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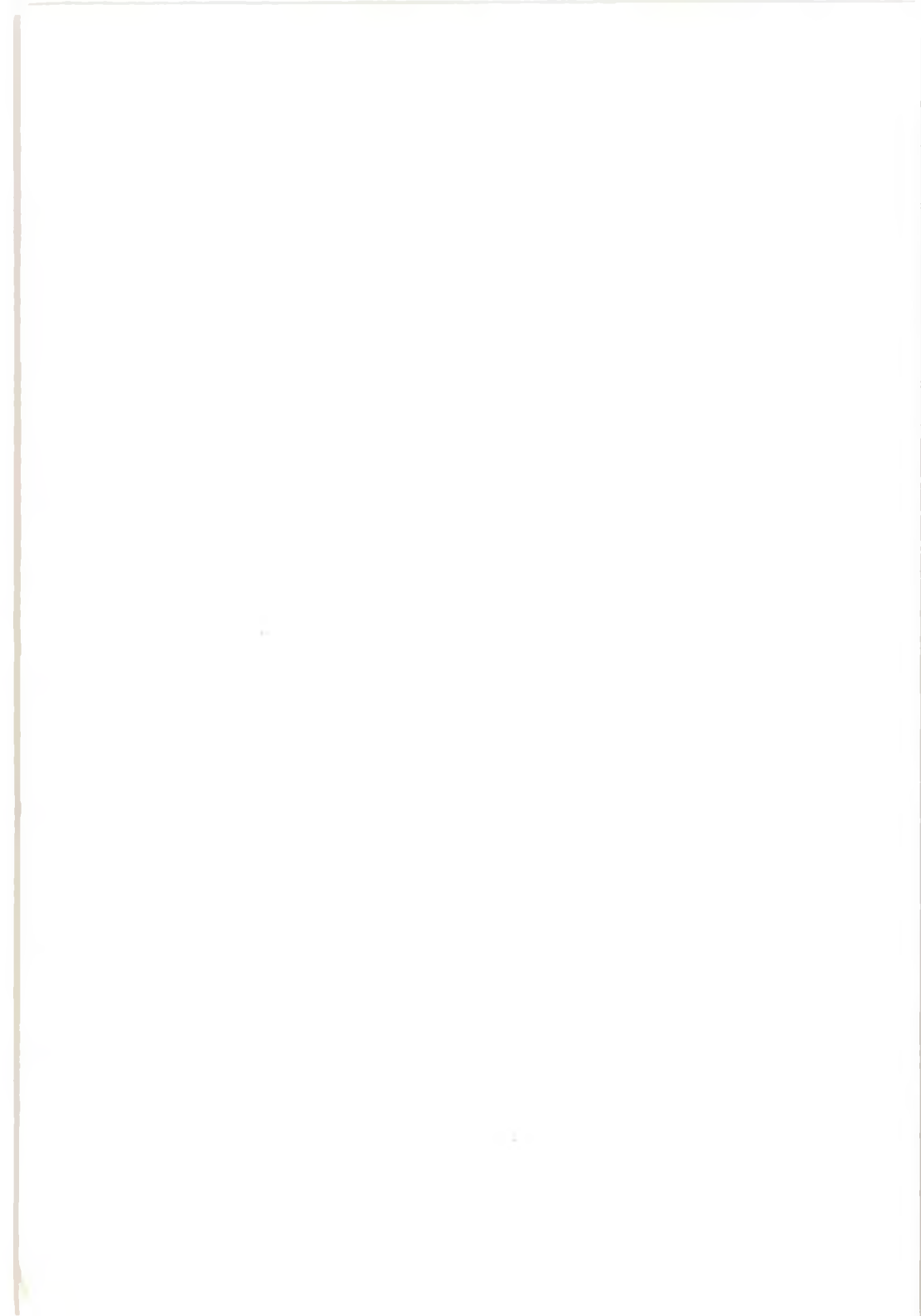
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official organ
of animation
and communication
for the
salesian congregation

Direzione Generale
Opere don Bosco
Roma



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of the Salesian Society
of St John Bosco

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF ANIMATION AND COMMUNICATION FOR THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

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“EXPERTS, WITNESSES AND CRAFTSMEN OF COMMUNION”¹

The salesian community – animating nucleus

Introduction. - I. **A new phase in our community life.** - 1. Strong expectations. - 2. Animating nucleus. - 3. The goal. - 4. The present moment. - 5. The model for reference. - II. **A community process for becoming an animating nucleus.** - 1. Redesigning the mission. - 2. A way of life for communicating a spirituality. - 3. Making the salesian community a "family" able to arouse communion around the salesian mission. - 4. Giving to our educative activity and to that of the EPC the missionary dynamism of "Da mihi animas". - 5. Fraternal life and pastoral work for growth. - Conclusion.

Rome, 25 March 1998

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

My dear confreres,

The year 1998 sees all the provinces engaged in preparing and holding Provincial Chapters. This is a grace from the Lord generously offered to all of our ninety-one circumscriptions, which will have its effect on the life of the whole Congregation. We do not see these Chapters as legal formalities nor as merely deliberative assemblies. For us they are experiences, celebrations and occasions for re-launching the communion which unites us in our religious consecration and our mission to young people.

The Provincial Chapters will reflect and manifest working methods for lay participation in the salesian charism and hence

¹ "Religiosi e Promozione Umana" 24, in *La vita fraterna in comunità* n.10.

for the greater responsibility for animation which is being shaped for us. In this way they are called to make a contribution which will be indicative for our future.

This Congregational event fits into a process within the Church which can be clearly seen in the six synods which precede the Jubilee: the visible and practical fulfilment of communion according to the new horizons of the Church and the world. I had personal experience of this in the American Synod in which I took part with others.

It was this which suggested the theme for this letter which I offer you as a stimulus to reflection rather than as a complete treatment of the topic, given its breadth and complexity.

My recent visit to Africa for the erection of two new Vice-provinces,² has been a new proof, if proof were needed, of the potentialities inherent in "salesian" fraternal life, i.e. life according to the spirit and style of the origins, codified today in the Constitutions and Regulations: potentialities for each one of us, for our mission, for the young people in our environments, for those disposed to work with us, and for people in general. It is therefore only right to give them special attention at this juncture.

I. A new phase in our community life.

1. Strong expectations.

Recent General Chapters have formulated guidelines and organic indications for educating young people to the faith³ and for involving lay people in the salesian mission.⁴ The fulfilment of such proposals requires the creation of some realities closely

² Tropical Equatorial Africa (ATE) and French-speaking West Africa (AFO).

³ Cf. GC23.

⁴ Cf. GC24.

connected with them: the establishment of the educative and pastoral community, its animation on the part of the group of Salesians, the understanding of the current situation and mentality of young people, and the formulation of an educative pastoral plan. All this constitutes the "model" for pastoral ministry, which we intend to follow with practical proposals to deal with the current situation while remaining faithful to the principles of the preventive system.

Reading these guidelines, even cursorily, one immediately becomes aware that the possibility of putting them into practice depends upon an element that is considered sound and almost taken for granted: the **salesian community**.

The community, in fact, is invited to recognize the challenges which the young people pose and to think about what suggestions to offer them so that their faith may mature. The community is called to live and communicate a spirituality, without which efforts to put the young people in contact with the mystery of Jesus would be ineffective. It is to the community that the task is given of bringing the lay people together, getting them involved, giving them responsibilities and training them.

The presence of the community is always presumed in the guidelines, even though not always mentioned explicitly. To its members the indications are primarily addressed. To them the project is entrusted.

