



acts

of the general council

year LXXVIII july-september 1997

N. 360

official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma



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

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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**LETTER TO THE DON BOSCO VOLUNTEERS,
TO THE SALESIANS AND ALL GROUPS
OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEGINNING
OF THE INSTITUTE**

Introduction. - The originality of the Spirit of God. - The ministry of the Rector Major. - The salesian nature of the Institute. - A fact which challenges the Salesians and the Salesian Family. - The consecrated secular state. - The unique elements of consecrated secularity. - Consecration 'qualifies' secularity. - Secularity 'defines' consecration. - The mission of consecrated secular persons. - An original salesian spirituality. - Conclusion.

Rome, 24 May 1997
Feast of Mary Help of Christians

My dear confreres,

My visits to different parts of the Congregation have shown me the interest of Provinces and local communities in the guidelines of the GC24. In some places they are only just approaching the matter, while others are already adopting concrete suggestions for the animation of the educative and pastoral communities, of the Salesian Family and of the Salesian Movement.

I am also convinced of the fruitfulness of these three working environments which allow us to join numerous lay people to us, exploit their vocational and professional qualities which are in line with our spirit, and make them sharers in our responsibility for the salesian mission through suitable formative processes.

In particular, I want to stress the fact that the Salesian Family, about which I have already had the opportunity to write to you, is becoming consolidated through the growth of each individual group and attention to the Family as a whole. The two processes are taking place simultaneously. Each group is called upon to grow by incorporating new members, to strengthen itself internally by a program of formation, and to make itself autonomous in apostolic initiatives and in organization. Together, on the other hand, communication is fostered, a coordination is established with advantages and concrete requirements but without rigid schemes, and in consequence mutual support is offered and greater depth is given to the spirituality we have in common.

It is precisely from this standpoint of helping the individual groups to grow and to keep in mind the whole Family, that I have thought it useful to offer also to you the text of the letter I have written for the Don Bosco Volunteers at their request on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of their Institute.

It seemed to me that it would be of help if the whole Family had a better knowledge of this Institute, which at present has 1,300 members, in 150 groups and subgroups spread across 44 countries, and which can be further extended in many countries where other groups of our spiritual Family are already at work. And at the same time, a reflection on their identity will help us Salesians and the entire Family to better understand one of the dimensions of our mission: the lay and secular dimension, which during the present six-year period we are intending to take up decisively, especially as regards its practical consequences.

The letter will also have practical results in connection with the spiritual assistance which in accordance with our Regulations (cf. art 40) we must give to the DBV, and which nowadays is all the more necessary because of the world situation and the present era of the Church.

I therefore entrust this letter to your careful attention, not

least as an act of thanksgiving to God and as a testimony of affection for our Volunteer sisters. It concerns our charism, our spirit, our mission and our Family.

* * *

Dear Sisters in Don Bosco,

Since my first meeting with your Central Council, you have been inviting me to write a letter in which, prompted by the 80th anniversary of your Institute, I could offer a stimulus to the process of renewal on which you are engaged in the light of Vatican II.

I willingly comply with your wishes. It is in line with the reflection of the SDB GC24 which analyzed more deeply the sense of the sharing and communion in Don Bosco's spirit and mission with the laity, whose vocation is marked by its secular character: and you represent for us a special category of secular persons, almost a point of meeting and fusion between the experience of religious and that of lay people.

The letter provides me with an opportunity to reexamine the significance and value of the salesian charism lived in a consecrated secular form; and to identify, in recalling a fact which might seem only a calendar item, an event of grace which is a reminder to all the members of the Salesian Family and prompts them to a renewed commitment.

I do not want to repeat things which are already well known to you, and which you are striving so zealously to put into practice in your lives. But as I reflect on the different groups of the Salesian Family, I think it may be opportune to refer once again to certain facts which already form part of the Church's heritage and should be part too of our common vision and mentality.

As a secular Institute you represent a characteristic phenomenon in the Church. To dwell for a moment on the aspects

which constitute what is new about you and are at the roots of your originality, will help all of us to be better aware of our salesian vocation and more faithful to it.

1. The originality of the Spirit of God.

Your vocation to a consecrated life in the world takes shape in the historical and ecclesial context of the post-modern age recently begun.

The human race is at a crucial turning point in its history, characterized by many signs which are positive and others which are ambiguous. Among these is the tendency to think that it is sufficient unto itself and therefore has no need of God nor of the sacrament of the Church in the development of its life. We are witnessing a dangerous divorce between technical and scientific progress and faith in the living God, who is relegated to private life.

This was asserted by Paul VI on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of *Provida Mater*: "The most serious problem in the present development is that of the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders".¹

The signs of this tendency are an insistent challenge to us. On the one hand they obscure the religious connection in many sectors of public and social life, and on the other there is a tendency towards vague spiritual experiences which imply a flight from concrete experience.

The Church, for its part, has devoted particular attention to the development of consecrated life, recognizing the various forms in which it has been already expressed and its openness to new manifestations still unthought of. It is an indication of the originality of the Spirit who is present in all ages.

Secular consecration is one of these novelties which shows

¹ Paul VI on 25th anniv. of *Provida Mater*

that the Church has not ceased to reach out and discern.² The fundamental stages you know already, because you have been involved personally in following them: from *Provida Mater* (1947) to the first International Congress of Secular Institutes (1970), to the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (1995), and to the celebration of the 50th anniversary of *Provida Mater* (1997). You are also able to give due weight to the rich indications which the Supreme Pontiffs have offered you, from Pius XII to John Paul II.

Your Institute has followed with enthusiasm the process of renewal called for by the Council, and in your General Assemblies you have studied more deeply the various constitutive elements of the charism. After the pontifical recognition of the Institute (7 August 1978), you have lived in depth and rich spirituality the reformulation of the Constitutions.

The beatification of Fr Philip Rinaldi (1990) gave a further impulse to your renewal, accompanied by the Rector Major, Fr Egidio Viganò, who was always paternally close to you with his word and understanding, with reflection and pastoral guidance.

In the meantime you have spread to new areas and have uninterruptedly increased in number, while at the same time consolidating your organization in the area of animation and providing efficacious instruments for formation. Today your Institute is seen as well founded, with many members and fertile in vocations, and capable of autonomy.

The prevailing religious and social circumstances make it the more urgent that you consider who you are and what place you occupy in the Church and the Salesian Family.

We all recognize (in the words of Paul VI) that "there has been an uninterrupted rain of new jewels, an unexpected flourishing of new initiatives of holiness"³ in the Church and, for our part, in Don Bosco's Family. And we feel that it is good for all of us to be aware of the fact.

² cf. VC 10

³ Paul VI to Superiors of Sec. Insts. 20. Sep. 1972

2. The ministry of the Rector Major.

I read in your Constitutions: "The foundation, the project of life, and tradition places the Institute in the circle of the Salesian Family, and it has been officially recognized as part of it.

The Institute considers the Rector Major of the Salesians, successor of Don Bosco, as the Father of the entire Salesian Family; he is called upon to promote among the various groups and members the unity of the spirit and fidelity to the common mission"⁴.

In virtue of the common awareness of a paternity which derives from Don Bosco, and in fidelity to the task entrusted to me of guarding and fostering the salesian spirit in harmony with the different manifestations of the salesian vocation, I begin this reflection on consecrated secularity.

I approach it from many different and complementary standpoints: the Salesian Family in its entirety, the unique nature of the Secular Institute of the DBV, the relationship between the Volunteers and the Congregation, the salesian spirit in its various shades according to each Group, and other similar viewpoints. The present letter is meant to be fraternal and orientative in style, and so I shall incorporate points for reflection and motivations for orientation.

It is a letter addressed to you, dear Sisters, but it is offered for careful reading to all the Groups of the Salesian Family. It will contribute, I hope, to a mutual enrichment through the knowledge and communication of the endowments of each Group, and this in turn will develop the spirit of Don Bosco which you share and enrich with a unique type of expression.

The attaining of the 80th anniversary of the foundation of your Institute becomes in this way an event of grace and of fidelity which involves all the members of our Family.

⁴ C DBV 71

3. The "Salesian" nature of the Institute.

Much has been said and written in this connection. You have condensed the substance of it in article 5 of the Constitutions: "The Volunteers live their vocation by making their own the salesian charism which identifies them in the Church and in the world.

Pastoral charity, the central nucleus of the spirit of Don Bosco, renders them particularly sensitive and open to the human values which the Saint drew from the heart of Christ.

As Don Bosco, they entrust themselves completely to Mary, because they know that she continues in history 'her mission of Mother of the Church and Help of Christians'"⁵.

It may be superfluous to dwell on this point of the vocation of the DBV, if we keep in mind your origin and development. Nonetheless I think it interesting to draw your attention to it once again, albeit briefly, because it is at the root of your originality among secular Institutes and in the Salesian Family itself it constitutes a specific expression.

You yourselves define the salesian charism as identifying you in the Church and in the world⁶. Make it your distinguishing mark: let others recognize in you your salesian roots. Let your life show forth the linkage you have with salesian reality, so that your thoughts and actions, your options and criteria, your words and witness of life express and diffuse the salesian spirit in the Church and in the world. Fr Egidio Viganò, in the letter he addressed to you in 1979, reminded you that "your salesian character is not something tacked on to your Institute; it is vital and elemental".

This means that the consecration you live either finds expression in certain typical values of evangelical life lived in the salesian spirit, or else it cannot have the importance the Church requires in giving it official approval.

⁵ C DBV 5

⁶ cf. C DBV 5

Very rapidly, and to some extent synthetically I want to remind you: your holiness is either salesian or it is not holiness at all.

This is the 'identifying' element of which the article of the Constitutions speaks. It takes nothing from the compass and vitality of your secularity: quite the opposite. It sustains and gives life and direction to the path of persons who live in the world with the radicality typical of consecration.

For you the result is to be found in the harmony of the features you bring together around and in force of salesianity.

On this point reserve is out of place. People can know you and you can manifest yourselves openly as disciples and followers of Don Bosco in your pursuit of holiness.

4. A fact which challenges the Salesians and the Salesian Family.

Reflection on the salesian character which is your distinguishing element raises a question in my mind: is the Institute of the DBV sufficiently known by my confreres and by all the members of the Salesian Family?

This is not just a rhetorical question. Some expressions heard in our communities and groups, which I quote in a simplified form, illustrate the dimensions of the problem and questions which cannot be left unanswered.

To some your identity is unclear. They see it as halfway between religious and laity because there are no visible signs of identification! That probably explains why they find it difficult to speak of your vocation.

Others are surprised by your reserve. It seems to them that it commits you to a difficult task of being present and absent at the same time, and binds you to a kind of evangelization which has little impact and reduces vocational possibilities.

And there are still others who wonder about your real involvement in a secularized society for proposing gospel paths to so many brothers and sisters immersed in consumerism, who

have lost the sense of life. They think of your presence as more natural in the Church than in the secular environment.

If such questions are raised, it could mean that we Salesians too should have a better knowledge of the effective identity of a secular Institute, both within and outside the Salesian Family. I hope therefore that the present letter may lead to reflection in salesian communities.

The salesian vocation needs many different expressions through which it can enter daily life from different standpoints: that of the Volunteers is typical and significant for the harmony between the option for evangelization and involvement in ordinary human contexts. It therefore needs its own elbow-room and its own specific forms of presence and action.

5. The consecrated secular state.

You DBV, therefore, are salesian women and your distinguishing characteristic is your consecrated lay state.

Very opportunely, in your IV General Assembly, you base your reflection on consecrated secularity on the mystery and criterion of the Incarnation. From this standpoint we can look again at the sense of secular consecration and the spirituality which must sustain your life.

In the light of what you yourselves have already offered to your Sisters, I will point out some further steps that need to be taken in the development of the vocation of a DBV.

I recognize from the outset that many problems still remain open in connection with secular consecration. A simple and immediate example concerns the imprecise or preferential use of the expressions 'consecrated secularity' or 'secular consecration'. In these different modes of expression there are shades of meaning which are not without their importance.

It is not my intention to take up all the problems, nor consider them under all their various aspects: that would require

an ample treatise of theology, canon law and spirituality. I want rather to consider matters from the standpoint of the Salesian Family, to help its members understand, and from your own perspective to encourage you to realize your vocation to the full.

It must be recognized that secularity (and in consequence consecrated secularity) is continually changing. New situations are met with every day in the fields of the family, economy, social life, political options, and in general in the whole of human commitment.

But there are certain definite points of reference. There is a text of *Perfectae Caritatis* which defines the significance and orientation of secular Institutes: "While it is true that secular institutes are not religious institutes, at the same time they involve a true and full profession of the evangelical counsels in the world, recognized by the Church. This profession confers a consecration on people living in the world, men and women, laymen and clerics.

Therefore they should make it their chief aim to give themselves to God totally in perfect charity. The institutes themselves ought to preserve their own special character – their secular character, that is to say – to the end that they may be able to carry on effectively and everywhere the apostolate in the world and, as it were, from the world, for which they were founded.

At the same time let them know quite clearly that they will be unable to accomplish so great a task unless the members have so thorough a grounding in matters divine and human that they will be truly leaven in the world, for the strengthening and increase of the Body of Christ. Superiors therefore should devote great care to the formation, and especially the spiritual formation, of their subjects, and also to the promotion of their higher studies".⁷

⁷ PC 11

I have used this long quotation to reaffirm the fundamental points expressed by the Council, the implications of which have not been fully grasped by everyone. A few comments on them will help to meet the difficulties referred to earlier.

A particular characteristic.

The text of *Perfectae caritatis* states clearly that secular Institutes are not religious Institutes. There is a fundamental distinction between the two: consecrated secular life is a different 'type' of life from consecrated religious life

"You", said Paul VI to members of secular Institutes, "enrich today's Church with a particular example in its secular life, which you live as consecrated persons; and with a particular example in its consecrated life, which you live as seculars".⁸

The element of 'example' in the two cases requires careful consideration. The secularity is not a mere aspect, an external sociological condition of life, nor is it just a collection of interior attitudes, but is a content of the consecration and spirituality.

The consecration, for its part, does not represent an added sanctifying factor but is rooted in the sense of secularity and expresses the soul of the secular Institute in so far as it is not merely 'placed' in the world but embodied in it.

The consecration, on the part of members of secular Institutes, is real and complete.

It is a morally perfect consecration, in the measure of the gift of grace communicated to each one, as in other kinds of consecration. It is not some kind of second-class consecration of reduced proportions; neither is it part of a 'broader' religious life, of which it might be an acclimatized example. It is not in fact derived from anything. The Spirit does not repeat himself.

⁸ Paul VI to Sups. of Sec. Inst. 20 Sep. '72

It is an original consecration, expressed in the setting of a new institution. It is complete because it permits a complete and loving donation to God and to men, which renders it authentic despite certain mundane appearances.

It is a matter of an evangelical life characterized not by external, psychological or spiritual separation from the world, but by the free practice of the evangelical counsels in the heart of worldly reality, in view of a total offering to God and for the salvation of men.

As such, consecrated life in the world perceives the spiritual needs of the world in which it is inserted and assumes the true and deep aspirations of that world; but it also presents a scale of values different from those proposed by the world which is closed in on itself. By its witness and activity therefore it offers a critique of the stalemate situation in which the world frequently lives; silently it becomes an inspiring model for individuals and for society.

The consecration of members of secular Institutes is 'secular', i.e. lived in the midst of the world.

Some have cast doubt on the very possibility of a secular consecration, probably because they have a wrong idea of the sense of consecration as a donation of charity.

Charity is adaptable and can penetrate the whole of creation. It can be lived in every state of life and in every social environment. It can reach its full flowering even while remaining in contact with the most material and corporeal realities of this world.

It is true that certain conditions are necessary. The Gospel enunciates them and the experience of the Church explains them. But the cloister is not one of them, nor is the need to copy religious life.

The fullness of charity emerges like a parable narrated by the Holy Spirit at a point in the Church's history and in that of mankind by continually new means.

Certainly this is a point difficult to grasp, even in our own Salesian Family, by those without direct knowledge of secular institutes, or who are not sufficiently open to the action of the Holy Spirit who "breathes where he wills".

The members of secular Institutes can be men and women, lay people and priests.

The ruling is not something secondary. The four points linked with generic difference and situation in the Church could be explored at greater length by asking why such specific enumeration is made.

The fundamental reason is that secular consecration constitutes "the original common characteristic"; it assumes all the conditions or traits in a particular synthesis, enriching them and being itself enriched by them.

I will not go more deeply at this moment into the theme of feminine secular consecration, which concerns you directly. That can be considered at some other time.

I would like rather to recall in these circumstances that, in harmony with the Don Bosco Volunteers there have begun the "Volunteers with Don Bosco" (known in English as the "Don Bosco Secular Institute" - translator's note). This is an incipient male secular institute, which at present exists in various countries of the salesian world in increasing numbers and quality of presence. It is a true gift from the Lord!

The experience already gained by the Congregation in respect of the DBV will be made available to bring the DBSI to a successful conclusion.

All these categories have an element in common: consecration lived in the secular condition and secularity assumed even to the degree of consecration.

The characteristic of secular Institutes is their secular nature

The image which best depicts their presence and action is that of leaven. Speaking of consecrated secular persons, Pius XII said: "They live in the midst of the world, their apostolate is carried out with the world's means, their activity is directed to the world's sanctification, and they work after the fashion of leaven. Their whole life is an apostolate and must be expressed as apostolate".⁹

The secularity which is proper to the vocation of the individual members shapes also the Institutes themselves. Their form of staying in the world is that of leaven in the dough. It is useless to ask that they become more visible. Profession for them does not imply organized forms of fellowship expressing a new membership. Obedience does not determine a place and type of apostolic work, and poverty does not mean the personal renunciation of goods and income. Chastity, in which is expressed the option of love for God and neighbour, is lived in a form more likely to give rise to questions than to manifest immediately a religious preference.

The quality of being leaven invests the whole existence of each member and shapes the project of the Institute as a whole.

The purpose is twofold. On the one hand there is the sanctification of the world through a Christian presence expressed in the radical form of a conscious and active consecrated life; and on the other there is immersion in the world and working from within it, so to speak, for its reinvigoration and the growth of the Body of Christ.

