

I. LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

Rome, October 1977

My dear Confreres and sons,

We now are the threshold of the General Chapter. When this issue of the Acts gets into your hands, the Chapter will probably be under way.

During the last few months the preparatory work has become more and more intense: topics have been studied more thoroughly and rough drafts of documents have been readied by the Pre-capitular Commission. This Commission — it is our duty to acknowledge it in this place — worked with admirable diligence and without sparing any efforts to provide the Capitulars with solid study material on the various topics of the Chapter. To all the members of the Commission who under the able and inspiring leadership of the Moderator got this very useful material ready, we express our warmest thanks.

By receiving such material towards the end of August, the Capitulars have had the opportunity to study in depth the weighty issues dealt with in it, and thereby to get themselves ready for the Chapter discussions. As we have stated repeatedly, it is the goal of this Chapter to check on what has been done during the last six years in order to make concrete plans and proposals on what needs to be done during the next six years.

Fervent, humble and trusting prayer

As I mentioned on another occasion, since I am fully aware of the importance of this Chapter for the wellbeing of our beloved Congregation, I have invited many other religious institutes,

especially those of contemplative life, to give us the precious support of their prayers, and have received a cordial assurance from very many of them. Also the various branches of the Salesian Family have pledged themselves to stay fraternally close to us in imploring from the Holy Spirit his much-needed guiding light.

It should however be clear that we must be the first to feel concerned and indeed duty-bound to have recourse to prayer. I therefore invite all of you, particularly the sick and suffering confreres, to accompany the Chapter members with your fervent, humble and trusting prayer. The work of this great assembly of ours touches our deepest spiritual concerns and needs. This is one more reason why we should enrich it with that wealth which comes from our contact with God-prayer that is.

We can thus feel hopeful that the Chapter will attain its set goals and will bring about the Salesian spiritual and apostolic renewal which is eagerly awaited not only by our confreres, but also by all those who regard themselves as a vital part of our Family and cherish the destiny and mission entrusted by Divine Providence to our beloved Congregation in the Church and society.

Divine Providence now summons us to look forward

Dear Confreres, with this brief letter at the conclusion of my six-year term of office, we bring to an end a long series of letters by which we meant to strengthen our fraternal and family ties uniting each member of the Congregation, regardless of where he may be living, to the Rector Major and to the center of the Congregation — a center we all must look to as the center of power and light in our Family.

Looking back, I remember first of all our very many meetings in the most varied places of the world — meetings which were always marked by the Salesian family spirit. Once again I can see all of you and relive with a great deal of personal satisfaction those happy and enriching moments spent together.

On many other occasions I had the opportunity to get in touch with you through my letters addressed either to individuals or more commonly to groups. Through this means too were we able to share deep and cherished sentiments of fidelity and love to Don Bosco and the Congregation.

But Divine Providence now asks us to look forward. It is to this end that we are about to celebrate the 21st General Chapter.

The Superiors who will be elected by this Chapter will, as we deeply trust, be assisted by the One who always stood by Don Bosco with motherly care, and watched over and guided and comforted our Congregation in its often difficult and troubled journey. Supported by the consensus and active collaboration of all of us, the new Superiors will promote the advancement of our Congregation. They will give every bit of their energies to the carrying out of the constructive, practical and stimulating deliberations which will come out of the General Chapter.

We will join whatever forces we have — be they large or small, it hardly matters — for the accomplishment of a program of resolute renewal.

My cordial and brotherly greeting

On my own part, I first of all send my cordial and brotherly greeting to each of you, particularly to those who are suffering in body or spirit and those who are prevented, against their wills, from participating in full in the life and mission of the Congregation.

And I ask you to remember me frequently to the good Lord that in his infinite mercy he may overlook all the shortcomings and failures of my far from short term of office.

At the same time I should like to express from the bottom of my heart my sincere regret for any wrong that I may have done anyone in any way, albeit unintentionally, in the exercise of my mandate.

The Good Lord grant me to make myself, within the limits of my capacities, still useful to the Congregation, most of all

through prayer, a loving observance of the Constitutions and any service — modest though it may be — which I will still be able to render to it.

May Mary Help of Christians bless all the Salesians, the Salesian Sisters, the Cooperators and all those who, from the Volunteers of Don Bosco to the Past Pupils, feel that they are a living part of our great and beautiful Family.

And may Don Bosco always be our Father and Teacher.

Fr. LOUIS RICCERI
Rector Major

A grave loss

We just received the very sad news of the death of His Excellency Monsignor ANTONI BARANIAK, Archbishop of Poznam (Poland).

He was born at Sebastianowo, in the archdiocese of Poznam, on 1st January 1904. Ordained priest on 3rd August 1930, he was elected Titular Bishop of Theodosiopolis in Armenia and nominated Auxiliary of the Archbishop of Gnesna on 26th April 1951. He was promoted Archbishop of Poznam on 30th May 1957. He died piously in the Lord on 13th August 1977.

I shared in spirit the profound bereavement and sorrow of the clergy and the faithful of Poznam, and of the beloved confreres of Poland on the grave loss of this very worthy confrere, and I reserved to myself the writing of his obituary letter. In it I will present the figure of this great son of Don Bosco who in difficult and even tragic moments managed to be always a faithful servant of the Church, according to the teachings of Don Bosco.

In the meantime I recommend him to your prayers, so that he may be welcomed into God's Kingdom through the loving-kindness of our Blessed Lord.