There is constant reference to it in meetings and documents in which the situation of our vocational fruitfulness, of our impact and our renewal are studied. After considering what can be done about some problem, and deciding how to do it, when it comes down to *who* should do it, there is the constant refrain: "*it needs a community which...*", and then come the requirements.

To which community do these expectations refer? To the local community, to the provincial community or to the world community? The three levels which work together and in harmony are always understood, as the Constitutions indicate: "Local communities are a living part of the provincial

community”;⁵ “Religious profession incorporates the Salesian in the Society, making him a participant in the communion of spirit, witness and service that is its life within the Universal Church”,⁶ i.e. in the world community.

Looking more closely, however, at the deliberations of the last two General Chapters it becomes clear that the focal point, from which one starts and to which one returns is the local community. Assigned to it are the greater number and the more specific tasks. The Province is asked to ensure that conditions are such that the local communities are able to function, to plan the mission in the whole area, animating, giving support and encouragement and setting up enriching contacts between the local communities.

There is no question about the identity, the organization at world level, the guidelines which ensure our unity, or the creative possibilities for the individual provinces. The amount of encouragement, directives and aids produced by Chapters and by the General Council is not only abundant, but faithfully reflects the renewal in the Church and appears suited to the time in which we live.

What we look at in the first place, and use as a yardstick, is the vitality, the ability to respond of what we might call the cells or the basic organisms of the Congregation: the local communities, and in reference to these, the provincial communities.

It is not difficult to see why. The local communities are the places where we are at work every day: where we live out our consecrated lives and express the quality of our commitment to education. They are in direct contact with the youngsters and the people: they experience their situations at first hand and have to think of bearing witness by their lives and of finding apostolic initiatives to respond to the needs. It is in the local communities that guidelines are tried out and tested: to see

⁵ C 58.

⁶ C 59.

whether they are valid and practicable in our current situations.

There is another reason too. Only by involving the local communities is it possible to bring all or at least most of the confreres into the task of rethinking a method of faith education and a new community approach. Few confreres are involved at provincial and world level, even though their roles are of great importance and influence.

The community, therefore, in which we live our daily life and especially if it is directly exposed to the public gaze, is the place where the greatest expectations regarding significance and apostolic effectiveness are to be found.

The expectations in this regard are well stated in the theological expressions which abound in both the document "*Fraternal life in Community*",⁷ and the part of the Apostolic Exhortation *Consecrated Life* entitled "Signum fraternitatis". They are pages to be meditated on in order to find in them ever new spiritual and practical guidance: the image of the Trinity, a sign of communion with the Church, a prophetic expression of following the call, a school of Christian love, the place where one experiences God.

"Salesian" expectations have also been expressed in notions which immediately give the idea of the requirements and the results: the community is a *family* and is built up as such; it becomes a *sign, a school and an environment of faith*; we think of it as a *special place for ongoing formation*.

In line with these ideas the GC24 drew out very forcefully one which corresponds to the phase of renewal in which we are at present engaged; it is in fact its keystone, its driving force: the **animating nucleus**.

It is on this that I want to concentrate in this letter, and from this standpoint to consider other aspects of the community.

⁷ Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life etc. Rome, 1994.

2. Animating nucleus.

This is already a familiar expression in our vocabulary. It represents a benchmark in our current way of understanding pastoral activity, intimately connected with others no less important, such as the participation of lay people in the mission, the development of the educative community, the formulation of the project, the sharing in pedagogical style, and the communication of salesian spirituality.

With these it becomes a "system", which would not be possible for them alone without the action of the animating nucleus. Similarly, it is not possible to understand the purpose and the practical meaning of the expression itself in separation from the whole "system". Article 5 of the General Regulations puts it well, when it inserts it among the guidelines for our pedagogical and pastoral practice. "The application of the plan requires that in all our works and settings we establish the educative and pastoral community, whose animating nucleus is the salesian community".⁸

The frequent use of the expression in GC23 and GC24, the hopes expressed regarding its understanding and its functioning, have rightly drawn the confreres' attention to it. They have come to understand that it is important to set about putting the Chapter declarations into practice. And being still at the stage of sorting out the idea, they raise questions about both the concept and its application.

I consider as perfectly justified the many requests for clarification made to me and to the members of the Council when we have the opportunity to meet. I willingly respond to some of these questions noting, however, that the answers do not provide immediate and universal solutions. Rather they are useful as points of understanding, as some experiences already realized, as an encouragement to continue the research, the experimentation and the codification of practice.

⁸ R 5

What do we mean by “animating nucleus”? It is a group of people who identify themselves with the salesian mission, educational system and spirituality, and together take up the task of assembling, motivating, and involving all those who are concerned with a work, so as to form with them the educative community and to carry out a plan for the evangelization and education of the young.

The reference point for this group is the **salesian community**. That means that the Salesians, all of them, are a permanent part of the animating nucleus. Each one, young or old, directly engaged in a working role or retired, makes the contribution which his preparation or his situation permits.

This also means that the lay people are part of it in accordance with the circumstances already mentioned.

It even means that the local nucleus could be formed principally by lay people, always having behind them adequate support, on the spot or within the province, from the Salesians. This happens in places where recently we have had to animate through a guardianship, patronage, or legal requirement.

It needs to be emphasized that the “salesian” community, its spiritual heritage, its educational method, its brotherly relationships, and co-responsibility for the mission, provide in each case the guiding model for the pastoral identity of the animating nucleus.

The type we are dealing with here, which ought to lead to the implementation of provincial plans for relocation and redimensioning, is one in which the salesian community is present in sufficient numbers and in quality to animate, together with some lay people, an educative community and project, accepting that this allows of a variety of styles of implementation depending on the number of confreres and roles.

The other kind, the one in which only lay people make up the immediate animating nucleus is complementary: it is a possibility which could answer certain particular problems of either personnel or initiatives, and always looks to the “salesian

nucleus" as the inspirational model to inspire it and in which to find support.

3. The goal.

In the light of the above indications, it has been asked whether it is a matter of necessity or choice. It must be said that the process of the Church, the changes that have taken place in society with their repercussions in the field of education, our own periods of rethinking and verification, have coalesced in the concept of *community – animating nucleus* through force of evidence. There is now no longer any question about convictions or orientations in this regard; it is now a matter of its concrete realization and our ability to bring it about.

It may be helpful to recall, albeit briefly, the motives underlying the options; they may suggest useful attitudes.

Nowadays educative and pastoral initiatives have become open and are based on criteria of participation. Numerous lay people are at work in this field, and their numbers have increased in recent years to such an extent that they now constitute a numerical majority; they include parents and collaborators; they are linked with civil organisms and other educational agencies; they are open to the locality and linked with a network of friends and supporters: it is a complex world of management in which not everything can be done directly and there is need of complementary responsibility and skills of various kinds.

While traditional educational environments are acquiring new dimensions, settings for reaching the young with programs to meet their different situations are becoming more numerous and diversified. On the one hand there are requests to take on the management of ever bigger, more complex and intricate works; and on the other there is a call for new educative fields provoked by the present needs and prevailing poverty. This has led and is still leading to the demand not only for more per-

sonnel, but for personnel with specific qualifications and for linkages in all directions in line with the complex nature of society.

But all this is only the beginning of the matter. The decisive reason which has led us to conceive the community as an animating nucleus is the new season through which the Church is living. It reveals an acute awareness of communion with God and among men, and sees communion as the principal way for the realization of man's salvation.

This is bound to bring about notable modifications in pastoral practice. Everything acquires its meaning and dimension in the light of communion. Ecclesial communities become solidly subjects of the mission. Within them the vocations of the religious, the ordained ministers and the laity are turned to account, in line with the specific gift given by the Spirit to each one. Their respective experiences interact to their mutual enrichment and become committed together in evangelization, which becomes "new" also because of this fresh element: the ecclesial subject which accomplishes it, and in this the importance of the laity emerges at the present day.