The laity are a catalyst in the world, and secular Institutes are the same in the Church which lives in the world. Their particular mission is to animate the laity if the Institute is a lay one, and to animate the priesthood if its members are priests.

⁹ Pius XII, *Primo feliciter*

Those responsible for secular Institutes have a primary and almost sole task: the spiritual formation of the members.

It is not the responsibility of the leaders to direct the apostolate of the Institute, as would be the case with religious superiors. They cannot dispose of individuals by demanding of them pastoral tasks in a community structure; they have to be left where God has placed them, so that they may become centres of irradiation in the world and among the people.

Poverty of material structures serves to keep them within the bounds of apostolic discretion proper to consecrated secular persons.

Those in charge, free as they are from the concerns of apostolic organization, must dedicate themselves to the formation of the members. The latter must be enabled to live in a full and efficacious form the apostolate linked with their professional occupation and with the social and cultural context in which it is expressed. It is in this that the force of heaven resides.

6. The unique elements of consecrated secularity.

There are two inseparable aspects to your vocation: consecration and secularity. And they are not simply juxtaposed or linked in some vague manner, but are mutually compenetrative.

Now it is enlightening to ask ourselves: why do we qualify the secularity of secular Institutes with the term 'consecrated'?

And why do we define the consecration of secular Institutes with the specification of 'secular'?

The combination of one term with the other gives rise to a number of questions and opens up an equal number of lines for reflection.

To 'qualify' in fact means to strengthen, to lead to a truer sense, to extract what there is of good in a reality, to improve it. And then 'define' emphasizes the limits within which we are

operating; it clarifies manner of life, content of spirituality, forms of activity.

The reflection will help the Groups of the Salesian Family to live certain characteristics of the common salesian vocation. You, in fact, stress realities which are of interest to all of us and which each Group is called upon to assume in line with its own identity.

6.1 Consecration 'qualifies' secularity

The Church's magisterium is constant in its numerous reminders to secular Institutes of the commitment to secularity.

"Secularity indicates your insertion in the world", said Paul VI to those responsible for secular Institutes at top level. "It does not signify only a position, a function, which coincides with living in the world while exercising a 'secular' trade or profession. It means before all else the awareness of being in the world as the specific place for the fulfilment of your Christian responsibility".¹⁰

These words clearly endorse the important declarations of the Council which underlie the experience of secularity lived even to consecration. Let me specify some of them.

The goodness of the world.

The statement takes us back to a new vision of the secular reality in which we are all inserted.

'World' has many meanings. Some biblical scholars list up to nine different senses in which this term is used in scriptural language. We do not need to list all of them.

What interests us at the moment is the significance of the term as it is used in *Gaudium et spes*: "The world (...) is the whole human family seen in the context of everything which

¹⁰ Paul VI to Sups. Sec. Inst. 20 Sep. '72

envelopes it: it is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and failures; the world, which in the Christian vision has been created and is sustained by the love of its maker, which has been freed from the slavery of sin by Christ, who was crucified and rose again in order to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that it might be fashioned anew according to God's design and brought to its fulfilment".¹¹

The term 'world' refers to all those realities which constitute our daily living; the warp and weft of relationships established between persons; geographical relationships based on territorial vicinity; historical and cultural relationships, laboriously constructed and now producing their results for good and evil; and finally social relationships which give rise to our towns and cities.

Rightly do you like to say, you who are consecrated seculars, that we are all born as seculars; and this because we are born as human beings inserted in the world.

The goodness to which we are referring highlights the presence of God in the world. The love and Providence of the Father, the redemption of the Son and the animation of the Holy Spirit have been at work in it from the beginning. This recognition is not something spontaneous or automatic. It is the result of grace, the consequence of a responsible response of a believer.

When the response implies also the assuming in Christ of the 'world' reality so as to collaborate in its fulfilment; when we aim at the realization of the Kingdom, to which we dedicate all our existence, our gifts and talents, our abilities and values, then we are no longer seculars only by birth or nature but we become so by a call and a vocational option to participate in the history of salvation, with our heart left permanently in the world to find and express in it the love of God.

¹¹ GS 2

What an amount of salesian sensitivity do we find in the attitude which assumes 'secularity' as a task to be fulfilled!

We are educators; human advancement is part and parcel of our daily apostolic commitment; we have to deal with persons, with culture, work and society; reason and faith together fashion our approach to situations; humanism shapes our spirituality! Our Family includes a secular dimension expressed in a wide variety of figures, among them the Cooperators and past-pupils. Within the Congregation itself we have the coadjutors who combine the lay state with religious consecration.

The mission is essential for a secular consecrated vocation.

In the document *Primo feliciter* we read: "The whole life of the members of Secular Institutes, consecrated to God by the profession of perfection, must be expressed in apostolate".¹²

This finds an echo in can. 713,1: "Members (of secular Institutes) express and exercise their special consecration in apostolic activity. Like a leaven, they endeavour to permeate everything with an evangelical spirit for the strengthening and growth of the Body of Christ".¹³

It is for this reason that the secular Institutes came into being. The recognized goodness of the world becomes, through vocation, a commitment for man. This is the most fertile perspective that derives from the mystery of the Incarnation.

We are made holy not *despite* our insertion in the world but because of it. The following of Christ finds in the worldly reality its place of realization and development.

There is a unity between Christian vocation and mission. Secular consecration does not detach from the world but brings about a deeper immersion to the extent that it grasps its sense and understands its destiny.

¹² Pius XII, *Primo feliciter*

¹³ CIC 713,1

This movement stems from the desire to enter more profoundly into God's love for the world, and thus play a personal part in the actuation of that love which the Father revealed in sending his only-begotten Son into the world.

It is an interesting vision for us Salesians.

We assert that it is the mission that gives its tone to the whole of our life.¹⁴ You declare that apostolic activity is the expression and realization of the consecration itself and takes in the whole of life. All those who take their inspiration from Don Bosco are considered active workers, animators and promoters of life.

With the DBV before our eyes we should grow in apostolic commitment, as required by the salesian charism and lived in different ways by each Group.

The new relationship between Christ and the world.

This is another perspective which helps us to understand why existence in the world can be consecrated.

In this relationship is to be found the greatest challenge to the Church and to conciliar renewal.

Paul VI, in his address of 7 December 1965, has expressed this in a rich spiritual tone which is nonetheless clear and exhilarating. "Profane lay humanism has appeared with a frightening stature, and in a certain sense has challenged the Council. The religion of the God who became man has met the religion (because that is what it amounts to) of the man who has become God.

What has happened? A clash, a struggle, an anathema? It could have happened, but in fact it did not. The old story of the Samaritan was the pattern of the spirituality of the Council, which was pervaded throughout by an immense sympathy. The revelation of human needs (and they become all the greater as

¹⁴ cf. C SDB 3

the human race increases in number) fully occupied the attention of our synod. Give it credit at least for this, you modern humanists, who have renounced the transcendence of higher things, and you will recognize our new humanism: we too, we above all, are helpers and promoters of man. [...] A current of affection and admiration flowed from the Council to the modern human world".¹⁵

The expressions of the presence of the Church in the world are as numerous as are multiple the real needs of men. There are pastors, bishops and priests, dedicated to the proclamation of the Word and responsible for ecclesial communion, placed and constituted by the Holy Spirit as authentic teachers of the faith, dispensers of the mysteries which lead the faithful to holiness, defenders of men and of the poor.

There are the lay faithful who form the great majority of the people of God for whom the Church is present in all temporal realities with its witness, proclamation and efforts for their transformation.

There are the missionaries of various kinds who plant, found and build new communities of the faithful throughout the world. Their only strategy is the force of the Gospel.

Religious, in the variety of their charisms, are a living Church which recalls the future of the Kingdom and the requirements of the beatitudes, presenting in the world the ultimate perspective of the construction of the city of man.

There are you, consecrated secular persons, who represent a forward wing of the Church in the world; you express the Church's desire to insert in it the strength of the kingdom and sanctify it from within by the power of the Beatitudes.¹⁶

From an external standpoint it could seem a humble presence, and can also be confused with the world in which you insert yourselves.

¹⁵ Paul VI, 7 Dec. '65

¹⁶ VC 10

We are convinced as believers that in the world and in the heart of events and of history there are 'seeds' which are waiting to express all their power, both Christian and evangelical. They need a stimulus, something to bring them together and get them moving in a continual commitment.

And this is how you work as Church. Your presence could become in effect "like an experimental workshop in which the Church verifies concrete methods for its relationship with the world"¹⁷, to quote Paul VI once again.

Relationships between the Church and the world are concretely visible at the present day in areas where human history is being shaped: in the social reality, culture, politics, economy, the arts and sciences, international life, the instruments of social communication.

Who is willing to get inside this ferment?

It is the very vastness of the commitment that gives rise to the question we asked at the beginning of this section: "why do we qualify the secularity of secular Institutes with the term 'consecrated'?" We become aware that it is necessary for the accomplishment of these tasks that there be a solid and robust interior supportive structure, like an animating centre.

To avoid remaining at theoretical ideas of secularity, a force is needed to transfer man and his life to a definitive horizon which is unconditioned love, self-donation almost as a sacrificial offering, a true and total consecration, identical with that which gave rise to the Institute and its development.

Every secular Institute is the result of an overpowering desire: that of charity, of love. Consecrated life is a total dedication of oneself to God, who is loved above all things else. This totality of dedication to God, in an authentic plenitude of love, is the decisive motivation lying behind the vocation of special consecration.

God is not only given the first place but he is there as the

¹⁷ Paul VI, loc. cit. 20 Sep. '72

raison d'être of consecrated life; in him the consecrated person finds himself and his relationship with the world and with others. From this the diaconate in the world takes its rise.

The heart, centre and sense of consecrated life is therefore the search for the perfection of charity, the charism par excellence, without which all the rest is of no value.¹⁸

Also for the Salesian the Church and the world are sometimes an environment for life and action; at other times they are the objective of vocational commitment; and sometimes too they form a reality difficult to bring together in unity in one's own existence and activity. They always represent the great content and motives for responsible living.

Your experience in the heart of the world with your heart in God can be a stimulus for the Salesian Family to live with greater authenticity and realism a characteristic which permeates our spirituality.

6.2 Secularity 'defines' consecration.

Without the world and its reality the members of secular Institutes would have no reason for their existence. They are *in* the world and *for* the world, as are the laity in general. With the latter they share the consecration of baptism and confirmation, which constitute the title and strength for the evangelical leavening of the world, but they assume such consecration in the most radical manner possible by the profession of chastity, poverty and obedience for the love of Christ.

They are therefore in the world in a particular way which 'qualifies' their condition as Christians: they are not *of* the world. By the calling and will of God they find themselves in the world, so that everything may be restored to the primitive order of creation and redemption.

It is important that consecration be expressed. In it resides

¹⁸ cf. 1 Cor 13

the leavening principle. Like Jesus, you are "consecrated and sent". But at the same time you must be able to "define" and bring out in this consecration the specific secular element. This will be advantageous to you DBVs and helpful also to all of us who call ourselves Salesian.

This perspective too stems from the mysteries of faith.

The Incarnation put to the test.

Many difficulties in the understanding, acceptance and evaluation of secular Institutes in Christian communities arise from the ways in which religious experience is understood and the need there is to resolve some knotty points of faith. There are realities which must be brought together in the daily life of the Christian which can be expressed in certain double-barrelled phrases: nature and grace, existence in the world and rapport with God, life and spirituality, Christian faith and history.

The relationship between them has sometimes been portrayed and lived as separation and lack of communication, which in some cases bordered on mutual indifference. It appears to be a case of two parallel planes of human existence. Development of each is attempted without direct reference to the other. In this view Christian life is not built on elements of social life, and the latter encroaches on the former only through sheer necessity.

If you want to express this in Don Bosco's terms, you could say that the commitment to produce "a good Christian and upright citizen", in the same person and at the same point in life, does not create a problem.

In other cases the approach has been to apply a regime of external communication, considering human experience as only the field of application of ethical and spiritual demands of faith. This certainly represents a step forward as regards separation, with evident consequences in all areas of life.

In cases like this a secular consecration could have no place!

It would be necessary to wait for a new period in history when it would be possible to speak of the reassembly of the two levels. Saving grace does not build an independent world, closed to temporal life, cut off from daily reality, preserved from natural pollution. It creates instead the joyful possibility of realizing a project of life in a new and renewed form.

In this way the Church itself finds once more roles and settings more open to its intervention. Placed neither outside nor above daily reality it shares in the human travail in the construction of the earthly city by preparing, directing and guiding it towards the heavenly Jerusalem.

We Salesians have learned from St Francis de Sales the possibility, principles and manner of living a "devout" life, i.e. a life radically directed to God and shaped by him to the conditions of the world according to its own state. And at the school of Don Bosco we have learned that there is no discontinuity between work and prayer, human advancement, education and evangelization, profession and apostolate.

Fr Philip Rinaldi has passed this on to your Institute with simple indications but with extraordinarily practical results. We do not oppose elements; we bring them together. We do not separate, even when we distinguish different modes of intervention and content renewed in the light of the Gospel of salvation.

We recognize that we have, as indeed has the whole Church, a secular dimension. We know that we are a living and concrete part of the world. We rediscover our vocation of service in view of its sanctification and consecration. Educative sensitivity obliges us to study the great evangelical values immersed in the life of the world: justice, peace and love.

Salvation and human history.

Words have their value for a proper understanding of reality and for communication purposes. When we use the term 'secularity', it will be well to keep in mind three different levels of reference.

The first and most immediate level is to the material reality in which we are all inserted. We are all 'secular' from the fact of having been born in this reality which has accompanied us throughout our existence. Here the term 'secular' has no special nuance either negative or positive. The world conditions our existence, to the point that all our resources are ordered to it: faculties, sentiments, intelligence and practical energies.

A second level follows from the appropriation which man makes of the world through his interventions which modify what is offered him from birth: here we have culture and humanization.

The intervention he makes consists in 'work'. It can also be called 'professionalism', practical commitment, and by many other terms. It results in the building of a physical environment, a kind of society, a communal organization of life and relationships. From this standpoint too we are all seculars, even though with different responsibilities and especially with different levels of awareness.

The third level involves the Christian life, with religious commitment and the salvation of the world, willed and fulfilled by Christ.

As believers we assume the responsibility of 'sanctifying' or 'consecrating' the secular reality, of specifying its reference to God, of continuing and mediating the event of Christ, of saving it with him from sin, of orienting it towards its fulfilment.

All of this together forms human history, within which there is the presence of God and is enacted Christ's mystery. Let us now therefore speak of the history of salvation.

These are not two parallel stories. Together they realize a common process for the advancement and salvation of man and society, without confusion but also without separation.

Salvation "is already present here on earth, received and mediated by men; they, the members of the earthly city, are

called to form the family of the children of God even in this present phase of the history of mankind and to increase it continually until the Lord comes".¹⁹

The secular condition therefore is to be understood as a property of man but willed by God, in which his grace is active. It represents the normal setting in which God loves man and brings about man's salvation.

Today's theology proposes a vision as evocative as it is joyful: grace comes not only after the creation but precedes it and is its cause. In this effusive movement, of communication, of self-giving, of this association of other living beings in his own life, in this turning of God to man as a grace, arises creation itself! In other words, we human creatures on our arrival in this world are already marked by grace.

In things, in man, in the world, there is a certain order, a capacity, an affinity, a fact of having been made to live with God through his grace. Sin has made and makes this difficult, and this is a reality we cannot ignore. But we recognize that the world, in so far as it is man's world, was made to be a support so that man be directed towards God. And the world cannot be called human unless it helps man to attain the fullness of his encounter with God.

The consecration of secular persons bears witness to these real possibilities. Often they remain hidden to the eyes of the majority in the world. But those who live in a secularity shaped by consecration, i.e. assumed in a specific vocation, recognize and are able to discern the God who is present but hidden.

In this way secularity provides contents of spirituality, and prompts ways of involvement to consecration itself.

¹⁹ cf. GS 40

7. The Mission of consecrated secular persons.

The animation of temporal realities.

The mission or collaboration in salvation of lay believers, present as leaven in secular realities, is designated by various names which have already clear references.

In the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*²⁰ we find the expression "the laity consecrate the world itself to God"; in the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, we read the words "the Christian animation of the temporal order"²¹; in the document on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et spes*, finally, this need is expressed in the words: "impressing the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city".²²

And then in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* there is an ample section describing the setting of the presence and work of the lay faithful. It is headed: "To live the Gospel, serving the person and society".²³

In n.34 we read: "Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about, what is needed is to first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself in these countries and nations where indifference, secularism and atheism are widely spread".²⁴

The process of ecclesial reflection in the period following the Council has highlighted the fact that the worldly and secular realities (in the sense already explained) are not an obstacle in the plan of salvation, and not even an extraneous element or one which is juxtaposed; they represent what the body is to the soul.

They are part of the loving design of God the Father, in so

²⁰ cf. LG 34

²¹ cf. AA 7

²² GS 43

²³ cf. CL 36-44

²⁴ cf. CL 34

far as they are instruments and settings for salvific Providence. They were assumed by the Word in the Incarnation to express in a human manner man's relationship with God and to collaborate in his plan of redemption.

And then the work of the Spirit sets in motion human forces for the transformation of the world, as in the first creation he prompted the passage from chaos to cosmos.

The realities which some call profane, in line with a certain idea of what is sacred, have an objective linked with salvation and can be directed towards it. They are "sacred" on account of the sign of God who is in them, in line with their particular nature. But they are made "sacred" (consecrated) to the extent that they are consciously placed by man under the influence of the presence of God.

There is nothing automatic nor merely ritualistic in all of this. It is up to man, to the believer, to the consecrated person sustained and reinvigorated by the Spirit, to help the world to open up to God and to the salvation that stems from rapport with him.

What we have said means that we have to look at profane realities with an attitude of respect on account of the good they represent, recognizing their legitimate authority in their particular order and with respect to their proper objectives.²⁵

It means also taking the natural order seriously, working for its perfecting because it expresses the positive part of what is inscribed within it.

In these ways is realized, with similarity of involvement but diversity of emphasis, the commitment of the laity and of consecrated secular persons in the world.

