkata
97	P CHUNKAPURA Jose	<i>Delegate</i>	India Kolkata
98	P PAURIA Joseph	<i>Delegate</i>	India Kolkata
99	P KURUVACHIRA Jose	<i>Provincial</i>	India Dimapur
100	P PATHIKULANGARA Jerry Thomas	<i>Delegate</i>	India Dimapur
101	P THOTTATHIMYALIL Francis	<i>Delegate</i>	India Dimapur
102	P SANGMA Januarius	<i>Provincial</i>	India Guwahati
103	L KARAKOMBIL Joby Mani (Louis)	<i>Delegate</i>	India Guwahati
104	P PULIANMACKAL Biju Michael	<i>Delegate</i>	India Guwahati
105	P THATHIREDDY Vijaya Bhaskar	<i>Provincial</i>	India Hyderabad
106	P THUMMA Vijaya Pratap	<i>Delegate</i>	India Hyderabad
107	P THONIKUZHIYIL Joyce Mathew	<i>Provincial</i>	India Bangalore
108	P KOROTH Sivy	<i>Delegate</i>	India Bangalore
109	P KUTTIANIMATTATHIL Jose	<i>Delegate</i>	India Bangalore
110	P KOCHAMKUNNEL Jose	<i>Provincial</i>	India Chennai
111	P JOSEPH Andrew	<i>Delegate</i>	India Chennai
112	P LOURDUSAMY Don Bosco	<i>Delegate</i>	India Chennai
113	P KOORAPPALLIL Jose Mathew	<i>Provincial</i>	India New Delhi
114	P KERKETTA Shilanand	<i>Delegate</i>	India New Delhi
115	P MANIPARAMBEN Davis	<i>Delegate</i>	India New Delhi
116	P FERNANDES Fèlix	<i>Provincial</i>	India Panjim
117	P TELLES Clive	<i>Delegate</i>	India Panjim
118	P LYNGKOT Paul Olphindro	<i>Provincial</i>	India Shillong
119	P CHURULIYIL Manoj	<i>Delegate</i>	India Shillong
120	P ZOSIAMA John	<i>Delegate</i>	India Shillong

121 P SARPRASADAM Agilan	<i>Provincial</i>	India Tiruchy
122 P JEYARAYAN Amala	<i>Delegate</i>	India Tiruchy
123 P ROYAN Ricopar	<i>Delegate</i>	India Tiruchy
124 P ALMEIDA Joseph	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Sri Lanka
125 P ATHTHIDIYAGE Chalana	<i>Delegate</i>	Sri Lanka

Salesian Region: CENTRE AND NORTH EUROPE

126 P OBERMÜLLER Petrus	<i>Provincial</i>	Austria
127 L MAYER Günter	<i>Delegate</i>	Austria
128 P WAMBEKE Wilfried	<i>Provincial</i>	Belgium North
129 P HAELVOET Eric	<i>Delegate</i>	Belgium North
130 P VACULÍK Petr	<i>Provincial</i>	Czech Republic
131 P ŽENÍŠEK Pavel	<i>Delegate</i>	Czech Republic
132 P ŠUTALO Tihomir	<i>Provincial</i>	Croatia
133 L BEŠLIĆ Domagoj	<i>Delegate</i>	Croatia
134 P FEDERSPIEL Daniel	<i>Provincial</i>	France & Belgium South
135 P ERNST Xavier	<i>Delegate</i>	France & Belgium South
136 P BRIODY James	<i>Provincial</i>	Great Britain
137 P ANDERSON Kieran	<i>Delegate</i>	Great Britain
138 P GESING Reinhard	<i>Provincial</i>	Germany
139 L GOLDSMITS Mike	<i>Delegate</i>	Germany
140 P VON HATZFELD Hatto	<i>Delegate</i>	Germany
141 P McDONNELL Eunan	<i>Provincial</i>	Ireland
142 P HENNESSY Patrick	<i>Delegate</i>	Ireland
143 P FORMOSA Paul	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Malta
144 P FALZON Robert	<i>Delegate</i>	Malta
145 P JARECKI Tadeusz	<i>Provincial</i>	Poland Warszawa
146 P SOLARSKI Przemysław	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Warszawa
147 P ZDZIEBORSKI Jacek	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Warszawa
148 P JACHIMOWICZ Roman	<i>Provincial</i>	Poland Piła
149 P POPŁAWSKI Adam	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Piła
150 P SZULCZYŃSKI Witold	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Piła
151 P PIZOŃ Jarosław	<i>Provincial</i>	Poland Wrocław
152 P MAZUR Roman	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Wrocław

153 P KAZNOWSKI Marcin	<i>Provincial</i>	Poland Wroclaw
154 P WOCIAŁ Michał	<i>Delegate</i>	Poland Wroclaw
155 P BUČÁNY Peter	<i>V. Provincial</i>	Slovakia
156 P KAČMÁRY Martin	<i>Delegate</i>	Slovakia
157 P KOŠNIK Marko	<i>Provincial</i>	Slovenia
158 P KOLAR Bogdan	<i>Delegate</i>	Slovenia
159 P MANÍK Karol	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Ukraine
160 P PLATOSH Andrii	<i>Delegate</i>	Ukraine
161 P ANDRÁSFALVY János	<i>Provincial</i>	Hungry
162 P VITÁLIS Gábor	<i>Delegate</i>	Hungry