The process has not been a short one by any means. The travail in the pre-conciliar period, the reflections in the Council itself, the efforts to set up in a new way both ecclesial life and pastoral work after the Council, the doctrinal synthesis and praxis which have matured in these years leading up to the Jubilee, the Synods (on the laity, ordained ministries and consecrated life), and the Apostolic Exhortations which followed them, have clarified how the different vocations complete each other, enrich each other, and are coordinated; indeed, they could not have an original identity apart from mutual reference within ecclesial communion.

For our part, we see this form of being religious and of working for the young from the very beginnings of the Salesian Family. From the outset Don Bosco involved many persons through his witness and the novelty of his work, and gained support from both ecclesiastics and lay people; he attracted to

his work both men and women who helped him to teach catechism, to build schools and workshops, to animate playgrounds, to obtain work for needy boys with upright employers. With them he started up groups and occasional forms of cooperation.

When he saw the need to provide a home for some of the boys, he created a family with the collaboration of Mamma Margaret, with whom he shared the running of the house. His aim was to unite all good people and extend their collaboration to the maximum. He dreamed of their collaboration, suggested it to them, and set about realizing it by word of mouth, friendship and through letter-writing.⁹

Soon he became convinced of the need for consecrated personnel: and this not only because the continuity of the work called for persons available full-time for the young, but because the religious quality of the education he had so much at heart needed to have a priest in charge of it. It was not just a matter of rescuing the youngsters from a situation of economic poverty, or preparing them for life through study or the learning of a trade, nor even of educating their religious sense or conscience, but of bringing them into contact with the living Christ through the grace of faith, the efficacy of the sacraments and participation in the ecclesial community.

Vocations to a consecrated life were to be found among the youngsters themselves. And so he began to gather some of them together and invited them to form a Society; he asked them to stay with him permanently, to commit themselves full-time and with all their strength to a work of charity, to dedicate their whole life to following the poor, chaste and obedient Christ in a faithful service to God and the young.

Our charism therefore was born in a context of communion of a family and educative kind, animated by an almost unlimited openness in collaborating in doing good to various groups,

⁹ cf. BRAIDO P., *Il progetto operativo di Don Bosco e l'utopia della società cristiana*, LAS Rome 1982, p.11.

with the specific aim of creating cooperation, solidarity and communion.

4. The present moment.

In recent times a great deal of reflection has been given to the consecrated community.

Of interest is the quality of fraternal life with reference to the lawful demands now emerging in communities, to the conditions of life they call for, and to the new possibilities of rapport and communication which arise as a consequence of culture, of renewal in the Church, and of present personal sensitivities.

Of interest too, and very much so, is the service to human and Christian communion which consecrated communities are called upon to provide in today's Church (evangelization, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue) and the prevailing world climate (peace, communication, reconciliation, ethnic conflicts, the intercultural character of society, and globalization).

The two levels are intertwined; they are interdependent: we become experts in community through an experience of brotherhood in Christ. And so one leads to the other; both have to be reawakened and renewed in a stage in which the community must come to terms with *certain conditions*.

One of these is its *present composition*: the number of members in the individual communities is falling and in some cases can go no lower. As well as being greatly reduced in number, there is sometimes a preponderance of those who are aged or at least getting on in years. This is not always a disadvantage, especially if seen in a positive manner as making it possible to give greater responsibility to individuals because of the smaller numbers, or as an opportunity for exchange and charismatic experience between generations if the aged are in the majority. Such a composition, nevertheless, requires a new ability for relationships and adaptation of various kinds.

A second element to be considered is the *relationship being*

created between the community and apostolic work. In some places we no longer have exclusive responsibility for the work; not all the members of the religious community are involved in it; often they are distributed over several sectors with little communication between them. One feels a disproportion between the religious personnel and the dimensions of the work. A consequence of this is that there is an abundance of exchanging of ideas and sharing of responsibility between the religious who are still active and the lay collaborators, but much less with the members of the religious community. In many cases too, many confreres become so overburdened by their various duties that they cannot follow the regular rhythm of community meetings.

A third element is the *greater insertion* of the community into the dynamics of the Church and a greater openness to the social context. Consecrated life is seen not as a withdrawal from questions which concern man, but as being inserted in them with an original contribution and specific mission. As a result there is a multiplication of relationships and exchanges with what is external. The time available for community matters is cut back and is less tranquil and protected, more invaded by the complexity of life and stimulus from the neighbourhood. The complexity, events, trends and images penetrate through the ever more individualized means of social communication, and challenge not only the quality and frequency of relationships but also the community's ability to make judgements in line with the Gospel.

But the most important fact concerns the *change from insistence on life in common to that of brotherhood* determined by the circumstances of work and of the new demands of the individual.

The two terms, *common life*, and *fraternal life in community* convey the idea immediately, and it is not difficult to distinguish between their implications. "Common life" means "living together in a particular and lawfully constituted religious house", and performing the same actions (praying,

eating, working, etc.) in accordance with the same norms. For common life it is important to come together physically.

"Fraternal life in community" means primarily acceptance of the individual, quality of interpersonal relationships, friendship, the possibility of real affection, the joy of being and working together, the active participation of everyone in the life of the group. Nowadays we are more concerned about the union of persons, the depth of relationships, mutual help and support, making the most of each one's capabilities and active role, and the convergence of intents and objectives.

Common life and fraternal life are linked. "It is clear that 'fraternal life' will not automatically be achieved by the observance of the norms which regulate common life; but it is evident that common life is designed to favour fraternal life to a great extent".¹⁰

A balance has to be found: not purely communion of spirit which would do away with all manifestations of common life; but not such great legal insistence on common life as would make subordinate the more substantial aspects of fraternity in Christ: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples".¹¹

Our Constitutions help us to understand and establish this balance and fusion of the two aspects. They tell us of the moments we have in common: they characterize the family spirit,¹² they tend to create a mature rapport among us, to open us to communication, to make us able to share "joys and sorrows (...), apostolic plans and experiences".¹³

Good order and balance between the two elements brings about the desire and need to form true communities, in line with the conditions of each group and individual aspirations; deeply renewed communities, be they small, medium-sized or

¹⁰ *Fraternal life in community*, n.3.

¹¹ Jn 13, 34-35.

¹² Cf. C 51.

¹³ Ibid.

large, which have to animate traditional works or be inserted in more lively fashion among the people, must nevertheless be always able to help individuals to grow from both a human and religious standpoint, to express with greater transparency what they believe, and stir up the desire to become members: in other words, communities with vocational ability.

5. Our community model.

All forms of religious life have an indispensable element in the community. But each realizes it in its own way which differs from that of others.

Our community life is in the first place a reflection of that lived by Jesus with the Apostles. He chose them "to be with him, to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons".¹⁴ From this moment onwards, and by virtue of this call, they formed a solid group in fidelity to the Master and his cause. Together they enjoyed familiarity with Jesus, and heard from him exclusive explanations about the mystery of the Kingdom. Together they were direct witnesses of certain episodes and participants in central events of Jesus' life. Together they learned from him how to pray in solitude and in contact with men; they were given as a group the task of getting the crowd arranged at the multiplication of the loaves, and all of them were sent (albeit to different villages) to prepare for the arrival of Jesus and to proclaim the Gospel. They gathered round Christ to report on their adventures, and even had some brief discussions on the nature of the Kingdom and their participation in Christ's cause. Jesus taught them the attitudes necessary for following him and for building unity among themselves: service, forgiveness, humility in their needs, not judging others, selfless generosity. Together with the preaching of the Gospel and "so that the world may

¹⁴ Mk 3,14-15.

believe",¹⁵ he commanded them to live in unity; he prayed for them "that they may all be one".¹⁶ Together, with Mary, they received the Spirit and began to set up the community, animating it by the word, the Eucharist, and the service of authority.