For the latter the reflection of Paul VI is valid: "In this way, from your consecrated life, also your activity in the world – be it individual or collective, in professional areas in which you are committed either individually or in groups – receives a

²⁵ cf. GS 36

marked orientation towards God, since in a certain way it too is involved and affected by your same consecration".²⁶

It is typical of lay people to be concerned in the first instance about putting temporal things in order so that they respond to their proper end and are placed in history for the service of man, working from within and in accordance with the laws proper to their own dynamism. Consecrated persons have as their primary aim that of witnessing to the necessity, primacy and reality of the presence of God in life, or recalling the indispensable nature of Christ and of the spirit of the Gospel for the salvation of the temporal order.

This is expressed in the Exhortation *Vita consecrata* in n.10, the only paragraph dedicated explicitly to secular Institutes: "Through their own specific blending of presence in the world and consecration, they seek to make present in society the newness and power of Christ's Kingdom, striving to transform the world from within by the power of the Beatitudes".²⁷

Professionalism forms part of the consecration.

The areas I spoke of earlier (culture, social and political work and development) are not aspects which can be left to chance. They have laws which must be observed, because they are designed by Providence as the road which leads to a meeting with God. By professionalism we mean work carried out with responsibility, with attention to quality, to the sense of secular finality, capacity for service and collaboration.

Here consecration becomes binding, and also something specific as regards the secular laity. "Although you are in the world, your situation differs in a certain way from that of the simple laity in the sense that you are committed in the same worldly values, but as consecrated persons: i.e. not so much for affirming

²⁶ Paul VI, loc. cit. 20 Sep. '72

²⁷ VC 10

the intrinsic validity of human things in themselves, but for explicitly orienting them according to the evangelical beatitudes".²⁸

Those who are consecrated bear everywhere the seal of the Spirit. Their professionalism therefore has two aspects, both of them equally important and meaningful for defining in a more complete manner the sense of their life: competence in their particular secular occupation, and competence in spirituality (or life in Christ) through experience and reflection.

For a consecrated member of a secular Institute the spiritual life consists also and mainly in taking up responsibly one's own work, the social relationships common in the world, life's environment in its various expressions, as particular forms of collaboration in the coming of the Kingdom of heaven. And at the same time it means being ready to explain the reason for one's own hope and options, and giving guidance to those who seek it.

8. An original salesian spirituality.

As I approach my conclusion I offer you some incentives for a life "according to the spirit" lived with a salesian style in an authentic consecrated secularity.

I do not have in mind either a complete treatise nor a definitive schematic arrangement. That would require us to return to preferential items and the content and form of the mission, to rise again to the heart of Christ and to pastoral charity. These things you have already formulated in your Constitutions, taking in doctrinal inspirations and summarizing lived experiences.

The spirituality represents the synthesis in and of personal and community life. You DBVs are asked to keep together three inseparable aspects: personal sanctification, the construction of the Kingdom, and the consecration of the world. It is

²⁸ Paul VI, loc. cit. 20 Sep. '72

not an easy task! You have already learned that the salesian spirit is the element which binds them together in a particular and original physiognomy which is manifested in life and activity. From this flows the grace of unity: a gift which comes with the vocation, but which needs to be consciously cultivated.

I want now only to emphasize some traits connected with consecrated secularity, the point we chose as the focus of our reflection.

Being inserted full-time and with full rights in the world constitutes a clear indication for the utilization of daily life. And then secular professionalism leads to adaptation to times, rhythms, needs and expressions, which tend towards what is "concrete". From these two points stem some important indications for your spiritual style.

Be attentive to little items in human history and to the work of the Spirit in the heart of ordinary people.

Daily life needs to be viewed with a unified vision. It seems to be made up of so many bits and pieces: work, meetings, news items, personal elements, plans and sufferings!

In daily life things happen which link us with God, and others which lead us to men. The assemblage of the different fragments needs continual updating; it cannot be put off to a distant future, nor can every item be foreseen so as to protect what has been already achieved.

There are promptings which come from afar, from above, from experts; but there are also quiet whisperings from close at hand, from the poor, from those rich in wisdom and grace.

All this has to be brought together in a unity of love: the perceived love of God and the love you give to others. It is a matter of seeing through the eyes of Christ, and of spirit – the spirit of sympathy, of understanding, of close relationship.

In daily life there are aspects which anticipate and build the future: they are signs of the times. To be alert to how as many

people as possible live is to embrace the invitation of the Spirit and make certain options.

Salesian experience shows that the Oratory as a criterion for presence and action is the ideal environment for detecting the signs of the times. I am referring not to its structure but to its style and spirit. Free association with other people, listening to what they say, the possibility of detecting immediately the needs of youngsters and of adults and of giving them a suitable reply, the ability to replan proposals and initiatives – all these things give substance to a spirituality of daily life in the style of Don Bosco.

Make of your multiple daily events an experience of the Kingdom, hidden in the warp and weft of life.

The daily round means incarnation. In your words, gestures and actions, the grace that is within you becomes visible and expresses your consecration. By inculturating it and making it intelligible at the present day, you make ordinary things become significant and small signs eloquent with the expression of sense and humanity.

There is need perhaps to train oneself to spiritual discernment which can penetrate contemporary perplexities, the widespread fragmentation of the present day, and the precarious element which affects everything. There is also need to look beyond normal horizons, to do a bit of dreaming, to muse on new things and new possibilities.

Paul VI reminded everyone of this in *Evangelii nuntiandi* and referred explicitly to secular Institutes what he said in n.70: “(to make effective) all those latent Christian and evangelical possibilities which already exist and operate in the world”.²⁹

The ability to link events with their root; the openness to what is new and previously unknown, like the inrush of grace

²⁹ EN 70

that leads towards unity; the urge to be able to express the inexpressible that lies in one's own heart and in the heart of reality; internal enrichment, not as an accumulation of new items but as growth in the germination of seeds that have been sown; these are the things which transform the material elements of life into the sense of living.

And today we all need to rediscover the significance of history and its events which we are living and building, both by our presence and our absence.

Personally I am inclined to think that the "reserve" of a consecrated secular person is linked with daily life.

The members of a secular Institute are first and foremost human beings and Christians like all others. They are and want to be able to get on with everyone. Pius XII had already said in 1949 to a group of consecrated seculars: "You are consecrated to God, recruited for the service of Christ; the pact has been ratified. God knows it, the Church knows it, and you know it. But the world does not know it, but feels the beneficial effects which stem from the Christian substance of your existence and apostolate". The "reserve" therefore belongs to the level of "apostolic discretion" which consecrated men and women are called to live daily in their profession. The situation of secularization in which the world is at present living must not be overlooked; nor must be forgotten the need to remain as the leaven hidden in the mass of dough.

Everyone knows that if a mass ferments it is due to the leaven: that is quite certain! Everyone too can see that there are some who allow themselves to be guided by criteria which are commonly overlooked or deliberately ignored. All are also able to estimate how much of the Gospel, or of what is new, abides in the heart of some believers and is expressed in their actions. But this requires a process which unifies acts interiorly and exteriorly to the extent of showing the inspiration which is at their origin. It can be said, therefore, that consecrated secularity characterizes and qualifies, more than by ma-

terial activity, by the significance, the messages, the questions, the incentives or the new images of life it manages to provoke.

Build up a fabric of understandings and relationships, of dialogue and seeking, of sympathy and evangelical communion.

The consecrated secular person is and makes himself the travelling companion of his brothers and sisters.

He does not seek isolation and eschews marginalization.

He overcomes self-seeking and expressions of individualism.

He is able to make of existing differences a rich value for all.

He makes himself professionally qualified, because he knows that competence opens the doors of the intelligence, and consequently also of the heart.

He fosters dialogue and is a worker for communion.

It is almost a requirement inscribed in the vocation itself. "Your secularity prompts you to give special emphasis – as distinct from religious – to the relationship with the world. This relationship is not only a sociological condition, an external fact, but rather an attitude: to be present in the world, knowing that you are responsible for its service and for shaping it to God".³⁰

In point of fact, the rich nature of the secular state which we have been describing requires the depth of consecration to enable it to confront prevarications and corruption which are always possible. "The consecration you have made places you in the world as witnesses to the supremacy of spiritual and eschatological values, i.e. of the absolute character of your Christian charity which, the greater it is, will make the more relative the values of the world, while at the same time it will be helped by a right intention on your own part and that of your fellow members".³¹

³⁰ Paul VI, 25th anniv. of *Provida Mater*

³¹ Paul VI to Sups. Sec. Inst. 20 Sep. '72

Conclusion

And now that I have reached the end of this letter in which I wanted to focus on the consecrated lay state, I have become aware that from the reflections we have made, certain points have been highlighted which it would be worth our while to examine more deeply: the manner of promoting vocations, points to be emphasized in initial and ongoing formation, the maturing of spirituality, but especially the spiritual assistance you have asked for at every level³² and which the Salesian Congregation has undertaken to provide³³, because of the significance of your presence in the charism and Salesian Family.

These are tasks for the time ahead which we shall share according to our respective responsibilities. The event we are celebrating finds us therefore in a healthy state of dynamic fidelity to a vocation which seeks always to renew its response to the Lord.

This future we entrust to Mary Help of Christians. You look upon her as the "model of consecrated life in secularity",³⁴ because "accepting with faith the mystery of Christ in daily life, she lived her consecration to God with nothing that distinguished her from the women of her time, and found in work a way of life and of sanctification".³⁵



³² cf. Reg. DBV 20-22

³³ cf. Reg. SDB 40

³⁴ C DBV 11

³⁵ *ibid.*

ANIMATION OF THE EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY

Fr Antonio DOMENECH

Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

The GC24 has presented the Educative and Pastoral Community (EPC) as the place where is lived and manifested in a particularly intensive manner the sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco between Salesians and laity; it developed its nature and functions, giving special importance to the participation of lay people in its animation, and reaffirmed the task of the salesian community as its animating nucleus.

To give effect to what the Chapter had prescribed, the Provinces began to study the theme to decide on practical models for the realization of the EPC in the various works, which roles of responsibility and animation were to be entrusted to lay people, verify the functioning of the EPC, and specify the relationship between the Council of the EPC (or of the Work) and the Local Council.

By means of this present communication I would like to collaborate in the efforts of the Provinces to be practical by offering some elements of motivation and some guiding criteria.

1. The EPC, a salesian form of being present among the young for the realization of a common and shared project.

It may be thought at times that the EPC is a new structure added to the other organisms of management and participation

already existing in the various works or pastoral environments.

In presenting the EPC to us, the GC24 refers to Don Bosco's experience at Valdocco where he formed with the laity that first "house" or "family" for the young (cf. GC24, 155). The EPC, therefore, is the concrete expression of the salesian presence Don Bosco wanted as a family, i.e. a community of persons who share the mission of the education of the young, and especially the poorest of them (cf. GC21, 96, and especially GC24, 119, 156-157).

The EPC is the concrete form in which we want to fulfil the salesian mission in a particular place. We want to form a communion of persons around the salesian educative and pastoral mission in what is as far as possible a family atmosphere of young people and adults, parents and educators, laity and religious, to the extent of being able to become an experience of Church (cf. C 47).

2. The EPC is a living organism.

More than a structure or a cut and dried institution, the EPC is a living organism which exists to the extent that it grows and develops. Our task is not only to take care of its organization, but also to develop its life.

Here then are some elements that can help us to evaluate the degree of vitality of our own EPC and provide us with some indications for launching a positive process of growth.

In the first place we need to look at the quality of human relationships within it: to go beyond the purely functional relationships associated with the office held or the work carried out, by developing a fraternal rapport and interest in individuals; going beyond relationships based solely on friendship or harmony of ideas; moving towards a sharing of fundamental values of the salesian style and mission; passing beyond even a collaboration of purely good will so as to establish clearly the levels and content of shared responsibility and functions.

② Another important element of growth is the progressive maturing of the sense of belonging; one of the ways in which this is manifested is the ever more clear and conscious sharing of the objectives and criteria of the PEPS and in the ever more explicit and generous participation in educative and pastoral responsibilities, even to the extent of vocational identification.

③ Finally, and as a synthesis of all the rest, there comes the development of the educative and pastoral identity in each one and in the community as a whole: from a sharing of peripheral values like activities and specific interests to that of values central to the salesian educative and pastoral plan. This development of identity is manifested in the concern for one's own ongoing formation, in the personal and collective effort for a better professional, educative and Christian quality in one's own work, in the commitment for a renewal and updating of the various institutions and structures in line with the educative and pastoral criteria of the PEPS, and certainly too in the effort at harmony, at dialogue and a cordial presence among the young as a sign of educative love for them.

3. Central nature of animation.

It is not difficult to understand, therefore, that the fundamental task in the realization of the EPC is that of its animation, i.e. of creating a true family in which young and old, parents and educators, professionals and volunteers, share one and the same educative and pastoral project, with each one making his or her own original contribution, and with all mutually accompanying each other in their growth as individuals and as Christians, and in this way giving effect to a true experience of Church (cf. C 47).

|| All are involved in this process of animation; it is not the responsibility and task of just some of them. All, with their own particular forms of action and the relationships they maintain,

either foster or weaken it. There is no neutral ground; everything that happens in daily life either fosters the process of growth and development of the EPC, or it slows it down and prevents it.

4. Reciprocal relationship of salesian religious and of laity in the animation of the EPC.

The Chapter document recalls how Don Bosco at the beginning gathered together as many people as possible, ecclesiastics and laity, young and old, men and women, to stay with him and carry out for the young the mission God had entrusted to him. But of some of them Don Bosco asked more than this. He asked them to stay with him for ever, to commit themselves to the young full-time and with all their being, to dedicate their lives to the following of Christ for the faithful service of God and young people. They are the salesian religious (cf. GC24, 149).

In this sense, in the EPC we are a prophecy in action. In fact, through the testimony of our religious life we bear witness to:

- the primacy of God and of his love which can fill a whole life,
- the enlightenment which the following of Christ gives to educational activity, confirming and raising ordinary human values,
- the joy arising from the total dedication of one's life to a mission of education and evangelization,
- the fertility of community life as the activating principle of the family spirit to be lived in the EPC (cf. GC24, 151-153).

Lay people too enrich the EPC with their original contribution: they bring with them a concrete model of secular life, lived in the family, in their profession and their own particular social and political environment, and with their own specific professional educational and pastoral competence, and with

their own form of living the religious dimension of life and their Christian vocation in the world.

This reciprocal contribution offers to the EPC an enrichment of educative presence and makes it a true experience of Church, a witness and a significant reference point for the young. It is important therefore that each one develop to the maximum his own contribution in everything he does, overcoming (on our own part) the temptation to enclose our own condition as consecrated persons within our community life or limit it to certain moments of religious activity, while we appear and live as lay people in our professional work (cf. GC24, 45).

5. Tasks of animation of the EPC.

The animation and care of the life of the EPC includes a multiplicity of tasks which we can conveniently list and organize according to their importance. If we liken the EPC to a fruit-tree, its care supposes a series of actions directed to its various parts; they are all of them necessary but some are more fundamental and require a special professional competence to guarantee the quality of the fruit.

There are tasks which concern the more external and practical aspects of the EPC:

- *promoting its organization and coordination* of the various teams, by encouraging:
 - good communication (personal relationships, brisk information, dialogue),
 - elaboration, realization and verification together of the PEPS,
 - the efficacious and coherent functioning of the different structures, teams and organisms involved, etc.

Other tasks concern educative aspects:

- *enhance the quality of the educative value* of the objectives proposed, of the contents offered and of what is achieved,
 - by seeing to it that all proposals and activities realized in the EPC are in line with the PEPS, and give special educative attention to the very poor,
 - by developing a suitable educative methodology,
 - by inserting the EPC in its proper cultural, social and ecclesial environment.

Still other tasks, finally, concern the level of salesian identity:

- *the deepening at every level of an educative, spiritual and Christian formation of high quality*,
 - by motivating and organizing a systematic process of ongoing formation,
 - by following up the educative and Christian growth on an individual basis, together with vocational development,
 - by promoting in the educators the experience of Salesian Youth Spirituality;
 - *the ensuring of the salesian identity*, through:
 - the close, friendly and significant presence of Christian and salesian witnesses among the young,
 - an educative and Christian environment of high quality with specific suggestions for those better disposed,
 - a clear and opportune statement of the vocational option.

All these tasks are necessary and are linked with one another; but the last ones are more decisive for ensuring the animation of the EPC.

6. A specific service of animation: the animating nucleus.

All the components of the EPC take part in the animation, but some have the specific task of stimulating the contribution

of all, fostering its quality and coordination, and of following particularly the animation of those levels more decisive for the salesian identity and the quality of education and evangelization. These constitute the “animating nucleus” of the EPC.

They are not the only animators but are the driving force of the animation realized in the daily life of the EPC. Their function is above all that of prompting the involvement and responsible participation of the greatest possible number of members of the EPC in the work of overall animation.

This animating nucleus includes the salesian community in virtue of its consecrated and salesian vocation, but it is open also to lay people, especially those most closely identified with the salesian spirit and mission, who carry out functions of directive responsibility in the EPC.

It is even possible to have an animating nucleus at local level formed solely of lay people, where there is no salesian community, but with an SDB reference point or assistance either at provincial level or on the part of a neighbouring community which looks after the charismatic aspects and takes care of ministerial requirements (cf. GC24, 159).

7. The salesian community in the animating nucleus.

The GC24 declares: The salesian community is a ‘charismatic community’, which means that it is alive and that it guards, deepens and constantly develops Don Bosco’s charism. It carries out a specific animating activity with regard to the EPC, in a unified manner and with reference to the more decisive levels of animation” (GC24, 159).

The Chapter explains this task of the salesian community under these four aspects:

- *testifying to the primacy of God* and total dedication to education and evangelization,
- *guaranteeing the charismatic identity*,

- being the *centre of communion and participation*, calling on the laity to share in Don Bosco's spirit and mission,
- *prime responsibility for formation*, spiritual, salesian and vocational.

This specific animating activity not only applies to the community as such, but also to every Salesian who is an animator and continually prepares himself for the work.

8. Working model of animation of the EPC.

Assuming this task of animation presupposes that we have rethought our own situation and our function as a religious community within the EPC and the educative and pastoral process. In the past the salesian community took on almost exclusively the responsibility for the educative environment and work, with the help of the laity when necessary; today the salesian community must bring in the laity to share with them this responsibility, and assume within the EPC a specific task as a witness to salesianity, promoter of growth and communion, and guarantor of educative and salesian quality; in other words it is called to be the religious and salesian leaven in the EPC, of which the majority is made up of lay people.