Salesian Region: INTERAMERICA

163 P BATISTA Francisco	<i>Provincial</i>	Antilles
164 P MARRERO Adán Luis	<i>Delegate</i>	Antilles
165 P ORTIZ Javier	<i>Provincial</i>	Bolivia
166 P ROCABADO Alvaro	<i>Delegate</i>	Bolivia
167 P PRADO José Ángel	<i>Provincial</i>	Central America
168 P GUZMÁN Rodolfo	<i>Delegate</i>	Central America
169 P GÓMEZ RÚA John Jairo	<i>Provincial</i>	Colombia Bogotá
170 P JARAMILLO Rubén	<i>Delegate</i>	Colombia Bogotá
171 P VALENCIA Luis Fernando	<i>Provincial</i>	Colombia Medellín
172 P GUERRERO José Ariel	<i>Delegate</i>	Colombia Medellín
173 P SÁNCHEZ Francisco	<i>Provincial</i>	Ecuador
174 P CÁRDENAS Juan	<i>Delegate</i>	Ecuador
175 P MÉSIDOR Jean-Paul	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	Haiti
176 P BONHOMME Morachel	<i>Delegate</i>	Haiti
177 P OROZCO SÁNCHEZ Hugo	<i>Provincial</i>	México Guadalajara
178 P LARA PÉREZ Eduardo	<i>Delegate</i>	México Guadalajara
179 P OCAMPO URIBE Ignacio	<i>Provincial</i>	México México
180 P MORALES Paulo Armando	<i>Delegate</i>	México México
181 P CAYO Manuel	<i>Provincial</i>	Perú
182 P MEDINA Pablo	<i>Delegate</i>	Perú
183 P ZAK Timothy	<i>Provincial</i>	United States East
184 P CONWAY Michael	<i>Delegate</i>	United States East

185 P MONTEMAYOR Ted	<i>Provincial</i>	United States West
186 L VU Alphonse	<i>Delegate</i>	United States West
187 P MONTENEGRO Rafael	<i>Provincial</i>	Venezuela
188 P OLIVEROS Ramón Alfredo	<i>Delegate</i>	Venezuela

Salesian Region: MEDITERRANEAN

189 P ASPETTATI Stefano	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy Central
190 P COLAMEO Roberto	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Central
191 P MERLINI Daniele	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Central
192 P VERLEZZA Maurizio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Central
193 P STASI Enrico	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy Piemonte - Val d'Aosta
194 P BARONE Luca	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Piemonte - Val d'Aosta
195 P DEGIORGI Giorgio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Piemonte - Val d'Aosta
196 L TOSO Gianluca	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Piemonte - Val d'Aosta
197 P GIACOMAZZI Giuliano	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy Lombardy Emilia
198 P LEONI Erino	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Lombardy Emilia
199 P PICCINOTTI Giordano	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Lombardy Emilia
200 P SANTORSOLA Angelo	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy South
201 P ROMA Gianpaolo	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy South
202 P BIFFI Igino	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy North East
203 P GAETAN Enrico	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy North East
204 P ZANCHETTA Silvio	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy North East
205 P D'ANDREA Giovanni	<i>Provincial</i>	Italy Sicily
206 P COSTA Giuseppe	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Sicily
207 P VIVIANO Michele	<i>Delegate</i>	Italy Sicily
208 P LEÓN MENDOZA Alejandro José	<i>Provincial</i>	Middle East
209 P ZAKERIAN Simon	<i>Delegate</i>	Middle East
210 P MENDNOÇA José Aníbal	<i>Provincial</i>	Portugal
211 P FREITAS De SOUSA Juan Eduardo	<i>Delegate</i>	Portugal
212 P ASURMENDI MARTÍNEZ Ángel	<i>Provincial</i>	Spain Sevilla
213 P CANINO Miguel	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Sevilla
214 P MIRANDA Fernando	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Sevilla
215 P NÚÑEZ José Miguel	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Sevilla
216 P PÉREZ Juan Carlos	<i>Provincial</i>	Spain Madrid
217 P GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ Fernando	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Madrid

218 P GUTIÉRREZ Luis Fernando	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Madrid
219 P SEGURA Samuel	<i>Delegate</i>	Spain Madrid

Salesian Pontifical University

220 P RIVA Eugenio	<i>Sup. V. Prov.</i>	UPS
221 P MANTOVANI Mauro	<i>Delegate</i>	UPS

Generalate and Community depend on Rector Major

222 P CAMERONI Pierluigi	<i>Delegate</i>	RMG
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Invited Observers

223 L BECERRA Christian	<i>Invited</i>	Perú
224 P BOZZOLO Andrea	<i>Invited</i>	Italy Piemonte - Val d'Aosta
225 L CHINAPPAN Francis	<i>Invited</i>	India Chennai
226 P HAIDUKEVICH Viktor	<i>Invited</i>	Poland Warszawa
227 P HOBZA Martin	<i>Invited</i>	Czech Republic
228 P KETTNER Siegfried	<i>Invited</i>	Austria
229 P LASARTE Martín	<i>Invited</i>	Angola
230 L LOPES Marçal	<i>Invited</i>	East Timor
231 L METOULE David	<i>Invited</i>	Africa Tropical Equatorial
232 P MUÑOZ RUIZ Eusebio	<i>Invited</i>	RMG
233 P OCHE Anthony	<i>Invited</i>	Africa West English-speaking
234 L PÉREZ GÓMEZ Marcelo	<i>Invited</i>	Spain Madrid
235 P PULIKKAL Joseph	<i>Invited</i>	Africa East
236 P SALA Rossano	<i>Invited</i>	Italy Central
237 P SCHWEIZER Thomas	<i>Invited</i>	Germany
238 P SORO Denis	<i>Invited</i>	Africa West French-speaking
239 P SOTO Roel	<i>Invited</i>	Thailand
240 P TIMKO Peter	<i>Invited</i>	Slovakia
241 L VADAKKEVETTUVAZHIYIL Sunny Joseph	<i>Invited</i>	India Dimapur
242 P VITO PAU Petelo	<i>Invited</i>	Australia