This apostolic model is mediated for us through the charismatic experience of our beginnings. Don Bosco, following Christ the Good Shepherd, gathered young disciples around him who grew fond of him as they shared with him the service of the oratories. He asked them to stay with him and devote themselves full time to wholehearted work for the young. With them he extended his gaze to distant places which led to the expansion of the Congregation and refined the spiritual traits which gave a characteristic physiognomy to his family.

It is a community not only for the young but with the young: it shares their life and is adapted to their needs. The presence of the young determines the timetable, the style of work and the manner of praying. Staying with Don Bosco means staying with youngsters, offering them all we have and are: heart, mind and will; friendship and work; sympathy and service. In this relationship and environment the identity of both the community and its individual members matures.

It is a community highly charged spiritually, characterized by "Da mihi animas". Don Bosco shaped his first collaborators, with simplicity and tangibility, according to the program: work, prayer and temperance. He asked them to carry out a "work of charity" for the benefit of their neighbour. Love of Jesus Christ and trust in his grace was what lay behind his concern for the good of the boys, beginning with their human and spiritual needs. Even the most abandoned were helped to make contact with God and the Church, and those who showed particular dispositions were led explicitly towards holiness. The

¹⁵ Jn 17,21.

¹⁶ Ibid.

nearness of God and the presence of Mary most Holy were almost sensibly felt.

The community was in no way extraordinary; it was formed of youngsters long on enthusiasm but short on experience, some with outstanding qualities and others with normal and even quite modest endowments, but it was a community led by Don Bosco, with his understanding of each one's capabilities, in a "mission" felt by all to be unique and one in which they were all involved. There were different roles, tasks and work to be done in widely different ways; but there was a definite and general sense of membership of the oratory and belonging to Don Bosco. It was in no way diminished or obscured by the variety of roles or commitments, or the dimensions of skills and settings.

Despite the moments of tension and difficulty that we know of, the Valdocco community appeared *united around a plan of action and the person of its director*, something Don Bosco considered fundamental for its apostolic efficacy. He made every effort, therefore, to foster creativity and involve everyone through spontaneous or established forms of participation, so as to ensure unity in activity, harmony among individuals and consistency of criteria.

In this way the community became the soul of an environment which attracted and won over the hearts of the youngsters: it produced a climate of familiarity, which encouraged spontaneity and led to confidence; it expressed that "pedagogical charity", the kindness which gives rise to loving attachment and arouses a parallel feeling.¹⁷ Don Bosco presented it in his Introduction to the Rule in these words: "When this brotherly love reigns in a community towards one another, and all rejoice in another's good just as though it were their own, then that house becomes heaven itself".

The youthful oratory community was neither closed nor isolated. It had relationships with persons of significance, various

¹⁷ cf. Letter from Rome, 1884.

religious and civil associations, and with the general context of the city. From the beginning Don Bosco's idea was that it should be linked with the Cooperators' Association as being two branches of the same tree. And so he wrote in the Regulations for the Cooperators: "*This Congregation, being definitively approved by the Church, can serve as a sure and stable bond for Salesian Cooperators, In fact, it has for its primary purpose the carrying out of works for the benefit of youth upon whom rests the good or bad state of future society. By putting forward such a proposal, we do not mean that this is the only means for providing for such a need, since there are hundreds of others which we highly recommend, for they are doing good work. We on our part propose one, and it is the work of Salesian Cooperators*".¹⁸

At the centre of that lively and open world that was Valdocco, Don Bosco, led by the Lord, wanted consecrated persons who would pull in other apostolic forces involved in the same project, a guarantee of development and of the continuation of the mission.

The *mission*, carried on with the same spirit of Valdocco, provides our communities with the criterion for resolving tensions that may arise. This does not lessen any aspect of fraternity but, in fact, gives it its concrete form. If the meaning of our educative mission to the young were to fall away, our own fraternity would lose its originality and force of communication. It would no longer be the hive of activity that the oratory was, but only a fixed reproduction of it.

The mission, on the other hand, is not an individual insertion from which one returns to the community only occasionally or to pray and rest: we share its life and also the responsibility for its apostolic work: "to live and work together is for us Salesians a fundamental requirement and a sure way of fulfilling our vocation".¹⁹

¹⁸ Bosco G., *Regulations for Cooperators*, quoted in *Regulations of Apostolic Life*

¹⁹ C 49.

The salesian mission is of its nature a community one. The Constitutions say so with great clarity,²⁰ with the force of a definition: the mission is entrusted to a community, provincial and local.²¹

It is a mission to youth: it aims at the growth of young people in line with the energies God has given to each individual and the grace Christ has communicated to the world. The preventive system, which is a synthesis of its content and praxis, requires a family atmosphere and hence a network of relationships. We are not tutors of individuals, nor specialized coaches: we work in and through a community and try to create broad youthful environments. The ensemble of content and experiences which educational praxis recognizes as adequate for the human development and growth in faith of the young, calls for a convergent synergy of interventions which cannot be realized by a single person working alone.

We may add, moreover, that youngsters must be guided towards maturity in relationships and social life with all its implications; and that the process of faith which we suggest has as its objective the leading of them to an experience of Christian community lived in line with its characteristic dimensions.

Communion and fraternity therefore, the community and family, are the condition, process and substantial part of the mission. This is something that prompts us to make of it an authentic experience and to become its expert craftsmen.

II. A community process for becoming an animating nucleus.

The above reflections give rise to further questions: How does the salesian community become competent as the animating nucleus of a large group of individuals, who are frequently pro-

²⁰ Cf. SDB C 44; FMA C 51.

²¹ Cf. C 44.

fessionally prepared? What does being an animating nucleus call for from the community? What weight does religious consecration have in the animation of an educative community?

We shall try to respond by analyzing certain perspectives more deeply and exploring some other possibilities. We shall concentrate our attention not only on the reality of animation as already presented by the GC24, and on the manner, methods and content of animation which have been frequently repeated, but also on what renders the animating nucleus competent for carrying out its service.

1. Redesigning the mission.

A qualifying element for the community in its animating role is the reshaping of the mission and its proper place in it, against the broad background conceived by Don Bosco and as expressed today in the Constitutions: in the Salesian Family, "by the will of the Founder, we have particular responsibilities: (...) to foster dialogue and fraternal collaboration";²² we bring about in our works the educative and pastoral community (...), so that it can become a living experience of Church and a revelation of God's plan for us".²³ To be well set up from a community aspect, considering the educative community and its components as the first objective of our activities in favour of the young, and taking up together theoretically and practically the work of animation, will lead to the clarification of the salesian and pastoral value of such work.

Around us there are adults linked with Don Bosco in various ways: through empathy, commitment, spirit; and to them we are "sent" by virtue of our vocation. Our service to them is not something of little importance: it is one of spiritual and salesian animation.

We are called not only to give dynamism to a group of edu-

²² C 5.

²³ C 47.

cators or collaborators by suitable methods; we are called to give rise to "an experience of Church", to give rise to and extend a vocational reality. It is not only a matter of making better use of the resources we have available, the laity for example, but of communicating the faith and the salesian spirit.

In this way *animation comes to be a primary part of our mission and an original manner of living our communion*, to which we must dedicate more than spare time or mere 'functional' attention.

Don Bosco's charism is concentrated to a particular extent in the SDB community; it was moulded by him directly through the force of consecration, through the daily sharing of the charism with others, through the plan of life called for by salesian spirituality, and through total dedication to apostolic work.²⁴ Such concentration is not an end in itself; it is there to communicate and spread the particular gift of the Spirit to the Church which is the salesian spirit.