This change is not just a circumstantial consequence of the falling numbers of SDBs, but an expression of a new mentality and a new anthropological, ecclesiological, charismatic, educative and pastoral vision, which we need to assume and deepen (cf. GC24, 162).

The GC24 speaks of an "*operative model*", recognized everywhere to some extent as valid and as the only practicable pattern in present conditions, i.e. the Salesians as the animating nucleus, the involvement of the laity and shared responsibility with them, and the drawing up of a possible plan, adapted to the needs of those for whom we are working, to the forces available and to the local context.

But the effective role of the Salesians in such a scenario varies greatly. In many works they do succeed in forming the nucleus referred to; in others they are already becoming an accompanying presence which constitutes a guarantee; in others they provide support and guidance but in a less direct manner" (GC24, 39).

It belongs to the Provincial with his Council to decide on practical models of the EPC (cf. GC24, 169).

9. Some practical consequences.

From all these perspectives emerge some practical guidelines as a help to the responsibilities of Provincials and Rectors with their Councils,.

- *All salesian communities and every confrere must be aware of this new working model, and accept its proper and specific responsibilities as animating nucleus of the EPC.*

If not all of the community do so, it leads to tensions, inhibitions, and individualism which compromises the significance and the efficacy of the salesian presence and activity.

This awareness is expressed in certain specific attitudes and modes of behaviour which are important, e.g.:

- joyful witness to our own religious and community life in the educative mission,
- the commitment of each and everyone to living the fundamental elements of the salesian identity, like the close and meaningful presence among the young, availability for personal contact, attention to the integrity of the PEPS in every activity, the overall vision of the whole of the salesian presence in promoting the inter-relationship and collaboration between the various works entailed, etc.,
- loyal collaboration with the various organs of participation already existing,
- active participation in the formation processes already in use in the EPC,

- concern for the development of the salesian vocation in the young and in collaborators etc.

It is advisable therefore that the community check up regularly on these attitudes, examine their motivations more deeply, and encourage the confreres in overcoming difficulties.

■ *Foster certain moments of special importance in the process of animation of the EPC.*

The whole life of the EPC forms part of animation: relationships, interventions, environment and so many little items of daily life either encourage the growth of the EPC or they hinder it. But there are some moments and some attitudes which are of special importance because of their catalytic function, and these the community, and especially the Rector with his Council, will foster in a special way. Here are some of them, by way of example:

- the process of the elaboration, realization and verification of the PEPS, encouraging the active participation of all the members of the EPC, and the SDBs first among them;
- the functioning of the collegial organs of participation, encouraging a climate of dialogue and collaboration, teamwork, adequate information and respect for the various levels of responsibility;
- moments of common formation, with their programming and methodology to ensure they have a motivating effect;
- moments when the salesian community and collaborators can come together for some celebration or festivity.

■ *Define and give effect to the structures most suitable for the animation of the EPC.*

The exercise of shared responsibility in the EPC requires a certain organization of roles and responsibilities through specific structures and organisms of participation.

The different situations of communities and provinces, legal norms and the nature of the works themselves call for a great

diversity of structures, but these must always respect certain criteria and requirements of the salesian style characteristic of the EPC. They include the following:

- *the organic unity of salesian youth pastoral work*: the structures must foster the integration and complementary nature of all initiatives, interventions and persons around the objective of the PEPS, overcoming simple divisions and sectorial organization; priority must therefore be given to the structures of coordination and integration of the different sectors of educative and pastoral activity, rather than to their excessive multiplication;
 - *communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco*: our structures must not just aim at being efficacious from a practical standpoint, like the structures of a business enterprise, but at integration of individuals in the educative and pastoral mission expressed in the PEPS; hence they will foster a serene and progressive dialogue on the content and motivations of the work, the necessary integration between familiar and professional requirements, especially of lay personnel, and economic and legal formalities in the characteristic salesian family style;
 - *the unity of the salesian plan for the area*, which is frequently served by several works (e.g. a school, parish and oratory) animated by a single salesian community: this requires the setting up of instruments for sharing, collaboration and dialogue between the different sectors and works, for the development of a unified pastoral line of approach with each work bringing its own specific contribution;
 - *clarity in the definition of roles*, of levels of shared responsibility, of areas of decision, of the competence of each organism, to ensure their complementary nature and an efficacious linked collaboration.
- *A fundamental structure: the Council of the EPC and/or the Council of the Work*, as the central organism which animates

and coordinates all the salesian work through reflection, dialogue, programming and revision of educative and pastoral activity (cf. GC24, 171).

It is an organism of coordination at the service of the unity of the salesian project in the territory where the EPC is at work, or the EPC of the various sectors in the case of complex works; rather than taking the place of or being superimposed on the different organisms of the EPC, by making decisions which are theirs to make, it must help them to keep always in mind the integral nature of the project, and to feel the responsibility they share for its elaboration, realization and verification; to keep in mind the overall needs and requirements of the youthful context, encourage linkage and collaboration between them, especially in wider services as, for instance, the formation of educators.

Its members must have a clear awareness of the PEPS as the concrete horizon of all the programming and activities of the different sectors, a will for communion and collaboration with the different groups of the Salesian Family working in the area, a sense of Church, a great desire for communion and to meet common needs for an ever better service to young people and their environment.

It belongs to the Provincial with his Council to decide the criteria of composition and to lay down the competence, levels of responsibility and linkage with the local Council of the salesian community (cf. GC24, 171). It would seem necessary to include in it the SDB members of the council of the house, the lay people who have directive roles and/or roles of coordination in the EPC, and some representation of the groups of the Salesian Family present in the area. But it will be well to coordinate the criterion of representation of all the sectors of the work with the need for an efficacious animation which requires a certain facility of action.

- *Responsibility of the Rector of the salesian community and of the local council in the EPC.*

The SDB Rector is the first in order of responsibility for the EPC; he animates the animators and is at the service of unity; he fosters the charismatic identity of the PEPS, in dialogue with the Provincial and in line with the provincial project; he promotes processes of formation and relationships, gives effect to the criteria for the convoking and formation of the lay people indicated by the Province, and maintains the linkage between the salesian community and the EPC (cf. GC24, 172).

The Council of the community assists the Rector and collaborates with him in these functions. In specifying the necessary linkage between the Council of the community and the EPC it will be well to keep in mind certain criteria: participation as members of the Council of the EPC, collaborating actively and directly in the process of reflection and decision making; assuming the final decision in matters which more directly involve salesian identity, formation and the convoking of lay people; fostering an always adequate exchange of information between the community and organisms of the EPC, with agility of dialogue and respect for the responsibilities of the different members.

I conclude by recalling what was said earlier: the EPC is a living organism, the concrete expression of that community of persons which Don Bosco created in the first Oratory at Valdocco, and in which took shape the spiritual and educative experience called the preventive system. To promote the EPC in all our works is to multiply the apostolic fruitfulness and to develop in the Church and in our society and culture the values of the spirit and mission of Don Bosco.

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

1. *Visit to Argentina* (2 - 15 April)

On Wednesday 2 April the Rector Major left for Argentina where he was to visit all the Provinces.

In each of them he had a meeting with the Rectors and with the confreres in formation, and spoke with them about themes concerning animation, formation, and relationships with the laity. He also had meetings with young people of the Salesian Youth Movement (SYM), the Past-pupils, and the Salesian Family in general.

On 3 April he arrived at the airport of **Buenos Aires** and was received by the Provincial, Fr Santiago Negrotti, who accompanied him to the Provincial House for a brief interview by the radio and TV. Later in the day he travelled to Bahia Blanca.

At **Bahia Blanca** he was received by the Provincial Fr Joaquin Lopez Pedrosa and other confreres; he greeted his relatives in the house of his sister Rosa, and then went to visit the Bishop of Bahia Blanca. Mgr Romulo Garcia, who had been Rector of

the seminary when Fr Vecchi had been Prefect of Studies at the Don Bosco College. Fr Vecchi then went on to the Town Hall to meet the Superintendent, Mr Linares Jaime, with whom he had a conversation. Finally he reached the John XXIII Institute, where he inaugurated the new radio 89.9 Manantiales.

On Saturday 5 April Fr Vecchi went to Fortin Mercedes, to be welcomed by Salesians, past-pupils, and by the boys and girls of the SDB and FMA schools. With them he celebrated the Eucharist in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians, during which he recalled with emotion the years he had spent in that college as an aspirant, novice and assistant.

At **Viedma**, where he was born, he met his relatives and the civil and religious authorities. He greeted the salesian Bishop, Mgr Marcello Melani, and received the keys of the city from the hands of the Mayor, Dr Chironi Fernando, who declared him an "*illustrious citizen*".

The same kind of thing happened at **Carmen de Patagones**, on the part of the President of the Council, Marino Ricardo, and the Superintendent Dr José Magdaleno Ramos, who proclaimed him an *Illustrious Guest* of the town.

On the Saturday evening in the Cathedral of Viedma, after visiting the tombs of Cardinal Cagliero and other salesian bishops of the city, he was entertained by the members of the SYM. On Sunday 6 April in the Institute Artemide Zatti he met with a group of DBV and took part in the ordination to the diaconate of two salesian students of theology: Daniel Smith and Julio Martini, by Bishop Marcello Melani.

On Monday 7 April, after visiting the tomb of Artemide Zatti he greeted the children of the school and then left for Buenos Aires. That same evening he met the students of theology of Buenos Aires and after supper was accompanied by the Provincial, Fr Luis Timossi to La Plata - Ceferino Namuncurá. In the **La Plata** Province he spent Tuesday 8 April, meeting the Rectors who had gathered for the occasion. He spoke to them of the application of the General Chapter, dealt with the theme of the effectiveness of

the salesian presence and concluded with the topic: *How to animate the processes of renewal of local communities*. He had a meeting with the confreres in formation and spoke to them about his journeys and the impressions he had gathered.

On Wednesday 9 April Fr Vecchi was at **Córdoba**. In this Province too he had meetings with the Provincial Council, the Rectors and the confreres in formation. He visited the Bishop, Card. Raul Primatesta, with whom he spent some time in conversation. Very significant was the meeting with the SYM, some 300 youngsters in all. In a moment of great festivity with songs and dances he was asked all sorts of questions about the growth and development of his own vocation, what kinds of things had given him courage and what had caused him fear. The young people were looking for guidelines for a process of salesian spirituality in the service of the Church and society, how could they come to understand God's will at the present day, how could they read the Word of God with the heart of Don Bosco, and what are the ideals to which young people should be most sensitive. At the end of the encounter the Rector Major was presented with an artistic statue

of the Good Shepherd, and then all the youngsters went into church for the Eucharist.

In the afternoon of Thursday 10 April Fr Vecchi reached **Rosario**, where he was received by the Provincial Fr Juan Cantini and other Salesians. He went to visit the parish church of St Dominic Savio and a salesian work in the same parish, dedicated to the Sacred Heart. In this area three Salesians are working in an extremely poor quarter, made up for the most part of families living in shacks. He then went on to **Funes** where he visited the Provincial House and post-novitiate. Here he blessed a mural which was the work of a post-novice, Ariel Garcia, and then had a meeting with the Rectors.

On Friday 11 April he gave the "Good Morning" to the 2,200 pupils of the St Joseph Institute of Rosario, lined up in ranks in the school playground. Then he had a question and answer session with the Salesians, FMA and DBV. At lunch he met the Bishop of Rosario Mgr Miras, and the retired former Bishop Mgr George Lopez. In the afternoon Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the Salesian Family, and after supper was present at an entertainment in the school playground, where in

a festive and joyful atmosphere there were songs and other musical items, animated sketches and the presentation of gifts.

On Saturday 12 April Fr Vecchi reached **Buenos Aires**. Waiting for him were the Bishop of Rio Gallegos (Mgr Alessandro Bucalini), the retired Bishop of Comodoro Rivadavia (Mgr Eugene Peyrou), the FMA Provincial of Buenos Aires (Sr Carmen Rivera), Ms Maria Dehemida (President of the ADMA), and many confreres. From the airport the Rector Major was driven to Via Don Bosco, next to the College, where in front of the monument dedicated to the Saint of Youth he was met by confreres, friends, Cooperators, pupils and past-pupils and by the scouts who, with their band leading the way, accompanied him to the splendid Basilica dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. In the afternoon, after a meeting with past-pupils he blessed the premises of the Salesian Institute of Social Communication.

On Sunday 13 April he paid a visit to the Apostolic Nuncio in Argentina, Mgr Ubaldo Calabresi. Returning to the Provincial House he gave an interview to Santo Biasati of "Rivadavia Television", a salesian past-pupil and journalist of high renown.

In the afternoon he had a meeting with the novices of the Provinces of Argentina and of Paraguay. Then at 5 p.m. began the **Feast of the Rector Major** in the gymnasium of the oratory of St Francis de Sales. At the beginning of the concelebration, at which Fr Vecchi presided, the Provincial (Fr Negrotti) presented to the huge assembly some of the distinguished persons present. They included the bishops Mgr Eugene Peyrou and Mgr José Pedro Pozzi, the Provincials of Argentina, of Paraguay and Brazil, and many confreres. He emphasized how every year the Salesian Family celebrates the Feast of the Rector Major and it was Fr Vecchi's wish that this year the celebration take place in Argentina. The celebration was animated by young people with audio-visual equipment, songs and a very appropriate commentary.

After the Mass in the same gymnasium there was a series of songs, musical items and dramatic presentations in which Fr Vecchi took an active part. Towards the end of the spectacle a group of young people put some questions to him on the youth reality, vocation and Christian life.

On Monday 14 April, he returned to Rome.

2. *Visit to North Belgium* (18 - 21 April).

In the afternoon of 18 April, the Rector Major accompanied by Fr Albert Van Hecke left for Brussels for the *centenary celebrations* of salesian work in the Province. At the airport to meet him were Mgr Adriaan Van Luyn, Bishop of Rotterdam in Holland, the Provincial Fr Piet Palmans, with the Vice-provincial and Economer, and three members of the DBV international Council: Gianna Martinelli, Magda Staeljanssens, and Myrian Vincax.

The most significant moments of the visit were certainly the solemn celebration in the Cathedral and the feast of the young people on Saturday 19 April.

At 10 a.m. the Rector Major, accompanied by Fr Van Hecke and the Provincial, arrived at **Antwerp**. After a meeting with the Apostolic Nuncio (Mgr Giovanni Moretti) and other personalities, they moved to the great cathedral which was packed with more than 2,000 persons.

The Mass, at which the Archbishop of Antwerp, Mgr Van den Berghe presided, was solemnized by chants and well executed ceremonies and was recorded by telecameras for transmission in other

churches... Before and after the Mass a group of young people gave an exhibition of animated song and dance.

After the celebration there was a reception in the Town Hall for a meeting with the civic authorities. There were many speakers including a member of the City Council, a teacher from our school, and the President of the Kreietbank, which had sponsored the centenary manifestations.

In the afternoon, in the theatre of the *Koningin Elisabethzaal*, there took place the great Youth Festival, organized and animated by the Salesians: Frs Robert Kino, Roger Burgggraave, John Van Meerbeeck and Paul Van Praet. With a group of about a hundred boys and girls they put on a two-hour spectacle of music, songs and dance, accompanied by video messages and the explosion of balloons and fire-crackers. The group is called: *25 jaar eigentijdse jeugd Musical*. The theme of the festivity was built around three aspects: the present-day situation of young people; their various reactions; and the message of hope, courage and ability to choose.

On Sunday 20 April the Rector Major visited the confreres in formation at **Oud-Heverlee** and gave them two talks on aspects of

the Congregation from the many he could have chosen: the panorama of youth spirituality, and that of the missionary frontiers. At **Groot-Bijgaarden** he had a meeting with the Rectors and spoke to them about the Rector's role.

On Monday 21 April he went to **Sint-Denijs-Westrem**, where in the company of the Rector he visited the boarding section annexed to the school and the localities and workshops of the school itself. He also went to see the neighbouring High School of Zwijnaarde in which the direction, administration and teaching are all entrusted to lay people. He was received by the Director, Mr Luc Verlinde.

Finally, at **Eeklo** he visited two centres for the reception of youngsters in difficulty. One of the centres has a Salesian as its director; the other is managed entirely by lay people.

3. Visit to Loreto (25 April)

On 25 April the Rector Major was at the salesian house of **Loreto** for the **feast of the Adriatic Province**. He arrived about 9 a.m. and was welcomed by the Provincial, the Rector and other confreres.

He blessed the statue of Don Bosco at the entrance to the house, and then went on foot with

all present to the Sanctuary to greet our Blessed Lady. All then moved to the John XXIII Auditorium for a meeting with the Salesian Family. The hall was packed to overflowing.. At the end of the meeting, during which Fr Vecchi replied to many questions, the assembly gathered in the Basilica for the solemn Mass which celebrated the silver and golden jubilees of profession and ordination of many confreres.

After the Eucharist and lunch, in the Loreto Sports Stadium there took place a very successful spectacle presented by the members of the salesian youth centre of Ancona. In his words of thanks at the end the Rector Major summed up the contents of the spectacle. It was a musical presentation of the life of Don Bosco with the preventive system, the letter from Rome of 1884, and the dream of the pergola of roses. It emphasized in particular some traits of the physiognomy of the Salesian: joy, a liking for hard work, love of the young, and trust and confidence in the constant presence of Our Lady.

The last message before closing was once again addressed to the Salesian Family whom Fr Vecchi urged to go forward in love of Don Bosco and of young people.

4. *Visit to the Holy Land* (27 April - 1 May).

On Sunday 27 April the Rector Major left Rome for Tel Aviv for the centenary celebration of the house of "Jesus Adolescent" at Nazareth. On arrival at the airport he was met by the Provincial and former Provincial, members of the Council and the Rector of Nazareth.

His first stop was at the house of **Beitgemal** to have supper with the confreres and converse with them. After supper he went on to the Provincial House of **Bethlehem**.

The following morning, after visiting the basilica and grotto of the Nativity, he went to the theological studentate of **Cremisan**, where he presided at the Eucharist and conferred the ministries of Reader and Acolyte. Afterwards he met with all the community and described the impressions he had received during his travels; he spoke of salesian spirituality and replied to questions put to him. In the afternoon he left Cremisan for Jerusalem where he visited the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, some of the monuments and the wall of the Temple. He then returned to Bethlehem for a meeting in the

evening with the Salesian Family, to whom he emphasized the need for working together, all united in the same educative project.