We are not a welfare society or an educational organization which has as its final objective specific material or cultural realizations; we are charismatics. That means giving life to a work which raises questions, gives motives for hope, brings people together, prompts collaboration, and gives rise to an ever more fruitful communion for the realization together of a plan of life and action in line with the Gospel.

Ours is a collaboration with the Spirit. He animates the Church and the world. He opens them to the Word, excites the desire for unity and the will for agreement, and renders efficacious efforts and commitments for the transformation of the world in accordance with God's design; he distributes charisms and sows the seeds of good in humanity, so that they may strengthen in themselves the elements of peace and communion.

Constituted as we are by the Spirit in consecrated communities, we become mediators of his animating activity: we help

²⁴ Cf. GC24, 236.

people to accept and welcome his interventions, we create the conditions needed for his gifts and inspirations to strike home in reality, so as to give full and ample realization to the mission to which he has called us.

The tasks of animation, particularly in the EPC, aim at making available to all what the Spirit has given to us: faith in God's loving plan for every individual, love of Christ expressed in total dedication to the salvation of the young, the pedagogical wisdom we learn from the Good Shepherd, and conformation to Christ through the model of Don Bosco.²⁵

Only this way of thinking of the mission will render adequately effective in the community the experience of the Spirit, who is to be found in the primacy given to the meaning of God, in the following of Christ, in the pastoral charity with which we place ourselves completely at the service of the young with our salesian educative and spiritual heritage.

To be animators therefore of the activity of persons involved in Don Bosco's mission and spirit is not an extra function for particular occasions: it is a *vocational trait* forming part of the identity of the consecrated individual Salesian or community, and a main part of the pastoral praxis.

"Every SDB is an animator, and strives always to fulfil the task more efficiently".²⁶ There is no need for special qualities beyond those that correspond to the salesian vocation. It is a matter of living the gift inherent in the community style with the young people and laity who manifest the same sensitivity and join forces in the same educative initiatives.

2. A way of life for communicating a spirituality.

The various adjectives associated with the term 'animation' are well justified, because they reveal doctrinal bases, processes

²⁵ Cf. GC24, 159.

²⁶ Ibid.

and objectives of various kinds. Ours is a spiritual animation, not in a limiting sense but in a descriptive one. It does not exclude other aspects of animation, but brings them all together in a particular perspective.

To become an animating nucleus we have to live our spirituality with awareness and conviction, and express it with joyful spontaneity. In the congress of young religious which took place in Rome in September 1997, the pious idea was expressed that not only individuals should be canonized but whole religious communities as well, as a subject which had lived in a solid and exemplary manner the ideal of evangelical life. It was added that a vocational handicap is inherent in the fact that the young see and are attracted by individual models without seeing a corresponding community life behind them: solitary saints, in communities which seem extraneous to their sanctity.

At Valdocco Don Bosco created a school of spirituality which found expression in the environment, in the work of everyday, in the quality of fellowship and in prayer: simple in outward appearance, but substantial and authentic. He invited his youngsters and anyone who wanted to collaborate with him to follow him in the same spirit in line with their own possibilities and circumstances. "At Valdocco", the GC24 reminded us, "there was a particular kind of atmosphere: holiness was built up together; it was shared and mutually communicated, in such a way that the holiness of some cannot be explained without the holiness of the others".²⁷

To build and enjoy this climate of *shared holiness* is something to which consecrated persons are committed. The religious community is the setting for an experience of God. Everything is thought out with this in mind and with a view to this end. "The spiritual life must therefore have first place in the Families of consecrated life... Apostolic fruitfulness, gen-

²⁷ GC24, 104.

erosity in love of the poor, and the ability to attract vocations among the younger generation depend on this priority and its growth in personal and communal commitment".²⁸

The GC23 indicated this as an adequate response to the challenges of educating young people to the faith. It invited communities to become a "sign" of faith giving gospel transparency to their lives so as to become also a school of faith. Faith, in fact, cannot be communicated unless it be lived as the great resource of one's own existence. "Spiritual and pastoral renewal are two aspects which mutually compenetrates and are interdependent".²⁹

To be animators as a community, i.e. to be an animating nucleus, is to accompany the educative activity we share with others by that breath of the Spirit which can give meaning to the advancement of the person and to the efforts for changing society: the experience of God's love, the light that comes from Christ, and the vision of man which emerges from the Word of God.

As with the apostolic community after Pentecost,³⁰ it is like having the ability to "go out" towards the others, to attract, unite, convert and create community with new criteria in the light of the risen Christ. "The first duty of the consecrated life is to make visible the marvels wrought by God in the frail humanity of those who are called. They bear witness to these marvels not so much in words as by the eloquent language of a transfigured life, capable of amazing the world".³¹

The experience of God which is at the beginning and is also the objective of our life-plan must be reawakened, relived and deepened in line with the characteristics of our spirit. We can in fact be led to reduce life to efficiency, to believe that the various elements of our religious life are there as functions of their educative results. This in turn can lead to a progressive in-

²⁸ VC 93.

²⁹ Cf. GC23, 216-217.

³⁰ Cf. Acts 2,1 ff.

³¹ VC 20.

ternal emptying, to a fading of even the deepest motivations and, as a consequence, to a certain delusion or loss of confidence in our interventions, in those we are working for, in the community and in the laity.

The capacity for spiritual animation, of our kind, supposes and requires the *experience of prayer*: the personal prayer, which comes as a grace and is assiduously learned and practised; and community prayer, felt and shared at prepared moments, calm and free without haste or dispersion.

Prayer gives back to us the taste for being with Christ and the meaning of the mission. Don Bosco reminds us that "just as food nourishes and preserves the body, so do the practices of piety nourish the soul and make it strong in time of temptation. As long as we observe our practices of piety, we shall live in harmony with everyone and we shall see the Salesian cheerful and happy in his vocation".³² Are not those words: "living in harmony with everyone, cheerful and happy in his vocation" just about the truest representation of the animator?

Two signs seem important to me in this matter of expressing the spirituality of the community through the diligence and quality of its prayer. The first concerns the Word of God which we can consult and share when it is a question of enlightenment in our personal and community life, the situations of the youngsters and the challenges of culture. The Bible recounts the religious experience of humanity: the attitudes, trials and reactions of those who lived in this world in accordance with the sense of God, and indeed in accordance with the covenant they had made with him. It is a story of spirituality lived right in the heat of events.

And then the Gospel not only provides us with the teachings and examples of Jesus but puts us in contact with him personally and with his mystery. Only evangelical discernment can give us a Christian mentality at the present day, and help

³² *Introduction to the Rules and Constitutions*, Turin 1885.

us to maintain a vision of faith, an attitude of hope and a criterion of charity.

The second sign is *the participation of the young and our collaborators in our prayer*, our ability to introduce them to prayer and give them a taste for it. We are not short of examples in this regard, and what we have begun we should continue. Let us not limit ourselves to extraordinary and stimulating celebrations, but accompany the young in a journey of prayer so that they come to want it and it becomes an attitude, a habit, and even a need.

Our youngsters and collaborators often come to know us as workers and as friends who are close to them, generous and available, and desirous of their good, but they do not discern the deeper motivations which underlie our life and constitute its originality. And so they do not understand the implications of consecrated life, and do not feel a desire to follow our own chosen path, even though they remain good friends with us.

To bring others to share in an experience of God, to set up a pedagogy of prayer leading to a personal relationship with Christ, and open to youthful sensitivities in line with our spirituality: this is the form of animation more befitting a religious community.

As well as offering occasional experiences, rather like samples to attract people, we are called to be educators and masters in spirituality. If that sounds over-ambitious, let us say that we want to be companions and authoritative witnesses, leaders and guides in the ways of spirituality. More than a few of the laity and young people are looking for a spiritual experience. They want something with internal sense and meaning to balance all the external agitation and disturbance. The GC24 puts spirituality at the centre of our effort at sharing. "We are called to share in the Salesian Family with all the lay people, not only in the carrying out of daily work but primarily in the salesian spirit, to become sharers in the responsibility for the mission, in our works

and beyond them".³³ The goal of formation, of and with the laity, is a shared holiness,³⁴ on account of which "spirituality is called to be the soul of the educative and pastoral community, the core of the formative journeys we have to make together in an atmosphere of the exchange of gifts".³⁵

It is the same task that the Church entrusts to those who are consecrated. "Today a renewed commitment to holiness by consecrated persons is more necessary than ever, also as a means of promoting and supporting every Christian's desire for perfection. To the degree that they deepen their friendship with God, consecrated persons become better prepared to help their brothers and sisters through valuable spiritual activities. The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call".³⁶

The principal mediation for the fulfilment of this task is our daily life, inspired by faith and close to the young and the laity, which diffuses a style of life as though by osmosis or contagion; it is the educative environment in which values appear concretely realized, with significant attractive models, with proposals that involve, and with motivations which shed light on behaviour.

It will also be necessary to accompany individuals making use of communal occasions which lend themselves to sharing and communication, and to make ourselves available for personal dialogue. It all certainly requires both attention and purpose.

3. Making the salesian community a "family" able to give rise to communion around the salesian mission.

It has frequently been noticed that the community responds not only to proposals for religious perfection and efficacy in

³³ GC24, 88.

³⁴ Cf. GC24, 104.

³⁵ GC24, 241.

³⁶ VC 39.

work, but also to deep desires and aspirations of the individual: for deep and authentic relationships, for communication, for personal enhancement, for friendship and affection.

The need is experienced for authentic adult fellowship and an attraction is felt towards it. Although we may have opportunities for individual relaxation of various kinds, and at the present day we are not lacking in sources of information, personal encounters and experience of friendship, the sharing of sentiments and situations remains in a class by itself.

In the society of communication, which is still of the "mass" variety even though made individual through the receiving apparatus, difficulty is experienced in communicating in depth, and there is still a feeling of isolation and loneliness.

You can spot this particularly between young people and an environment of a religious kind tinged with subjectivism and tending to provide immediate satisfaction for sentiment. They listen willingly to personal stories; they look for encounters where they can be courteously received and welcomed without rigid norms or conditions; they go for human relationships which make them feel free and help them to express themselves; they form groups in which they feel good and create solidarity through communication of proposals, desires and realizations.

What gives meaning and effectiveness to religious associations and communities, their force of attraction, does not lie so much in what they have and do, in their operations and work, as in what they live, their style of relationships, their unity.

This is why the first Christian communities caused such an impact. The external sign of the news of the Resurrection, immediately clear to everyone and even those without any knowledge of the content of faith, was the solidarity of the group of those who were assiduous and in agreement "in listening to the teaching of the apostles and in fraternal union, in the breaking of the bread and in prayer"; a group which "had all things in common" and there was no difference among the members. The power of conviction it unleashed made the group esteemed

by the people and considered reliable and even desirable. "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved"³⁷ – it appears to be almost a consequence!

For Don Bosco too fraternal charity, manifested in the family spirit, was the immediate sign the Salesians should offer to the young, to the collaborators and to people in general. "Love one another, advise one another, correct one another, and do not be carried away by either envy or rancour. Let the good of one become the good of all, and let the troubles and sufferings of one be regarded as the troubles and sufferings of all, and let each one strive to banish or at least to mitigate the sorrows of others".³⁸

The Constitutions have many references to this thought of our Father with its double emphasis on the communal style and its impact on the young. One of the places where our communal life is presented is in art.51: "The family spirit is the hallmark of the salesian community and inspires every moment of its life: work and prayer, meals and recreation, meetings and other encounters. In an atmosphere of brotherly friendship we share our joys and sorrows, and we are partners in our apostolic plans and experiences". Art.16 recalls another point of emphasis; it refers to the educative and vocational effect we have so much at heart: "This is a witness that enkindles in the young the desire to get to know and to follow the salesian vocation".

When we wonder how in the present situation we can move towards this ideal and express it without ambiguity, there comes to our mind the "grace of unity" which leads us, who are Salesians, to cultivate harmoniously and simultaneously the three notions of consecration, mission and fraternity,³⁹ giving to each of them its proper weight and combining them in a style of life and plan of action.

³⁷ Cf. Acts 2,42-47.

³⁸ Don Bosco, *Souvenir for the first missionaries*.

³⁹ Cf. C 3.

The first is precisely **fraternal life**. This presupposes that we have the time available and the energy necessary to cultivate and render communion visible as a gift to be offered to the young; it supposes the ascesis which develops in us the capacity for loving, and the experience which prepares us for a mature rapport with our collaborators. Many are the attitudes and manifestations of this kind of fellowship. "Every day, communities take up again their journey, sustained by the teaching of the Apostles: 'love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour' (*Rom 12,10*); 'live in harmony with one another' (*Rom 12,16*); 'welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you' (*Rom 15,7*); 'I myself am satisfied... that you are... able to instruct one another' (*Rom 15,14*); 'wait for one another' (*1 Cor 11,33*); 'through love, be servants of one another' (*Gal 5,13*); 'encourage one another' (*1 Thess 5,11*); 'forbearing one another in love' (*Eph 4,2*); 'be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another' (*Eph 4,32*); 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (*Eph 5,21*); 'pray for one another' (*Jas 5,16*); 'clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility towards one another' (*1 Pet 5,5*); 'we have fellowship with one another' (*1 Jn 1,7*); 'let us not grow weary in well-doing..., especially to those who are of the household of faith' (*Gal 6,9-10*)".⁴⁰ I will dwell on two elements which emerge at the present day: inter-personal *relationships and communication*.

Relationships are one of the indications of the maturity of an individual: perhaps, indeed, the main parameter reflecting each one's quality and limitations. Their quality, the way they are set up and managed, manifest how far love, the first energy and first commandment, has progressed in us and to what extent we have been able to evince it.

For this reason we pay particular attention nowadays to re-

⁴⁰ *Fraternal Life in Community*, 26.

relationships in work and in formation: not only from a formal point of view, but with an eye to the internal and substantial aspect. In fraternal life relationships are needed which are able to overcome weariness and habit because they are renewable, and are not broken off because we are capable of daily reconciliation. They must however be deep and internal, and not merely functional with respect to work; they must lead to a maturing in friendship and growth in the Lord, and in solidarity in the mission; above all they must be inspired by self-sacrifice and self-giving and not selfishly centred on oneself and one's own concerns.

It is a common opinion among observers of groups and communities that the greater part of internal difficulties that arise and which seem to concern work or ideas are in fact linked with problems of badly set up interpersonal relationships which come to light in work or in ideas.

On the other hand difficult relationships, situations of conflict which have not been suitably healed through reconciliation, act within a person, blocking the maturing process and creating difficulties in the way of the calm and joyful self-donation to the mission and to God. The sadness and distress which can follow are harmful in every sense. Internal bitterness wears the person down. It is a great service to help to loosen these knots, to clarify their roots, to see them as personal limitations and face them calmly, instead of remaining bogged down in them.

We need to educate both ourselves and others to rapport, even by a word, by support or encouragement. Relationships need animation with the creation of opportunities for their expression and growth. It is an aspect of the charity of all, and particularly of the Rector and the Provincial through whom the unity of the community is built up.