On Tuesday 29 April Fr Vecchi went to Nazareth for the centenary celebrations of salesian work in that town. He was welcomed by the Rector, Fr Antonio Scudu, and the assembled pupils. He presided at a Mass at which boys of Christian religions participated and also some Moslems. After Mass he met the lay teachers of the school.

In the afternoon he visited Mount Tabor, and in the evening went to the *Sala Dorr* for the solemn official dinner with the confreres, past-pupils and the civil and religious authorities. Many clergy and religious were also present.

On Wednesday 30th, with the salesian confreres, the FMA and other religious, Fr Vecchi presided at a concelebration at the grotto of the Annunciation, followed by breakfast with Mgr Giacinto Marcuzzo with whom he had a familiar conversation. He then visited the house of the Josephite Sisters and the Church of St Joseph.

In the afternoon he was present at a commemorative academy with musical items and a series of slides illustrating the history of

salesian work at Nazareth. There were speeches by the Mayor and Past-pupils, and at the end the Rector Major expressed his thanks and spoke of his joy and emotion at seeing images and hearing the account of the history of salesian work at Nazareth, which (he said) was wonderful for its simplicity. After taking leave of the authorities, Fr Vecchi celebrated Vespers with the confreres and the FMA.

On Thursday 1 May he was able to visit some of the well known places around the Sea of Tiberias, like Magdala, the Mount of the Beatitudes, Capharnaum, Bethsaida, etc.

Returning to Nazareth, he had lunch with the community and then left for Tel Aviv and Rome.

5. *Visit to Milan and Boretto* (3 - 4 May)

On Saturday 3 May the Rector Major called at Milan on the first stage of his journey to Boretto (Reggio Emilia).

At Milan 1,200 young people had gathered for the *Youth Festival* of the Province. After supper Fr Vecchi joined them in a prayer vigil during which, in answer to a question and basing himself on the event of Emmaus, he ex-

plained how they could live and revive a meeting with the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

On Sunday 4 May he went to Boretto, the birthplace of his father Albino. At 9.30 he presided at Holy Mass in the Basilica of St Mark, after which in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall he was presented by the local Mayor with a parchment conferring on him *honorary citizenship* of Boretto; in return the Rector Major bestowed on the town the medal of the Congregation.

6. *A significant recognition*
(6 May).

On Tuesday 6 May the Rector Major was at the Pius XI Institute in Rome for the conferring of the title *Giusto tra le nazioni* on two well-deserving confreres, Fr Antonioli Francesco and Fr Alessandrini Armando, who during the last world war and had given refuge in the Institute to 72 young Jews.

Among those present were the Israeli Ambassador to Italy, the Chief Rabbi of Rome, and the President of the Jewish community of Italy.

7. On Saturday 17 May at the Sacred Heart, Rome, Fr Vecchi was

present at the annual general meeting of the members of the VIS Organization, and spoke to them on the subject: *In the one charism, what are the specific roles of the laity, and how is communion and sharing with the SDBs to be realized.*

8. *At Turin for the feast of Mary Help of Christians*
(23 - 24 May).

On 23 May the Rector Major left Rome for Turin to take part in the celebrations in honour of Mary Help of Christians, beginning with the night vigil.

At 8.30 a.m. the next day he presided at a first concelebration animated by the pupils of the St Dominic Savio school. After the Mass at a ceremony with the DBV in the Pinardi Chapel, he presented to the Superior General (Gianna Martinelli) the letter he had written to the DBV to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the beginning of their Institute and to emphasize the importance of their witness by their life of consecration in the secular world.

He then visited the sick confreres, both at Valdocco and later in the "Andrew Beltrami" community.

In the afternoon he had a meeting with about a hundred young members of the *Don Bosco 2000 Association*; they are developing a program of apostolic presence in various parts of the neighbourhood of Turin, and are cooperating in many initiatives. They gave the Rector Major a video illustrating their activities.

In the evening Fr Vecchi celebrated a further Mass for the Salesian Family and took part in the solemn procession which began at 9 p.m. and included many groups from Turin and the surrounding area. There were many priests and Sisters walking, among them Mgr Pier Giorgio Micciardi, Auxiliary Bishop of Turin. At the end the Rector Major emphasized that the procession concluded a day which had been totally dedicated to Our Lady, and that they should now, like St John, take her into their own lives and homes.

9. *Visit to Corigliano Calabro* (25 May).

On 25 May the Rector Major, accompanied by Fr Luigi Testa, Provincial of the Piedmont Circumscription, went from Turin to Corigliano Calabro where he had been invited for the *inauguration of the salesian youth centre dedi-*

cated to Fr Albino Campilongo.

In the morning Fr Vecchi presided at the Eucharist in the parish church, concelebrating with the local Salesians. Many groups of the Salesian Family were present, together with a large number of young people who animated the liturgy in their own personalized style.

The solemn inauguration of the youth center took place in the evening with the Archbishop and the Rector Major jointly cutting the inaugural ribbon. This was followed by a brief liturgy of the Word and the blessing of the premises. A festive evening followed with speeches and music.

On Monday 26 May Fr Vecchi went to Rosin to visit the Archbishop. Returning to Corigliano he had a meeting in the afternoon with some fifty young animators, cooperators and members of the *Youthful Horizons* group. With them he discussed various items, like the problem of work, and commitment to collaboration in the animation of the young.

10. *Six-monthly meeting of the* *USG at Ariccia* (28 - 31 May).

The theme studied by the Union of Superiors General at this meeting was *spirituality*. One of the in-

vited keynote speakers was Fr Luc Van Looy. Fr Vecchi was elected as one of the six members of the USG to take part in the Synod of Bishops for America.

In the afternoons of 29th and 30th May, the Rector Major was able to spend a little time at the meeting of those responsible for the different groups of the Salesian Family, which was taking place simultaneously at the Generalate.

11. *At Cuorgnè for the centenary of the salesian work* (1 June).

On Saturday 31 May the Rector Major left Rome for Cuorgnè, to be present at the conclusion of the centenary celebrations of salesian work there.

On Sunday 1st June he was received by the Rector, confreres and local authorities. He presided at the Eucharistic celebration, and was then taken to the Town Hall where he heard speeches by the Mayor and by the President of the Piedmontese Region, and was given honorary citizenship.

He then went to see the house where Bl. Callistus Caravario was born and the parish church, where he was able to see the name of Caravario in the Baptismal Register.

In the afternoon, in the newly rebuilt theatre of the Institute, a youth spectacle was presented, including songs, historical sketches, and a recital which began with a group of animators dreaming about going to China to found an oratory inspired by an old letter of Bl. Callistus that had been found. It led to each one being invited to reflect on the commitment to which he was called, and the setting in which the Lord wanted him to work for the Kingdom.

12. *At Capriglio, birthplace of Mamma Margaret* (8 June).

On 7 June the Rector Major was present at a meeting of the *Curatorium* of the UPS which took place at the Generalate.

The same evening he left for Turin and on the following morning reached **Capriglio**, the birthplace of Mamma Margaret. He was received by the Mayor, the civil and military authorities, the parish priest, the Salesians and the population. He presided at the Eucharist, visited the little school where Don Bosco studied as a boy, the house where Margherita Occhiena was born, and had lunch with all the Occhienas in a suitably constructed

tent. The occasion was a homely one, rich in friendship and cordiality. In the evening Fr Vecchi returned to Rome, via Colle Don Bosco for a visit to our holy places.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Councilors

The Vicar General

From January to May '97 Fr Van Looy was engaged in many meetings, especially for the purpose of inviting confreres and members of the Salesian Family to reflect on methods for fulfilling the salesian mission at the present day in its various contexts, and on giving effect to the decisions of the GC24.

18 January. He was at the St Dominic Savio community at the UPS for a reflection on the application of the Chapter from the standpoint of university professors.

19 January. Meeting with young past-pupils of Piedmont on the theme of youth emargination

29 January. Solemn opening of the new Salesian Library at Oud-Heverlee in Belgium. This was a cultural manifestation of high lev-

el; the participants from the university world of Louvain, from religious life and from the world of culture were able to admire the organization of the new Library.

31 January. Feast of St John Bosco. At Turin to represent the Rector Major.

1 February. Meeting with the educators and supporters of the work of Arese for a morning's study on Don Bosco and emargination.

2 February. Address to the animators and collaborators of the oratory of Schio on oratory perspectives in the new millennium.

7-10 February. At Madrid, for a study-day with the Rectors on the programming by the Rector Major and General Council, and another day with the Salesian Family on vocational pastoral work. He was happy to see the serious and constant commitment of the Province to the involvement of everyone in the pastoral work for vocations.

11 February. At Castelvoglio, to lead a morning's study with the Christian Brothers, a religious congregation involved in education.

14-19 February. At Hua Hin in Thailand with the Rectors of the Provinces of the Far East, to study the role of the Rector in giving effect to the GC24.

From Thailand Fr Van Looy went on to the USA where he had various meetings with young animators at Los Angeles, and with confreres in formation at San Francisco, where he led three days of study on salesian spirituality.

Returning to Rome, he spent a day with the Josephites of Muri-
aldo at Vitorchiano on the theme: *The youngster at the centre.*

28 February. At the UPS with the deacons of the St Thomas community to develop the theme: *Priesthood and pastoral dialogue.*

After a period at headquarters in Rome, Fr Van Looy went to Madrid to preach a retreat to the Rectors and members of the Provincial Council.

20-29 March. He was present at the intermediate meeting of the General Council at Rome.

4 April. At Cracow in Poland, for a meeting of the World Council of the World Union of Catholic Educators (UMEC), which dealt with the rights and duties of teachers.

8-24 April. At the Generalate, Rome, for the *ordinary visitation of the Blessed Michael Rua community*, a period of dialogue and verification with working groups and individual confreres. It is encouraging to know that the confreres and lay collaborators dedi-

cate themselves so attentively to the animation of the Congregation and the service of the house.

18 April. Fr Van Looy took part in the assembly of the Italian professional schools (CNOS-FAP) on the theme of those to whom our work should be primarily directed.

20 April. At Macomer in Sardinia, he presided at a Young Peoples' Day on the theme "Christ", and was able to note that the Sardinian youth are well prepared and committed to the Christian animation of groups.

25 April. He took part in a meeting of Superiors General who have works in the USA, to obtain information concerning the development of religious life in that country.

27 April. He was at Civitanova Marche (Adriatic Province) for the first Mass of Fr Gregorio Sochaki.

6 May. At Rome-Testaccio, for a meeting with the community.

7 May. At Florence for a meeting with the combined communities of the area.

14-18 May. In Mozambique, where he visited the works in the neighbourhood of the capital Maputo. He saw with pleasure that the country is pressing ahead with the peace process, and that

the SDBs and FMAs have realized numerous projects in recent years following the re-establishment of peace.

19 May. The visit to Mozambique ended with a Salesian Family Day with more than a thousand participants. The Eucharist in the morning, sporting events, a picnic lunch, a cultural presentation, and a procession of our Lady, were all manifestations of hope and union.

From Mozambique Fr Van Looy went on to Cape Town to preach a retreat to the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, on the occasion of the centenary of salesian presence in Southern Africa. After the retreat he stayed on a further three days for a study seminar on salesian commitment in this period following the SDB and FMA General Chapters. Some sixty confreres and sisters took part in what was an event of great salesian value for Southern Africa.

28-30 May. At Ariccia. Fr Van Looy was present with the Rector Major at the general assembly of Superiors General (USG) on the theme *Spirituality: a unifying experience in consecrated life*.

The possibility of meeting at Rome and elsewhere with so many people involved in the edu-

cation and evangelization of the young makes us grateful to God and admired by others for so great a commitment.

The Councillor for Formation

In the visits, contacts and interventions of Fr Nicolussi in this period (January - May 1997), particular emphasis was laid on certain points from the six-year program recently set out: the knowledge and assimilation of the GC24 from a formative standpoint; the verification of the formation process; the strengthening of coordination and collaboration at interprovincial level.

From 3-9 February the Councillor was at Hyderabad (India) for a meeting and seminar with those responsible for formation communities of the eight Provinces of India (40 confreres in all). The purpose of the meeting was to verify - in the light of the guidelines of the documents PDV, VC and GC24 - the formation situation, set priorities for the present six-year period, and decide on forms of linkage and collaboration between the Provinces. At a time of growth and expansion and in a strongly diversified context, emphasis was laid on: the quality of

formation and attention to formative methodology, and the task of inculturation and the strengthening of communion and coordination.

In mid-February there was a meeting at Lubumbashi of the *Curatorium* of our studentate of theology, where some forty confreres from a variety of countries and circumscriptions are in formation. It is the only salesian centre of theological studies in Africa, and has therefore for us a particular importance as a centre of formation and of international culture. Taking part in the meeting were all those responsible for formation in the French and Spanish-speaking areas of Africa and Madagascar, and they reflected on various formative requirements in the area. A significant decision taken was to begin at Yaoundé a formative experience for brother confreres in the period following practical training.

At the end of February and beginning of March, Cremisan (Jerusalem) was the venue for the verification of the *Cremisan Project*, i.e. the new phase of the theological studentate, asked for by the Rector Major in 1985. At present 35 confreres from various Provinces of the salesian world are in formation in that commu-

nity. For future salesian priests the formative experience here is of extraordinary importance because of its biblical dimension, the formation to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and its international character. The verification was substantially positive and led to a renewed commitment to preserve the specific nature of this centre of formation and studies.

From 24 -27 April Fr Nicolussi took part in a meeting of the delegates for formation of the *Iberian Conference*, and visited the salesian theological studentate of Madrid which is supported by four Provinces, and other formation centres.

From 8-11 May he was at Benediktbeuern for the *Curatorium*, which includes representatives of the three German-speaking Provinces (Germany and Austria). At Benediktbeuern there is a community for confreres studying theology and for the post-novices. The academic and cultural centre includes the Faculty of Theology, with a Philosophy section affiliated to the UPS, and the university School of Pedagogy, with some 600 students. There are also an Institute of Youth Pastoral Work, an ecological centre and a reception centre for the

young. The whole forms a significant enterprise of which the quality is recognized at both ecclesial and civil levels.

At Rome there was a first meeting of the Rectors of salesian international communities which receive confreres coming from all parts of the salesian world seeking qualifications at the UPS or other Roman universities. The scope of the meeting was to share experiences and reflect on how to put greater emphasis on the salesian dimension and on qualification for formative service in the future.

Meanwhile in the Department the collection has begun of statistical data over the last ten years as a basis for a reflection on "perseverance and leaving". Contacts have been made with other Institutes for an exchange of experiences in this connection.

The Councillor for Youth Pastoral Work

In the period January-May 1997 Fr Domenech made contact with various teams of Provincial Delegates to study with them the pastoral programming, and decide on certain pastoral lines and needs on which provincial animation should be centered in the coming

years. The following are some of the meetings which took place.

11 April. National Council for Youth Ministry of the Iberian Provincial Conference (provincial delegates and members of their teams).

21-23 April. SEPSUR (Secretariat for Youth Ministry of Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay), with the Provincials present. The theme of the provincial animation of Youth Ministry was examined in depth and some priority lines of animation were decided on for the coming years; special insistence would be given to the animation of salesian communities as animating nuclei, and special attention would be given in all our works to the problem of emargination, education along the lines defined in the meeting of Cumbayá, and pastoral work for vocations.

13-14 May. The Councillor met the four Delegates for Youth Ministry of Poland at the national Centre of Cracow, to promote the process of reflection, sharing and collaboration being followed by the Delegates.

30 January - 2 February. Fr Domenech took part in the celebrations for the Feast of Don Bosco in the Sicilian Province. He was present at the Youth Vigil and

Mass at Catania-Barriera, and on the evening of the 31st had a meeting with the Salesian Family at Palermo-Ranchibile.

3 March. He had a meeting with Rectors and Principals, oratory directors and parish priests of the Genoa Province at La Spezia to study the educative and pastoral community in the light of the GC24.

14 - 18 March. He visited some communities of the Slovenian Province, and had a meeting with the Provincial and his Council to discuss the process of pastoral renewal in the Province.

7 April. He was at the UPS for a meeting with the group engaged in research on technical and professional schools to prepare the conclusions and publication of results.

28-30 April. Following on the meeting with SEPSUR he visited the eight salesian communities of southern Patagonia. At Caleta-Olivia he had a meeting with some young animators of the SYM of the area, and at Rio Gallegos with educators of the salesian school. Everywhere he found a good salesian atmosphere, with laity and young people collaborating with dedication in the perspectives of the salesian mission.

9 - 11 May. Fr Domenech was present at the meeting of the Eu-

ropean Consulting Group on the School and Professional Formation; delegates for the schools sector were present from all the European Provinces. The objectives of the meeting were to identify the central aspects of the provincial animation of the schools and professional formation centres, so as to give efficacious help to the provincial delegates in their work of animation, and to study the form and content for a European coordination of the sector in line with the conclusions of the European meeting on schools held in Rome in 1995.

The Councillor for the Salesian Family and for Social Communication

A. DEPARTMENT FOR THE SALESIAN FAMILY

The period January to May included many events of importance to the Salesian Family.

1. **From a doctrinal standpoint**, the Department has prepared certain aids, among them the *manual for the provincial and local delegate of the Don Bosco Past-pupils*.

With the collaboration of some Regional Councillors and the contribution of provincial delegates,

and making use also of present experience in various Federations, a series of work-plans has been organized which will be useful for those working with the Past-pupils. The text is available at present in Italian and Spanish. The English translation is in preparation.

2. In addition, the group working in the Department at headquarters, in accordance with what is said in the program for the six-year period has prepared the *formative dossier for the various provincial delegates in charge of the groups of the Salesian Family*. This is the result of teamwork and constitutes the basis for the meetings programmed with the Regionals during the present six-year period.

3. Finally, after a preparation carried out in the Department with some representatives of the ADMA Association of Spain, Italy, Bolivia and Venezuela, to respond to what was asked for in the last article of the preceding text, a new draft has been made of the *Regulations of the Association*. After approval in the General Council it will be promulgated for the Association's life and action.