No one can expect to be only a receiver in the community, as though it were an environment made primarily and independently by his own contribution. On the other hand it is neces-

sary to make up for the shortcomings of some by a greater capacity for giving on the part of the others. In communities there are always limits of communication, timidity, and excessive regard which put a brake on familiarity. The Lord compensates for such limitations through those confreres who are willing to put a bit more into the conversation, into the preservation of proximity, union and joy, so that the level of community life may not decline as regards mutual affection and family environment. "A fraternity rich in joy is a genuine gift from above to brothers and sisters who know how to ask for it and to accept one another, committing themselves to fraternal life and trusting in the action of the Spirit".⁴¹

The preceding comment may seem unusual for a circular: too particular, almost technical. I picked it up from the document *Fraternal Life in Community*, which says: "It may be useful to recall those qualities which are required in all human relationships: respect, kindness, sincerity, self-control, tactfulness, a sense of humour and a spirit of sharing".⁴² It was also suggested to me by the GC24 which spoke of our relational spirituality: a spirituality which not only loves with internal charity but (as Don Bosco had already taught in dealing with boys) is able to establish adult relationships conforming to the environment of life and prevailing sensitivities. And it was suggested too by the importance that attaches nowadays to relationships established almost specifically as objects for study and training in all forms of human activity. Finally it was inspired by the thought of St Francis de Sales, in whom "gentleness" was translated part and parcel into personal relationships even to the extent of constituting a distinctive trait of his personality.

Relational spirituality has as its source the charity which makes a person able and willing to create, heal, reestablish and

⁴¹ Ibid, 28.

⁴² Ibid, 27.

multiply rapport. Such charity becomes 'pastoral' when it is exercised within the ministry of ruling and guiding an ecclesial community.

In addition to relationships and included in their dynamic is *communication*. Today the desire in communities is that this be not limited to what is merely functional, but should include vocational experience as well; that there be exchange of news not only from the media or happenings at work, but also considerations, requirements and intuitions concerning our life in Christ and the way we understand our charisma. It is to this that such practices as the revision of life, community verification, exchange of prayer tend, as well as the discernment of situations, projects and events.

The present time has rendered communication in religious communities more necessary, and has modified its manner and criteria: it has become looser and more widespread. The complexity of life is such that we have to exchange views about tendencies, criteria and events of a family kind, and about external matters too: we either succeed in understanding them and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, or we remain excluded from the life and movement of the world.

The habit of assessment has become necessary, as also has the elaboration of common criteria for the process. It frequently requires the application of a method of trial and error. We must be ready to express ourselves with simplicity, be ready to modify judgements and positions, even only for the purpose of fraternal and practical convergence: mediation of this kind always helps the community, provided that essential values be not compromised.

Communication is necessary also because of the positive pluralism of visions and gifts existing in the community: there are rich qualities of intelligence, of spirit, of fantasy, and of practical skills that can be passed on. And moreover there are so many themes in consecrated life on which communication can take place with profit: the apostolic project, spiritual expe-

rience, challenges of the mission, guidelines of the Roman Congregations, and the tendencies of the Church.

Communication calls for learning, practice and also animation. We would say for spiritual learning to a greater extent than the technical kind. When we communicate we lay ourselves open to some extent. A certain reserve has to be overcome, which makes us unwilling to talk about ourselves; there is also confidence in the other person which has to be consolidated, and which will reassure me that he will accept what I say with maturity and in a positive manner.

Experience shows that not everyone has the courage to do this. We need a measure of learning also to receive communication, without judging the other person, without cataloguing him in a specific category on the basis of what he has said, without any lessening of esteem and expectations in his regard because of the difference of views.

As well as learning practice is needed too. If you neglect the capacity for communication it gets rusty. You lose the taste for it and its facility. Practice leads to the use and understanding of different kinds of language suited to various situations, which range from gestures and attitudes to calm and relaxed conversations, all of it inspired by charity and not technical calculation. We may recall Don Bosco with his hand placed lightly on the head of the boys, with his ready smile, the word in the ear, his 'good-nights', the kind of conversation he had with Dominic Savio, the way he asked for his boys' opinions and discussed with them. And the effort, so typical of the preventive system, to make his affection perceptible and free it from a generic attitude or from enclosure in a cold exterior. In the practice of communication too we need to learn the value of active silence and capacity for solitude. These are aspects which have almost been destroyed by the 'Babel' of conversations, messages, music, festival and plain noise.

A valid communication is always prepared and controlled by reflection, discretion and the ability to withdraw.

Learning and practice is needed therefore on the part of all, but animation too is needed by those who are directing matters so as to create a suitable atmosphere for calm and relaxed communication. Providing opportunities; a style of direction which makes it easy to express opinions, to ask for and prompt such opinions, to be pleased at a multiplicity of contributions, to make it clear that no one is going to be judged by what he says in the cut and thrust of a debate.

In addition to attention to fraternal life, the enhancement of community experience requires an **improvement in our way of working together**. The religious community is the place where the change takes place from *I* to *we*, from *my* work or sector to *our* mission, from the pursuit of my methods and objectives to a convergence on the evangelization and good of the young. This calls for a patient running-in period to overcome whatever holds us back or separates us through an individualized view of work and ill-regulated autonomy in initiatives which makes us little disposed to build with others. Many initiatives could be rendered more powerful merely by bringing together items which are similar but juxtaposed, by linking together those which are complementary, and converging times and personnel in specific areas.

The Constitutions and Regulations provide opportunities for understanding, coordination and convergence. Councils and community assemblies tend to come up with the same kind of statement of the situation in the light of the Gospel and of our original vocation, to project in integral form the great aspects of pastoral work, such as the orientation of the education of young people to the faith or the formation of the laity.

The weekly 'community day' has provided a new opportunity for a useful exchange of thoughts and ideas.

In a period in which the tendency is towards linkage, synergies and networks, we have to learn that fragmentation and watertight compartments are unproductive and do not form us as men of communion. In those communities which include certain sectors which must have a certain autonomy for various

reasons, it is desirable that there be at least some occasions for common programming and orientation.

From the beginning the salesian community has lived cheek by jowl with the young, participating fully in their life, and vice versa the young have shared the daily life of the Salesians. Today many boys and young men want to see and take part in our fraternal life and join in our work. Our community life, therefore, has to be structured in such a way that it is possible for us to pray with the young, share moments of fellowship and programming with our lay collaborators, and even welcome some of these youngsters and lay people to experience with us a period of community life.

4. Giving to our educative activity and to that of the EPC the missionary dynamism of "Da mihi animas".

The pedagogy developed by Don Bosco and passed on by him to his first Salesians was born of pastoral charity, able to understand and make allowances for the youth situation, and to start up initiatives designed to meet it. It was not just a matter of being active on their behalf, staying in their midst, and devoting his energies to them. Underlying all this was the desire to lead them to faith in Christ, the way truth and life, making himself a sign and witness of Christ's love. That was the fundamental experience which manifested the unique nature of salesian spirituality. The GC23 expressed it in a text which some have called the "salesian credo".⁴³

This is the experience we must communicate and help our collaborators to live, animating a style of pedagogy centred on *personal relationship between the educator and the pupil*. When this develops more deeply and becomes confidence, it provides the opportunity for revealing the predilection of Jesus Christ for each one of the youngsters.

⁴³ Cf. GC23, 94-96.

We shall try to create a family atmosphere,⁴⁴ with plenty of suggestions and initiatives covering all the needs and interests of the young, which sparks off their participation and gets them involved in their own formation; an atmosphere which has its high-spots in the celebrations which form an introduction to the mystery of life and grace associated with the transforming force of the sacraments, especially those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Of this style and program we are called to be reminders and stimulus. We must manifest with tranquility, but nonetheless with missionary courage, that faith in Jesus Christ brings light and a new energy to education: it is the image of the man apparent in Jesus, the confidence in life passed on to us by the Resurrection, the consciousness of a filial rapport with God; it is the transcendent horizon, the revelation of love as the secret for the realization of the individual and of civilization.