4. **From the point of view of contacts** with communities and

groups there have been many meetings, celebrations and periods of salesian reflection:

- at the Generalate with the *days of spirituality* for the Salesian Family (17-19 January 1997);
- *in the communities* of Bologna (23 Jan.), Valdocco (25 Jan.), Caserta (29-31 Jan.), Vasto (1-2 Feb.), Verona (8-9 March), Arborea (24-26 April), Taranto (4-5 May).
- *in the Provinces* of Thailand (13-18 Feb.), North Belgium (21-25 Feb.), Middle East (15-21 April), Sardinia (24-28 April), Léon-Spain (12-16 May).
- *at the Generalate* (30 May - 1 June) there was a meeting of the *World Consulting Group of the Salesian Family*, with the participation of officially recognized member groups (13 groups out of 18). They were very fruitful days because of the orientations to which they gave rise, and for the perspectives they opened up of work in collaboration and communion. It will be necessary to take up the contents of the meeting in other circumstances because of aspects they offered not only at world level, but at provincial and local level as well.
- Of particular importance were the meetings in Thailand, for

setting up the national Federation, and for verifying the possibility of entrusting to that Province the task of organizing the next Asia-Australia Congress of the Past-Pupils.

- In addition, special significance and value attaches to the *meetings in Spain*, with the provincial delegates for the Cooperators, Past-pupils, ADMA, and Youth Ministry, which had "vocational promotion" on the agenda.
- Again, in the *North Belgian Province*, it seemed that there was a first coming to grips with the reality of the Salesian Family, and there was a similar situation in the *Provinces of Léon and Cagliari*.
- Finally, in the *Middle East Province* the Group of those responsible at central level for the Salesian Family had applied the *formation dossier for provincial delegates* of the SF. Taking part were the Rectors of almost all the communities, and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians had also been invited.

5. In this period provision was also made for the substitution of Fr José Reinoso, after eleven years of service as central dele-

gate for the Cooperators Association, by Fr Patrick Laws of the Australian Province.

B. DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

1. The greater part of the work was carried out at the Generalate in Rome. The fundamental task was that of finding personnel for the reconstitution of the **Department's working team**.

2. From a **doctrinal standpoint**, the Department has been working on the elaboration of an aid for the formation of young Salesians to social communication. Experiments have been made with positive results in a joint enterprise with the Formation Department, because both departments are interested in the matter

In addition the Department has been involved in the manner of giving effect to another important point of the programming: *the renewal and relaunching of the Salesian Bulletin in the Congregation*.

A careful consideration of art.41 of the General Regulations has indicated new aspects of content and organization. The Department has undertaken to present during the present session of the

Council (June and July) an outline project for the renewal and relaunching.

As a first result of the reflections a *central director* for the Salesian Bulletin in this phase of renewal has been chosen in the person of *Fr Vito Orlando* of the Southern Province of Italy.

4. It has been thought useful to experiment with a group of *three Salesian Bulletins* (those of the Spanish Provinces, Portugal, and the French edition for France and Southern Belgium) to see how the indispensable and necessary instruments can achieve their purpose.

In the period 17-19 May a meeting was held at Madrid in the Don Bosco house of the Catechetical Centre of the Provincials concerned with the three Bulletins, their directors and publishers, with the Councillor General for Social Communications and the central delegate, to discover the reactions to the Department's proposals.

The results of the meeting will be submitted to the Rector Major and his Council for revision and approval.

5. From the standpoint of contacts and meetings, the following must be pointed out:

- work done with the provincial council of *North Belgium* (21-25 February),
- and with the provincial council of *Léon* (12-16 May);
- dialogue with various confreres of different Provinces, visited between January and May, interested in the problem of social communication and the task of provincial animation.

General conclusions can be drawn,

- by considering the *community commitment* (which must increase and face the problem of communication as a matter of urgency, because of present-day repercussions at a cultural level);
- by considering the service to be rendered by confreres who have received from their superior the *specific task* of animating and giving life to this field of salesian work;
- by considering the *possibilities*, both within the Salesian Family and outside it, in local and far-distant societies linked by social communication. How as educators and evangelizers we could be more attentive to messages which can use the means provided by the mass media.

The meetings programmed in

the various Regions can be of practical help to sensitivity and professional approach in this area.

The Councillor for the Missions

Towards the end of the winter session of the General Council, Fr Odorico made a missionary visit to Libya (3-6 January) after insistent requests from the Bishop of Tripoli (Mgr. Martinelli), and the two Polish confreres who have been working in that country for several years.

He observed, as in other countries of North Africa, the great difficulties for missionary work in a strictly Islamic country. For this reason our confreres are limited to pastoral work for the Asian and European immigrants, and to a presence of witness among the Libyan population.

From 11 - 16 January the Councillor was in India (Bombay) to preside over a meeting of the *Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation (DIAM) of all the Indian Provinces*. The meeting took place in the Provincial House and had as its main theme the study of the *Handbook of the DIAM*. Taking part in the meeting were also Fr Chrys Saldanha, who gave the main address, and Fr

Mario Marchioli of the Missions Department, Rome.

On 16 January, Fr Odorico met with Fr Joaquim D'Souza and all the Provincials of India, with whom he had a meeting on the six-year program of the Department, on the missionary priorities of India, and on the interprovincial organization of Missionary Animation.

From 17 to 28 January he made a missionary visit to the Province of Madras, during which he made contact with the main mission stations of the Province. He also gave a conference to the confreres of Madras on the world panorama of salesian missions and ended his visit with a meeting with the Provincial and his council. In this meeting he emphasized the strong missionary commitment of the Province, the growing presence among the very poor and the outcasts, the positive efforts at harmonization of evangelization with education, and the development and generous contribution of personnel for other missions "ad gentes".

The proposal to open a missionary aspirantate at the service of the missions of the Congregation was welcomed by the Rectors and the Provincial Council.

From 28 to 31 January Fr Odorico made a brief visit to the

Delegation of Sri Lanka. There he observed the growing interest in missionary expansion (two new missionary foundations had recently been opened), the increase in vocations, and the consolidation of the works already existing.

After a brief spell in Rome, the Councillor then undertook from 10 February to 16 March a long and tiring missionary journey to countries in the *Sahel* area of Africa [Guinea Bissau, Senegal (Tambacounda), Burkina Faso, Niger, Ciad, Central African Republic, Djibouti]. The journey ended in Namibia in the south-west of the continent.

This missionary tour had a double objective: to explore new countries for possible salesian foundations in response to insistent requests from Bishops, and to visit missions of recent foundation or which had not yet been visited.

The social, cultural and religious situation of these countries is one of the most dramatic in the world, and there is need of a growing salesian presence.

From 20 - 31 March, Fr Odorico was in Rome for the intermediate session of the General Council with the other Councillors who are heads of Departments.

From 1-5 April he presided in Rome at the meeting of the

Provincial *Delegates of Missionary Animation (DIAM) of Europe*. The principal theme was similar to that of the Bombay meeting, but in the context of the new challenges of first and re-evangelization in post-modern Europe. The representation of the Provinces at the meeting was significantly high, even though not complete.

From 8-10 April the Councillor made a brief visit to the Missions Office of New Rochelle, where he met the incoming and outgoing Provincials and the salesian personnel of the Missions Office and the Volunteer Movement. He thanked all of them for the great and significant efforts this Office had made over so many years for the development of the many missionary works of the Congregation.

From 10 - 26 April Fr Odorico made a missionary visit to the missions of Guatemala and Panama (CAM), where he was able to observe the progress made in the missions among the Kiché (Guatemala) and the Afro-Americans and natives of Darién (Panama). The Province of Central America has been very generous in sending confreres "ad gentes" (Africa, Asia and Cuba).

In the Province of Ecuador he made a brief two-day visit to the salesian foundation at Esmeral-

das, a work among Afro-Americans, for the purpose of getting to know more of this missionary aspect of Latin America in view of a coming continental seminar on salesian pastoral missionary work among Afro-Americans.

At La Plata, Argentina, on 16 April he had a meeting with the Provincials of the Southern Cone Region, with whom he shared the contents of the Department's program and the possible project of a Salesian Missionary Office in Argentina.

After a brief stay in Rome, Fr Odorico presided over the *First meeting of Superiors and Delegates of the African-Madagascar Region*, which took place from 3 - 9 May in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The first three days were dedicated to the organization of missionary animation in Africa, and other matters concerning missionary priorities of salesian work in the continent. During the meeting programs were also presented by the Economer General and the Regional for Africa.

From 10 - 30 May the Councillor remained at headquarters, for the preparation of various programs and documents.

On 30 and 31 May he presided at Turin, with Fr Christian Bigault, at the six-monthly meeting

of the directors of the main Mission Offices and NGOs for the study and sharing of finances for various projects.

During the past months Fr Jesús Jiménez has made three long journeys in America and Africa for the purpose of making a detailed study of refugee camps: his findings will constitute the basis for the programming of educative and pastoral interventions in this new missionary sector.

From 1 June the Councillor for the Missions has been back in Rome for the summer session of the General Council.

The Economer General

On the invitation of the Provincial, Fr József Havasi, Fr Mazzali made a short visit to the Hungarian Province for the feast of Don Bosco. From the provincial headquarters of Ujpest he visited the post-novitiate of Obuda, the parish of Pestszentlorinc, the Sanctuary and spirituality Centre of Szentkereszt, and the Don Bosco school of Jazincbarcika. In a full program of engagements and festivities there was a family meeting with the FMA of Budapest-Keresztenyek and of Mogyorod. Of particular interest was the celebration of the Feast of

Don Bosco at Ujpest in the presence of young people and with music of the Don Bosco choir and orchestra directed by Fr Dauner.

On 17 February he took part in the meeting of the CISI provincial Economers, which dealt with some urgent financial matters; the six-year program of the General Council on economy was presented.

The following day Fr Mazzali presided at a meeting of the Administration Council of the UPS which examined the accounts of the Vice-province of the University for 1996 and the budget for 1997.

On 22 February, he took part in one of the meetings organized by the group of Economers General, and gave an address on the theme *The identity of the Economist General*.

From 14 to 16 March he preached a retreat to a group of Cooperators and past-pupils of the Piedmont Circumscription at Ulzio on the theme of salesian youth spirituality.

On 17 March he had a meeting at Paris with the Provincials and Economers of the French-speaking Provinces, and gave a conference of the identity of the economist and on some financial problems. It was followed by a lengthy discussion which dealt, in particular, with the financial consequences of

the juridical situation of salesian works in France and South Belgium. Presented also was the program of the General Council for the economic sector. In the evening there was a brief visit to the 'Patronage Saint Pierre', where the famous "Passion" was being presented to the parish of rue Monte-Cristo at the Salesian Centre of Social Communication.

From 4 - 6 April, at the Spirituality Centre of Quecianella, Leghorn, he preached a retreat for the Cooperators of the SDB and FMA Provinces of Liguria and Tuscany, on the theme *Meeting Jesus Christ*.

In a visit to the Province of the Czech Republic, Fr Mazzali had a full program of meetings of various kinds. The Provincial, Fr Benno Benes, had arranged a visit to almost all the houses and realities of the province: the provincial house and studentate of Kobylske, the work at Brno, the Mary Help of Christians parish and interesting youth centre of Lisen, the studentate and Saint Adalbert parish of Ceske Budejovice, Jaromerice, the youth centre of Ostrava, the oratory of Oardubice, the parish and youth centre of Plzen and the parish of Zlin. In addition to their commitment to the reconstruction of the

Province, the Salesians have distinguished themselves particularly in the cultural field with three significant works: the special pedagogical and social schools of Jabok di Praga, the theological Faculty of Sud di Ceske Budejovice, and the Portal publishing house. The visit provided an occasion for facing some specific financial problems with those responsible for the Province.

With Fr Odorico and Fr Rodriguez Tallon, the Economist General took part from 6 - 9 May in the first pan-African meeting at Addis Ababa. A broad panorama was presented of financial aspects and problems, with an interesting exchange of views, especially as regards poverty and solidarity. Here too was presented the General Council's program for the economic sector.

There was a fraternal and constructive meeting with the Italian Southern Province on 20 May, on the occasion of the presentation of the balance-sheet for 1996 and the budget for 1997.

On 17 May Fr Mazzali animated the youth vigil for Pentecost at Colle Don Bosco, and on Whit Sunday itself was at Alassio for the festivities for the centenary of the picture of Mary Help of Christians in the public church of the Institute.

Fr Mazzali's final engagement before the new session of the General Council was a visit to Boston and New Rochelle from 24 May to 1 June as representative of the Rector Major for the question of the Don Bosco Technical School at Boston. The occasion made it possible for him to meet the Provincial (Fr Tim Ploch), the new Provincial (Fr Patrick Angelucci), the provincial council, and many confreres of Boston, East Boston, Paterson and New Rochelle.

To all this must be added the regular visits to Turin for meetings with the Council of Administration and the Executive Committee of the SEI and, when circumstances permitted, to animate retreats for the boys and young people of the Don Bosco oratory of Sangano.

The Councillor for the Africa-Madagascar Region

The period from January to May 1977 gave Fr Rodriguez-Tallon a first opportunity to visit and make contact with some countries of his Region which he did not know. He organized his journeys in line with the following preferences:

1. Canonical Visitations to be made (Liberia and Mozambique);

2. Houses of formation, taking part if possible in the *Curatorium*;
3. Countries and works not known by the Regional, especially in the English-speaking countries;
4. Works which are heading towards a juridical circumscription.

The Regional spent the last week of 1997 at **Khartoum (Sudan)**, accompanying the confreres in their work and taking part in their projects; he visited the Apostolic Nuncio, the Vicar General of the Diocese, and the country's Minister for Work. On the last day of the year he joined the SDBs and FMAs for a common prayer vigil, the presentation of the Rector Major's Strenna for 1997, and a fraternal supper. On the following day he returned to Rome for the final week's work of the Council's winter session.

On 9 January he left Rome once again for a long journey of nearly five months. The first country visited was **Togo**. At Lomé he took part in a meeting of the Councils of the AFO and ATE delegations, and in a meeting in which the members of the FMA Provincial Council were present. Later he joined the *Curatorium* of

the two houses of formation: the post-novitiate of Lomé and the novitiate of Gbodjome, near the capital. He also made a rapid journey to Kara to visit the community and see how it was progressing after the installation of the new Rector.

On 21 January he travelled (by land, since the frontier is in Lomé itself) to Ghana: he was able to meet the confreres of Ashaiman, near Accra, and those of the first foundation at Sunyani; he made contact also with three prenovices who are preparing themselves at Ashaiman, and inspected some possible sites for a new foundation near the capital.

After a brief stop at Abidjan, on 26 January he arrived in **Liberia**; he had chosen to celebrate the feast of Don Bosco with the confreres of this war-torn country, not least to thank them for their decision to remain and continue their work for very poor youngsters despite the war. He also made the *extraordinary visitation*, and was able to appreciate the immense work the Salesians are doing for the benefit of more than a thousand street-children, former soldiers, and youngsters at risk in general, with the collaboration of more than a hundred lay people who take responsibility for the program.

On 2 February he moved to Nairobi in **Kenya**, where in the company of the Provincial he visited all the foundations in the country, except for the distant Korr, which he kept for the time of the extraordinary visitation. He was able too to take part in the work of the *Curatorium* of the community of the students of theology.

On 8 February he left for **Zambia**, with the intention of entering Zaire by land, and visited the works in the capital, Lusaka.

On the 12th he crossed the frontier of Zaire, in the company of Fr Nicolussi and the Delegate of Mozambique; in Zaire he remained for twelve days, taking part in the work of the *Curatorium* and visiting the twelve works in Lubumbashi and its neighbourhood.

On 24 February he returned to Zambia, again by the land route, and visited all five foundations in the north of the country.

This required a journey of 1,000 km!, because the 100 km. which separate two of the works in northern Zambia are in Zairean territory and the roads are impossible. He was also able to have a meeting with the Council of the Circumscription.

On 2 March he moved to **Zimbabwe**, to get to know the recent

foundation in this country and to reach **Mozambique** by land.

With a visit to the FMA at Changara, near the frontier with Zimbabwe, the Regional began the *extraordinary visitation* to Mozambique. In the town of Tete he visited the Bishop, and in the following days went to Maputo, Matola, Moamba and Namaacha, the sites of the various salesian works in the country.

On the 21st he had a meeting with the Delegation Council and then went by land to Manzini in the Kingdom of **Swaziland** to visit the salesian work there and meet the AFM Provincial Council (Southern Africa). He also spent a day in Johannesburg, visiting the works in the neighbourhood.

On the 25th he flew to Madagascar, where he remained until 11 April; he celebrated Holy Week in various salesian foundations: Ivato, Fianarantsoa, Betafo, Ijely. In Easter week there was the traditional assembly of the confreres working in Madagascar: it began with a day of retreat animated by the Regional, and continued with the work of committees, ending with a plenary session and the presentation of various themes dealt with in the committees (formation and vocations; parishes and missionary districts; professional

formation; youth ministry; finances).

On 11 April he left Madagascar to visit **Uganda** and **Tanzania**; he was able to meet all the confreres with the exception of those working at Shinyanga in the extreme north-west of the country.

On the 20th he travelled from Nairobi to Addis Ababa in **Ethiopia**; here he visited all our works, first those in the south depending on the ILE Province, and then those in the north depending on the MOR Province; he also saw the site in construction at Dekamhare in Eritrea. At Adigrat, on Sunday 4 May, he had the opportunity to participate in the priestly ordination of two of our Ethiopian confreres: it was performed in the splendid Ethiopian rite, with everything sung, in which God was praised for past generations in this part of Africa.

From 5 - 10 May, Addis Ababa was the venue for the meeting of the *Provincials and Superiors of circumscriptions, delegates and provincial ecomers, of the whole of the Region*. The three themes studied during the meeting were:

1. Missionary animation of a Province: with the presence of Fr Luciano Odorico;
2. Financial organization of a

Province in Africa: with the presence of Fr Gianni Mazzali;

3. The Africa-Madagascar Region. A first meeting to talk about the Region: its program was studied, keeping in mind what the Constitutions and Regulations say about regions and the figure of the Regional; fields were studied in which there are aspects that can be strengthened; initial and ongoing formation; reflection on pastoral realities, etc.

On 11 May, the Regional left for **Nigeria**, where he was able to visit the three salesian foundations under the responsibility of the IAD and ICP Provinces. In this country, with more than 100 million inhabitants and with an enormous financial potentiality, he reflected with the confreres on our future and the conduct of our work.

On 20 May he went to Cameroon, to begin the last stage of his journey with a visit to the works of the ATE Delegation in **Cameroon**, in **Gabon**, and in **Congo**. With the satisfaction of being able to share the projects and hopes of the confreres in these countries of Central Africa, he brought his travels to an end and returned to Rome on 31 May for the work of the Council.

The Regional Councillor for Latin America ("South Cone")

After the winter session of the Council, Fr Baruffi spent some days with his relatives, and then went to the Province of Manaus where he remained from 27 January to 1 February.

He took part in a meeting of the Provincial Council to set the path and perspectives for the year. He was present at the opening at Manaus of the novitiate with thirteen novices. The novitiate has been transferred from Porto Velho to the Aleixo quarter of Manaus, where it is united with the retreat house of the Province.

The Regional was also present at the closing of the retreat of a group of confreres, and on 31 January, Feast of Don Bosco, received the perpetual profession of two members of the Province. A vocational resurgence can be detected. Unfortunately the lack of trained personnel makes it impossible to realize all the formative stages in the Province itself.

– *Episcopal ordination of Mgr Decio Zandonade.*

On 2 February, Fr Baruffi was present at the episcopal ordination of Mgr. Decio Zandonade at

Venda Nova. He had been director of the "Salesian system of Videocommunications", and had been appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Belo Horizonte. The whole religious ceremony was transmitted throughout Brazil by the Catholic television network. There was a large-scale participation in the event by the people, and great appreciation was expressed to the Salesians for the work they are doing in this part of Brazil for young people, and especially for those in most need.

– *In the Province of São Paulo.*

From 5 to 10 February the Regional, accompanied by the Provincial, visited the two aspirantates of Pindamonhangaba and Piracicaba, and the post-novitiate at Lorena. Those in formation were returning after the vacation period. The aspirantate admits pupils of the final years of first-grade schools and of the whole of schools of second-grade. There is an atmosphere of contentment in those in formation and of confidence in the formation personnel.

– *In the Province of Córdoba.*

Here, from 17 February to 17 May, the Regional made the *extraordinary visitation*, with an inter-

val in April for the meeting of the two Conferences CISBRASIL and CISUR, for the meeting with the national teams in the two Regions, and to accompany the Rector Major in his visit to Argentina.

During the visitation Fr Baruffi was able to have several meetings with the Provincial Council and two meetings with all the Rectors; he was able to visit all the works and talk personally with the Salesians, meet the educative communities, pupils, members of the Salesian Family, and also make contact with local Bishops.

Part of the visitation was dedicated to the *consultation for the appointment of a new Provincial*, since the present one is at the end of his mandate. There were three discernment meetings organized in the form of retreats, with a pre-arranged timetable including times for prayer, group-work, a full assembly for an evaluation of the Province, further prayer and personal reflection. There was then the possibility of indicating in writing three names as candidates for Provincial. In all the meetings there was an evident maturity in evaluating the reality of the Province, a great love, and the desire to choose the best candidate for the Province. Particip-

pation was total; only the sick were unable to be present.

– *Meetings with Provincial Conferences.*

From 15 to 20 April the Regional took part in a meeting of the Southern Provincial Conference (CISUR), held in the retreat house of the La Plata Province. The following themes were studied:

- Revision of the Statutes of the CISUR, to be approved by the Rector Major;
- Planning of ongoing formation in the region for the period 1996 - 2002;
- Evaluation of the meetings held;
- Fr Odorico, Councillor for the Missions, presented the Missions program for the period, and the "Handbook for the DIAM". He also gave some guidance concerning Mission Offices.

On the 16th there was a meeting of the JIAR (Provincials of Argentina), to consider some points of common interest to the Salesians of Argentina: these included the Novitiate, the Salesian Bulletin, the appointment of those responsible for the "Scouts", etc.

From the 18th to the 20th the meeting of the CISUR continued

with members of the formation team of the Region for a deeper study of formation itself. After an evaluation of what had been done so far, directives were adopted for the formation area and future meetings were arranged for ongoing formation.

From 21 to 25 April the Regional took part in a meeting of the *CISBRASIL*.

From 21 to 23 there was a national meeting of SDB and FMA Provincials, delegates at national level of missionary animation, social communication, and youth ministry. In this meeting it was decided to set up a working group to prepare an *Action Plan* for the whole of Brazil, formed in the first instance of SDBs and FMAs, with the possibility of broadening it to the whole Salesian Family.

On the 23rd there was a meeting of SDB and FMA Provincials for information on the two General Chapters and to provide further information on the *Action Plan* decided on in the previous meeting, with the steps to be taken for its realization.

On 24-25 April, the *CISBRASIL* meeting continued with the study of a report on the Missions of the Rio Negro, made by the "Union for Life" Mission Office of Manaus, the problems still existing,

and the challenges and objectives for 1997. An evaluation was also made of the meetings for ongoing formation, and the beginning of the course of specialization in salesian spirituality in the University of Campo Grande was programmed.

The creation should be highlighted also of the logo "Salesianos de Don Bosco", which identifies salesian work throughout Brazil.

– *Visit of the Rector Major to Argentina.*

From 8 - 14 April the Regional accompanied Fr Vecchi in his visit to the Provinces of Córdoba and Rosario and for the Feast of the Rector Major at Buenos Aires. The visit was a powerful moment of animation which contributed to a deeper understanding of various projects and at the same time encouraged the growth of a family sense and a vocational reawakening.

The Regional Councillor for Interamerica.

After the winter session of the General Council, Fr Chavez first went to Spain for the *lectio coram* and the defence of his doctoral thesis at the Pontifical University of Salamanca. The title of the

thesis: *La Inculturación del Evangelio: Opción por el Hombre. Opción por el pobre. Aplicación a la Teología Amerindia.*

A few days of rest followed with his family, after which he celebrated the feast of Don Bosco with the pupils of the High School, and the confreres and members of the Salesian Family of Miami (30 January - 2 February). He then visited the community of the students of theology, the Youth Centre and the *Pontifical Josephinum College* at Columbus, Ohio.

He returned to Miami on 6 February to accompany the Rector Major in the second part of his visit to the USA on the occasion of the arrival of the first Salesians. In these circumstances there was a meeting of Fr Vecchi with the Provincials Fr Angel Soto (ANT), Fr Timothy Ploch (SUE) and Fr William Schafer (SUO), concerning the salesian presence in that area. The Rector Major's proposal to commemorate the centenary by opening a new work in favour of Hispanic immigrants in collaboration with the whole of the Region was enthusiastically received by the Provincials and their Councils, who indicated the city of Chicago as the most significant for such a foundation.

In the days immediately follow-

ing (7 - 11 February) there was a meeting at Tampa of the SNAS (Salesian North American Conference), made up of the SDB and FMA Provincial Councils of Canada and the USA. During the meeting the Rector Major gave three outstanding conferences on the themes: Salesian spirituality, Formation of the Laity, and the Strenna for 1997.

From 11 - 17 February the Regional made a first visit to the confreres of Santiago, Camaguey, Santa Clara and Havana in Cuba. Salesian presence in the island is becoming ever more important in an atmosphere of greater religious freedom. This explains the greater frequenting of the churches and youth centres, the strengthening of the Salesian Family, and the growth in vocations. In fact, the first salesian priest has been ordained there after an interval of 14 years, and there are 3 postnovices, 2 novices and 13 young people between aspirants and prenovices.

On the 18th and 19th there was a meeting at Havana of Provincials of the Central American and Caribbean Group " (MEG-MEM-CAM-ANT-HAI-VEN), during which each one presented the more important works of his Province (ANT: *Canillitas con Don Bosco*; CAM: *Misiones en*

Alta Verapaz; HAI: *Lakay* (the house), the salesian response to street children; MEG: "*Red de Oratorios de Ciudad Juárez*", las "*Mamás Catequistas*" y el "*Real-sa*"; MEM: "*Alborada*" y el "*Artisanado de Nazareth*"; VEN: la "*Escuela Agronómica de Barinas*" y los "*Centros de Capacitación*"; information was exchanged concerning qualified personnel with a view to interprovincial collaboration, and experiences were shared of the application of the GC24 and of provincial organization and administration. Here, as also in other meetings of groups of Provincials, some aspects regarding the Region as a whole were considered (linkage with the CCS of Madrid, personnel for the CRS of Quito, programming, etc.) and the programming of the Rector Major and Council was discussed (cf. supplement to AGC 358).

From 20 February to 9 March, Fr Chavez visited the Provinces of Guadalajara (Mexico), Central America, Venezuela and Bolivia. In each of them he had various meetings with Provincial Councils, commissions for formation and for youth ministry, and houses of formation, in addition to getting to know the communities and works.

On 10 and 11 March at Co-

chabamba was held the first meeting of the Provincials of the Andes Group (COB-COM-ECUPER-BOL), during which a day was dedicated to the theme of vocational pastoral work and the causes of defections, and another to the sharing of experiences on the formation of Rectors and the organization of provincial solidarity.

From the 14th to the 21st the Regional carried out the consultation in Ecuador for the appointment of the new Provincial; he met with groups of confreres at Quito, Cuenca, Guayaquil and Macas, to whom he presented the letter of the Rector Major explaining the sense of shared responsibility in this process of discernment, and the present tendencies of the Congregation on the basis of the programming by the Rector Major and his Council.

From 21 to 27 March Fr Chavez made a rapid visit to the Colombian Provinces (COB-COM), where he met the Provincial Councils, the Rectors, and visited the houses of formation. Here, as in the rest of the Region, he was impressed by the ability and the determination of confreres and communities to respond to urgent social needs.

Finally, the Regional carried out the *extraordinary visitation* of the

Province of Peru between 29 March and 28 April, with a brief interval (23-25 May) to visit the Provincial of Guadalajara, Fr Salvador Flores, who was in a critical condition after a car accident but is now recovering.

On 31 May Fr Chavez returned to Rome for the summer session of the Council.

The Councillor for the Australia-Asia Region

After the winter session of the General Council, Fr D'Souza began his visit to the Region with a brief stay at Goa where, on 16-17 January, he presided at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Provincial Conference (SPCI). Then he went on to Bangalore to visit the National Centre for Ongoing Formation (*Don Bosco Yuva Prachodini*).

On 24 January, feast of St Francis de Sales, he was at New Delhi for the inauguration of the eighth Indian Province with "Jesus the Good Shepherd" as its titular. From New Delhi he then went on to Bangkok via Calcutta to begin, on 28 January, the *extraordinary visitation* of the Province of Thailand.

After passing through all the houses of Thailand and Cambodia,

the Regional closed the extraordinary visitation on 24 March and went to Hong Kong for a meeting with the Provincial Council.

He spent the last three days of Holy Week and Easter Sunday in *Vietnam*, where he had two meetings with the confreres and one with the Provincial Council to launch the consultation for the appointment of the new Superior of the Vice-province. Returning then to Hong Kong he had another meeting with the Provincial Council, with the presence of Mgr Joseph Zen, Coadjutor Bishop of Hong Kong, to take note of and verify together the measures to be taken in view of the imminent return of Hong Kong to mainland China.

From Hong Kong Fr D'Souza went on to Melbourne, to begin on 3 April the *extraordinary visitation of the Australian Province*, which also includes the mission stations of Western Samoa.

From 5 to 8 May he presided at a meeting of the Provincials of the Pacific area. On May 8, in the company of the Provincial of the Northern Philippines, Fr Luciano Capelli, he made a first visit to acquaint himself with the *Delegation of Papua New Guinea*. At Port Moresby on 10 May he had a meeting with the Rectors, and assisted at the inauguration of the new as-

pirantate and the installation of the new Delegate, Fr Francesco Panfilo. From Port Moresby the Regional went as far as Honiara to take a first look at the missionary work of the Japanese Province in the Solomon Islands.

Returning to Australia he took up once again the extraordinary visitation, which he concluded at Melbourne on 24 May, Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians.

On 26 May he began his return journey to Italy, staying two days at Singapore to know how matters stand with reference to the making of a salesian foundation in that city. On 29 May Fr D'-Souza returned to Rome thus concluding his second visit to the Australian-Asian Region.

The Councillor for the North-Europe Region.

The activities of Fr Albert Van Hecke in the period from 10 January to 2 June were as follows.

From 13 January to 22 February he was in *Great Britain* for the *extraordinary visitation*. He visited all the works and met all the confreres, members of the Salesian Family and many lay people involved in the salesian mission. He saw for himself the

diversity and complexity of the situations in which the confreres are working. He found a good provincial project, shared by the whole Province, which is a guarantee of the future development of the salesian charism in Great Britain. The program proposes involvement in various areas of "new evangelization", development of the volunteer movement and interventions in the field of youth animation. At the end he presented to the Rectors and the Provincial Council some conclusions of the visitation. On 23 February he returned to Rome, where he remained until the 28th.

From 1 March to 15 April he was in Poland for the *extraordinary visitation of the Province of Breslau*. He was able to meet all the confreres and visit all the works. He had group-meetings with the Rectors, the parish priests, various members of the Salesian Family, lay people and various youth groups involved in the parishes. He was impressed by the vast expanse of the field of work, the rich challenges for the future and the enormous energy present in this Province.

On 1 April at Czestochowa he presided over a meeting of the *Polish Provincial Conference*. At the end of the visitation of Breslau he

held a meeting of the Provincial Council and presented his conclusions to them and to the Rectors. On 15 April he returned to Rome.

Subsequently, on 18 April he accompanied the Rector Major during his visit to North Belgium for the celebrations for the Centenary of salesian work in that Province. The culminating moment was the feast for all the Salesian Family in the city of Antwerp. It began with a Eucharistic celebration in the Cathedral with 2,000 people present. Together with the Rector Major, the Regional visited some of the important works of the Province, had a meeting with the confreres in initial formation, and others with Rectors and with lay people committed in the salesian mission.

After a few further days in Rome, Fr Van Hecke left once again for Poland, where on 26 April at Swobnica, in the novitiate of the Pila Province, he presided at the clothing ceremony of 16 novices.

Immediately afterwards he went on to Warsaw where, from 26-30 April, took place the second meeting of the Group of Provinces of the Northern European Region on the theme: *The problem of vocations in the Region; challenges and consequences for each Province and for the Region as a*

whole. The meeting made evident the diversity of situations as regards pastoral work for vocations. It was a time of mutual enrichment and exchange of experiences in the vocational field.

Still at Warsaw, on 30 April he presided at a meeting of the consulting group of the Polish Provincial Conference.

From 15 to 19 May the Regional was in Ireland to obtain a first idea of the development of the work in that Province and to animate the salesian communities. He presided also at the Eucharistic celebration in the sanctuary of Knock at the conclusion of the Salesian Family pilgrimage. He noted the variety of salesian interventions in schools, the university field, the areas of youthful distress, and the parishes.

Then on 21 May he left for Hungary to get a first impression of the situation in that Province. He visited all the communities and spoke with the confreres, and visited also the works of the FMA. At Budapest-Obuda he met with the young confreres of the post-novitiate, and at the end of his visit presided at the Clothing ceremony of six novices at Szombathely. He noted the history of suffering and the present commitment of many confreres to respond to

today's challenges in conditions which are far from easy.

On 26 May Fr Van Hecke moved from Hungary to Austria for a brief visit of animation to the salesian communities. He visited all of them, spoke with the confreres, and had meetings with the Provincial Council and with the National Consulting Group of the Salesian Family. Here too he was able to visit some of the works of the FMA. He noted the dynamic efforts being made to give effect to the provincial plan for meeting the challenges of the salesian mission in Austria.

On 2 June he returned to Rome.

The Councillor for the West Europe Region

After the winter session of the Council, the Regional for Western Europe left for Valencia to make a first personal contact with that Province, the only one he had not been able to visit during the previous summer. It is a Province rich in works and prospects. This judgement is based especially on the good vocational work being realized in the youth ministry sector, through attention to youth groups and movements and to the forma-

tion of animators. A joint commitment by the Delegations for Youth Ministry and for the Salesian Family is beginning to bear fruit.

On 17 January he was present at Salamanca for the successful defence of his doctoral thesis by Fr Pascual Chavez, Regional Councillor for Interamerica.

On 19 January he began the extraordinary visitation of the Province of Portugal, which ended with a meeting with the Provincial Council and the Rectors on 6 and 7 March. During the Christmas period he had already made a visit to the community of Angra do Heroismo (Azores), and later - in Holy Week - he visited the work at São Vicente (Cape Verde Islands). By making a stop at Dakar he was also able to visit the confreres at Thiés (Senegal).

The visitation began with a meeting of the Provincial Council, and as it went on the Regional was able to speak with every confrere and have other meetings with various groups of confreres and members of the Salesian Family; they included meetings with pastoral coordinators, administrators, Co-operators, Past-pupils, groups of teachers, youth groups, etc.

On 10, 11 and 12 March Fr Filiberto Rodriguez presided over

the *first meeting of Provincials and Delegates of the entire West European Region*. Together they studied means for exchange of information, dialogue and collaboration. The idea was not to set up regional structures, but rather to provide space for reflection, information and mutual help.

The morning of the 10th was given over exclusively to matters of the Iberian Provincial Conference, and the afternoon of the 12th to exchange of information relating to the recent SDB and FMA General Chapters. Present for this were the members of the SDB Iberian Conference and the Conference of FMA Provincials of Spain and Portugal.

As already stated, during Holy Week the Regional visited the community of the Portuguese Province in the Cape Verde Islands. On his return on 27 March, he began the *extraordinary visitation of the Province of Bilbao*, which ended on 25 and 26 May with meetings with the Rectors and the Provincial Council. In the course of the visitation he also had meetings with the youth ministry team, the economists, various representatives of the Salesian Family and of youth movements. He also had the joy of assisting at the ordination of

four new priests and a deacon at Vitoria on 3 May. They were ordained by Bishop Miguel Asurmendi SDB, Bishop of the Diocese, with whom the Regional was able to have a personal meeting. On 10 May he took part in the Provincial Feastday and received the perpetual professions, and on the 24th celebrated the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians at Bilbao-Deusto. The participation of the pupils, and the huge numbers of the faithful, of friends, and of the Salesian Family made the events unforgettable.

Combining the extraordinary visitation with other journeys, on 23 April the Regional had a meeting at Madrid with the Provincial Delegates for Youth Ministry, in which a revision was made of the Statutes of the National Centre for Youth Pastoral Work, and questions were dealt with relating to the Centre itself. On 17 and 18 May, again at Madrid, he had a meeting to consider the *renewal of Salesian Bulletins*, to be realized in the Region. For this meeting were also present: the Councilor General for Social Communication (Fr Antonio Martinelli), the Central Delegate of the Department (Fr Carlos Garulo), the Provincials of Paris (Fr. Alain Beylot), of Portugal (Fr. Simão

Cruz), and of Madrid (Fr. Jesús Guerra); Fr. Job Inisan and Fr. Alfonso Francia were present as directors of the French, Belgian and Spanish Bulletins; Fr. Pascual Poumay and Fr. Aureliano Laguna, were also present as the editors of the Bulletins.

After the extraordinary visitation of Bilbao the Regional took part in another meeting, this time of the Administrative Council of the CCS (Salesian Catechetical Centre). Here too there was discussion on the publication and circulation of the Salesian Bulletin. And on the same day the Regional met with the confreres of the National Centre of Youth Ministry, concerning some organizational aspects including the possible return of the Centre to its former site in via Alcalá 164.

In the morning of the 28th he presided over a meeting of the Governing Body of the Missions Office of Madrid. The sound functioning of the Office was noted and support was given for the structural reforms at present in progress.

In the afternoon of the same day he had a meeting with the permanent organizing group of the Iberian Conference.

On 1 June he returned to Rome for the plenary session of the General Council.

The Regional Councillor for Italy and the Middle East

During the first five months of the year the main concerns of Fr Fedrigotti were the continuation of the *extraordinary visitation of the Roman Province* (IRO) (until mid-March), and then that of the *Adriatic Province* (IAD) (mid-March to 2 June).

18 February. As nominee of the CEI (Italian Bishops Conference), he took part in the inaugural session of the National Council for Catholic Schools, an organism of the Italian Bishops intended to be an "expression of the responsibility assumed by the Bishops of Italy in the matter of Catholic schools in the country" and "with the objective of bringing together in an organic manner the numerous components which contribute to the educative effort of the Christian community".

14 March. Sacred Heart, Rome; he met the provincial assembly of the Roman Province (IRO) to close the extraordinary visitation.

10 - 11 May. He presided at the assembly of the CISI, which concentrated its attention on the so-called *third sector*, an emerging area in which solidarity is developed towards the weaker groups, attention is given to organized so-

cial subjects and to the more enterprising among the laity, a new culture of the area and of civil and ecclesial commitment.

12 May. In response to a request made in January, he led the CISI Presidency in a reflection on: *Salesian presence in Italy: a plan for the redefinition of the boundaries of Provinces and of the mobility of personnel*. An analysis was made of the guiding criteria, the necessary sensitization of the confreres, and the development of the sense of communion at national level. Ways of "cooperation among the Provinces" were examined, so that "less poor" Provinces could express solidarity with "poorer" ones. Evident once again was the need of shared responsibility especially with respect to the houses of formation and the "areas of national interest" (CCS-LDC, the places of Don Bosco, "Missio ad gentes", salesian presence in southern Italy, etc.). After years of discussion and planning, the Presidency also approved the *Outlines for a formative project for university colleges*.

13 May. Fr Fedrigotti took part in a meeting of the *Missionary Consulting Group*, which assessed the situation of missionary animation, of the "missionary image" transmitted in Italy by the

Congregation and the Salesian Family, and of initiatives and instruments to be given effect for this purpose.

2 June. At Ancona. He had a meeting with the assembly of the Adriatic Province to close the extraordinary visitation.

3 June. He took part in a meeting of the CISM (Conference of Italian Major Superiors) which considered complex problems concerning Catholic schools, and the consequences devolving on religious responsible for them.

4 June. He attended the second session of the *National Council of Catholic Schools*, which examined the pressing problem of the schools in Italy, especially in terms of autonomy, the reform of scholastic cycles, the law of parity, and the hypothesis of a "national fund for the Catholic School".

10 June. With the CNOS community he took part in a seminar on the theme: The promotion of a culture among Salesians concerning civil law, in the sense of a deeper understanding of the conditions for a proper balance in educative activity between the canonical and civil dimensions, between the sensitivity for the "upright citizen" and the pastoral aspect which is concerned with the "good Christian".

5.1 Strenna 1998

The Strenna of the Rector Major for 1998 takes its inspiration from the second year of preparation for the Jubilee of the year 2000.

The text is as follows:

“IN HOPE
WE ALREADY HAVE SALVATION”
(Rom 8,24):
TOGETHER WITH THE YOUNG
LET US REDISCOVER
THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT
IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD,
SO THAT WITH TRUST
AND CONFIDENCE
WE MAY LIVE AND WORK
WITH GOD’S KINGDOM IN VIEW.

5.2 Decree on the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God Eusebia Palomino

The following is an English translation of the Decree on the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God Sr. Eusebia Palomino FMA, read in the presence of the Holy Father on 17 December 1996. By force of this decree Sr. Eusebia is declared Venerable.

“Mary in fact is the *sublime example of perfect consecration*, since she belongs completely to God and is totally devoted to him. Chosen by the Lord who wished to accomplish in her the mystery of the Incarnation, she reminds consecrated persons of the *primacy of God’s initiative*. At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the *model of the acceptance of grace* by human creatures” (*Vita Consecrata*, 28).

As a disciple of Mary, to whom she was piously devoted, Eusebia Palomina Yenes learned to live her consecration faithfully and to offer her life to Christ collaborating with him in her humble and hidden life for the salvation of souls.

The Servant of God was born in the village of Cantalpino, in the diocese of Salamanca on 15 December 1899 of Agostino Palomino Pérez and Giovanna Yenes García, a married couple poor in earthly goods but rich in faith and human dignity. Led by her parents and the parish community she began to walk in the ways of

God, to put her trust in Providence and to love prayer. She rarely took part in games but was assiduous in learning Christian doctrine, so that in 1909 she received her first Communion and the following year was Confirmed. To help to support the family she used to accompany her father as he went begging for bread, and later worked as a nursemaid and servant in various families, first in her native village and then in Salamanca, where in 1915 she was accepted in the college of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who admitted her as a postulant because of her desire for consecrated life in the Institute.

After her novitiate at *Sarriá* near Barcelona, she made her temporary profession on 5 August 1924 and shortly afterwards was sent to the College of Valverde del Camino, where she was occupied in humble tasks like that of cook, doorkeeper and assistant of the girls in the oratory. Frail in body, but already great in virtue, she attracted the admiration of the community and the local people, and of all who came to know her. United with God she grew uninterruptedly in holiness, raising special admiration for the humility and availability with which she did everything for everyone,

her simplicity, charity, lofty spirit of prayer and of sacrifice, her ardour for the salvation of souls and the Christian education of girls and young women, and her diligent observance of the Rule and the vows.

She cultivated and spread devotion to the wounds and heart of Christ, to the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary in line with the recommendations of St Louis Maria Grignon de Montfort.

In 1930 she made her perpetual vows and since Spain was at that time in the throes of civil war, prompted by charity and with the consent of her confessor, in 1931 she spontaneously offered herself as a victim to God for the coming of the Kingdom of Jesus and Mary and for peace in her tormented country. Her health, which had never been robust, began to deteriorate. With complete submission to the will of God she suffered many and painful sufferings with wonderful interior strength and great joy.

She died a holy death on 10 February 1935, already outstanding for her reputation of holiness.

In 1986 the Bishop of Huelva, with the permission of the Holy See and in accordance with the *Motu Proprio Sanctitatis Clarior*, introduced the Cause of beatifica-

tion and canonization, and celebrated the cognitive process, which was approved by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints by a decree promulgated on 20 December 1985. After the preparation of the *Positio*, the investigation was begun into the practice of the virtues to a heroic decree by the Servant of God. On 14 May 1996, the Congress of Theological Consultors took place with positive results. Subsequently, in their ordinary session of 13 November of the same year, the Cardinals and Bishops, with His Excellency Andrea Maria Erba, Bishop of Velletri-Segni as Presenter of the Cause, confirmed that the Servant of God had practised to a heroic degree the theological and cardinal virtues and those connected with them.

The undersigned Pro-Prefect then made a detailed report of all these matters to the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, and his Holiness, accepting and approving the voting of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, ordered that the decree be prepared on the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God.

When everything necessary had been done as required, in the presence of the undersigned Pro-Prefect, the Bishop presenting the Cause, the Bishop Secretary of the Congregation and the others customarily called together on such occasions, the Holy Father solemnly declared: *There is certainty that the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity to both God and her neighbour, as also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance and related virtues, were practised in a heroic degree by the Servant of God Eusebia Palomino Yenes, a professed Sister of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, 'in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur'.*

He also ordered that the present decree be promulgated and be inserted among the Acts of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Given at Rome, 17 December 1996.

✱ ALBERTUS BOVONE,
Tit. Abp. of Cesarea di Numidia
Pro-Prefect

✱ EDOARDO NOWAK
Tit. Abp. of Luni
Secretary

5.3 New Salesian Bishop

Mgr. Joseph Anthony IRUDAYARAJ, Bishop of Dharmapuri, India.

The Osservatore Romano of 1 March 1997 carried the news of the appointment of *Fr Joseph Anthony IRUDAYARAJ SDB*, as Bishop of the newly created Diocese of *DHARMAPURI* in southern India, resulting from the division of the Diocese of Salem.

The new Bishop was born at Madras, the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu on 4 October 1935, and has been a Salesian since 1956 when he made his first profession on May 24 of that year at the end of his novitiate.

After philosophical studies and practical training, he studied theology at Madras and was ordained priest on 20 April 1965. Subsequently he obtained the Diploma in Spirituality.

In his educative and pastoral ministry, the Superiors entrusted him with various posts of responsibility. From 1975-78 he was Rector at Vellore "Don Bosco", and from 1979-83 Rector at Tirupattur "Don Bosco". In 1983 he was sent to direct the post-novitiate community of Yercaud where he remained for six years. From 1979-89 he was also a member of the Provincial Council.

In 1989 he was appointed parish priest at Madras-Ayanavaram, and in 1991 became Rector of the house of Madras-Broadway. There he received the news of his appointment as a bishop.

5.4 Pontifical appointment

Fr Raffaele FARINA, Prefect of the Vatican Library.

On 25 May 1997 the Osservatore Romano published the news that the Holy Father had appointed *Fr Raffaele Farina SDB* to be *Prefect of the Apostolic Vatican Library*.

Of *Fr Farina*, now concluding two terms as Rector Magnificus of the Pontifical Salesian University, his salesian curriculum is already known from AGC 317, p. 60.

He was born at Buonalbergo, Benevento, on 24 September 1933 and made his first profession on 25 September 1949. He was ordained priest on 1 July 1958 after studying theology at Turin-Crocetta. He holds doctorates in philosophy and history with also a teaching diploma. He has already been Rector Magnificus of the University from 1977-83. He was Moderator of the GC21 and was for a period Director of the Salesian Central Archives.

On 16 February 1986, he was appointed Under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Culture, an office he held until 1992, when at the request of the Rector Major, Grand Chancellor of the University, he was once again appointed Rector Magnificus of the UPS, and reconfirmed in 1995.

Now he has been called to a new service for the Holy See.

5.5 Appointment of the Central Delegate for the Salesian Cooperators

We print the letter of the Rector Major of 6 May 1997 (prot. 97/0071) to the Coordinator General of the Cooperators, Robert Lorenzini, to members of the World Council and to the Cooperators themselves, and also for information to Provincials, communicating the appointment of the new Central Delegate for the Cooperators in the person of Fr Patrick Laws.

Dear Robert Lorenzini
Members of the World Council
and Salesian Cooperators,
(and Provincials, for information)

The purpose of this letter is to thank all those who gave me indications for the selection of the

new Central Delegate for the Cooperators, and to inform you that I have appointed to this office Fr Patrick Laws.

He will take the place of Fr José Reinoso who, after ten years work as Delegate, is returning to the Philippines, where in the past he exercised his gifts as a Salesian and priest in various formation communities. To him I want to express my gratitude for the work he has carried out during these years in which the Association has grown not only quantitatively but in quality as well.

I thank the Provincial of Australia who has made Fr Laws available for the Cooperators Association. The Salesian Family of Australia knows him well and greatly appreciates him for the work he has already been doing in this sector for some time. He willingly places his experience and good will at the service of the Association for the development of Don Bosco's apostolic and spiritual project. I entrust him to your prayers and collaboration.

May the Solemnity of Mary Help of Christians find us all united in prayer, that she may help us always to fulfil the designs of God.

Fraternally,

Fr JUAN E.VECCHI

5.6 Our dead confreres (1997 - 2nd list)

"Faith in the risen Christ sustains our hope and keeps alive our communion with our brothers who rest in Christ's peace... Their remembrance is an incentive to continue faithfully in our mission" (Cost. 94).

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
E ALCEDO Otoniel	Lima	20.06.97	84	—
<i>Fu per 5 anni Vescovo Ausiliare di Chachapoyas, per 8 anni Vescovo e per 13 Arcivescovo di Ayacucho (Perù)</i>				
L AMERI Alfredo Andrea	Rosario	02.03.97	90	ARO
L ARCE Fabio	Managua	16.04.97	68	CAM
L BANDIERA Giuseppe	Pietrasanta	07.04.97	88	ILT
P BERTI Italo	Roma	14.05.97	84	IRO
L BERTOLO Carlo	Ayagualo	15.05.97	85	CAM
P BIUSO Salvatore	Catania	30.04.97	89	ISI
P BLANC Esteban	Montevideo	29.04.97	89	URU
P BORRINI Fermo	Cuiabá	30.05.97	79	BCG
P BOTTO Alessandro	Torino	22.05.97	82	MOR
L BRAGGION Mario	Pordenone	23.05.97	82	IVE
P BRESCIANI Antonio	Quito	07.05.97	56	ECU
P BUQUEN Maurice	Saint Brieuc	27.05.97	87	FPA
P CAMMARATA Paolo	Pedara	24.05.97	82	ISI
P CAMPOS Geraldo Pompeu	Belo Horizonte	03.06.97	80	BBH
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
L CARATZU Diego	Torino	01.04.97	90	ISA
P CARPANESE Mario	Boston	27.02.97	85	SUE
P CERESA Pietro	Torino	19.04.97	77	ICP
P CLAVIJO Eusebio	Montevideo	08.04.97	83	URU
L COBO SANZ Jesús	Santander	21.01.97	75	SBI
P COLOMER PLANAS Josep	Barcelona	14.06.97	63	SBA
L CONCAS Daniele	Lanusei	07.06.97	75	ISA
P CORREA Angel María	Quito	12.06.97	93	ECU
<i>Fu Ispettore per tre anni</i>				
L CUNNINGHAM Roger	Macclesfield	20.04.97	85	GBR
P DAL MASO Giovanni	San Pedro (California)	06.04.97	86	SUO
P DALKMANN Franz	Essen	28.04.97	77	GEK
P D'ANNA Vincenzo	Santa Cruz	24.04.97	74	BOL
P DELLA FERRERA Domenico	Banpong	31.01.97	90	THA
P DIEBELS Jacques	Doetinchem (Olanda)	19.05.97	78	HAI
L DIVINA Federico	Negrar (Verona)	23.04.97	84	IVO
P DUQUE DOS REIS João	Belo Horizonte	07.06.97	66	BBH
<i>Fu Ispettore per dodici anni</i>				

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P FANTIN Enrico	Shillong	26.06.97	74	ING
P FERREIRA Theotônio	São Gabriel da Cachoeira	05.06.97	99	BMA
P FERRONATO Giordano	Valencia	20.05.97	86	VEN
L FORTINI Luigi	Torino	04.05.97	99	ICP
L FRACASSO Pio	Varazze	01.06.97	80	ICP
P GALDIERI Giovanni	Caserta	26.03.97	51	IME
P GAGAN Stanisaw	Kielce	23.05.97	67	PLS
P GUEVARA PARDO Manuel Roberto	Santafé de Bogotá	18.03.97	67	COB
P HICKS Michael	Limerick	22.03.97	80	IRL
P IÑON Felipe Venisio	San José (Misiones)	22.02.97	89	ARO
P KALATHUVEETIL Thomas	Bangalore	02.04.97	50	INK
P KÖNIGBAUER Ludwig	Penzberg (Baviera)	25.06.97	85	GEM
P LAURENDEAU Rémy	Angers	09.04.97	81	FPA
P LIMA José Eduardo	Rosario	15.04.97	73	ARO
P LOBO Joaquim	Bombay (India)	29.06.97	63	AFE
P LÓPEZ José Antonio	Piura	02.04.97	57	PER
P MANTEGAZZA Giovanni	Tokyo	23.05.97	82	GIA
P MARSHALL Albert W.	Oakland	16.05.97	58	SUO
P MAZÉ Joseph	Saint Brieuc	21.05.97	84	FPA
P MERINO Juan Carlos	Córdoba	26.04.97	77	ACO
P MOSTO Mario	Lima	07.04.97	66	PER
P MOTTA José	Goiânia	22.06.97	71	BCG
P MRÁZ Alojz	Pezinok	19.05.97	78	SLK
P NEARY Brendan	Dublin	16.04.97	92	IRL
L PERC Karel	Trstenik	07.05.97	80	SLO
P PERDOMO Fernando	San Juan de Porto Rico	14.06.97	73	ANT
P POLITI Salvatore	Catania	02.05.97	85	ISI
P REYNO Carlos Alberto	Las Piedras	02.05.97	75	URU
L ROTA Amilcare	Como	07.05.97	72	ILE
P SHEEHY Patrick Joseph	Calcutta	19.05.97	77	INC
P SILVESTRE SANZ Francisco	Alcoy	12.06.97	66	SVA
P SLOBODA Stanislav	Bratislava	17.05.97	76	SLK
P TOIGO Antonio	Torino	24.06.97	93	ICP
<i>Fu Ispettore per undici anni</i>				
P VINCK Piet	Wilrijk	26.05.97	87	BEN