Our life is a prophecy in the area of education: it manifests the meaning and the goal towards which human values must be developed: the liberating force of the personal relationship with God, the historical fruitfulness of the beatitudes, the ability to get the best out of the poorest individuals and groups, neglected and rejected by others.

In a context trying to do without God, we bear witness to the fact that his love brings an unusual lucidity and happiness; in face of the quest for pleasure, possession and power, we are able to say that "the need to love, the urge to possess, and the freedom to control one's whole existence, find their fullest meaning in Christ the Saviour".⁴⁵

If our commitment to education is not a temporary service but an original contribution, we must "bring to bear on the world of education a radical witness to the values of the Kingdom, proposed to everyone in expectation of the definitive

⁴⁴ Cf. GC24, 91 ff.

⁴⁵ C 62.

meeting with the Lord of history".⁴⁶ It must be said that it is to this that all our efforts of preparation tend; it is true that they have a professional dimension, but it is leavened and motivated by a deeper dimension still, the pastoral dimension. The latter must not be played down, nor must the former be made a watertight compartment. We educate by evangelizing.

"Because of their special consecration", *Vita Consecrata* reminds us, "their particular experience of the gifts of the Spirit, their constant listening to the word of God, their practice of discernment, their rich heritage of pedagogical traditions built up since the establishment of their Institute, and their profound grasp of spiritual truth (cf. Eph 1,17), consecrated persons are able to be especially effective in educational activities and to offer a special contribution to the work of other educators".⁴⁷ And it goes on to add: "In this way they can give life to educational undertakings permeated by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity, in which young people are helped to mature humanly under the action of the Spirit".⁴⁸

At the present day the service of education is requested and reappraised to cover extension of formation to the entire existence, but also with a vision that decisively overcomes the 'unidimensional' temptation so as to take up the person in his integrity and take into consideration the individual character of each one.

And so educative service is asked to "assist" every individual in the development of all his capacities, to communicate a vision of life open to his neighbour, to generate in each one the ability to live in freedom and in truth in accordance with his own conscience enlightened by experience and by faith.

As a religious community we are the animating nucleus of an ensemble of educators who intend to communicate these values and put forward this vision of life.

⁴⁶ VC 96.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The task supposes that we ourselves make the effort to become:

- **persons** capable of living our own lives with confidence and joy, with an attitude of understanding and dialogue with the young and their world, with attention to culture, and with the will to collaborate with all who are working for a more just, free and more cohesive world;

- **educators** who are competent, who make of their service to the young and the poor a commitment for the Kingdom; for the animation of an educative community and other apostolic forces; good will by itself is insufficient; *improvisation does not pay* when it is a matter of the Christian promotion of an environment on a long-term basis;

- **animators** willing to share a formative process with lay collaborators,⁴⁹ in the life of every day, in communal moments of particular formative value, duly prepared and qualified, such as the elaboration of the PEPS, the verification of the EPC, the discernment in the face of practical situations, and similar occasions;

- **leaders** who have made their own the value of participation and of sharing responsibility, and are able to animate by creating and renewing opportune circumstances;

- **Salesians** who manifest a particular sensitivity for the education of the very poor and become promoters of a culture of solidarity and peace: this sensitivity constitutes one of the most effective of apostolic signs and seems able to bring many people together.

5. Fraternal life and pastoral work for growth.

Fraternal life (with its communication and relationships) and a good set-up of the work, help us not only to feel better

⁴⁹ cf. GC24, 144.

but also to grow; they are enriching from a cultural, psychological, social and especially spiritual point of view.

There is *cultural* growth, because in listening to others and collaborating with them we receive information, new view points, facts and interpretations of a wide range of realities. Nowadays rapport and communication with competent persons are considered indispensable and are much sought after. There are people of this kind living in our own communities, everyone of them indeed probably has something to offer us. They can be found also among the laity.

There is *psychological* growth because easy relationships are developed, the ability to welcome persons of different mentalities; we become more capable of self-giving, of overcoming frustrations and internal hang-ups, fixations on ourselves and our success.

There is *social* growth, because the capacity is strengthened for insertion in working groups, in teams for participation and in various settings, with freedom and sincerity; we become able to handle social anxiety, that first feeling we get of unease and being an outsider when we find ourselves in a context or group we do not know or with whom we are not familiar.

And finally, at the head of all the rest there is a *spiritual* or comprehensive growth, because the attitudes and aptitudes set out above are part of an effort to respond to the Lord in a way in keeping with the charism and a manner for fulfilling the mission.

Experiences of ongoing formation, carried out away from our own community do produce benefits, such as a rethinking, a new synthesis, doctrinal updating, a new vocational enthusiasm; but when we get back to the community and daily life, that renewed vision of life and work that we glimpsed in those extraordinary conditions of time and environment, can be translated into practice only with difficulty. The customary rhythm takes over again and the "ordinary" common and human context dilutes the exemplary experiences of prayer,

mutual exchange and study. And so the course of ongoing formation remains an isolated incident in the run of life, even though its beneficial effects cannot be denied.

Four variables therefore have been introduced into the concept of ongoing formation, in line with formational sciences. They concern place, time, matter and method.

The preferred *place* for ongoing formation is the local community. It is more realistic, because that is where we learn to manage our life and react as salesian religious in face of the daily round.

The *time* best suited and most continuous for ongoing formation is that marked out by the alternation of work, study, comparisons and meetings with people. The remaining time is useful for support and backup.

Material or content: it is true that a systematic exposition on the Church, Jesus Christ and the community is helpful, because it provides motivation, light and fresh orientation. But all this is subsequently found distributed, fragmented, and to some extent watered down in daily life. The community, in which we have to read in real terms what has been explained to us, is the one in which we live side by side with our confreres, who have their own ideas, are marked by their past experiences and have their limitations, even though they have also many rich qualities which we must be able to discover and accept.

The same can be said of the ecclesiology we have heard expounded, of the youth ministry we have heard explained, of the deeper aspects of the preventive system: they are frames of reference which are useful because they are enlightening. But they must then be transferred to the particular concrete circumstances of an ecclesial community and its specific conditions, to our own field of pastoral work and the youngsters to be found in it, to the salesian environment in which all we have heard about the preventive system has to be applied. This latter, i.e. the concrete manner of applying visions and frames of reference, or dealing with particular cases, forms the partic-

ular matter for the ongoing formation which takes place in the local community. There we submit it to reflection and verification to see what kind of response we are making to the demands of our vocation and work. I would say that ongoing formation has more in common with the model of a well-made practical training period than with that of the studentate.

Finally, but linked with what we have already said, a word is needed about the *means* or most efficacious way of setting about ongoing formation: certainly there is reading, study, attention to spiritual life, and theological updating. But art.119 of the Constitutions and art.99 of the Regulations both speak of fraternal communication: listening calmly, noting and synthesizing with care, adopting evaluations and criteria, moving in well-weighed directions. All this will certainly be endorsed and relaunched through the use of the so-called special times and a personal habit of reflection.

Relationships, communication and programmed work, therefore, result in processes of formation and growth. At present not everyone understands this. No blame for this attaches to anyone, because in formation praxis in the past communication had neither the weight nor the possibilities it has today. But while not blaming anyone, we must know how to create and multiply opportunities for communication, deal with the matter of rapport, be aware of the kind of platform needed for these things and foster them as a practice of pastoral charity towards confreres and communities.

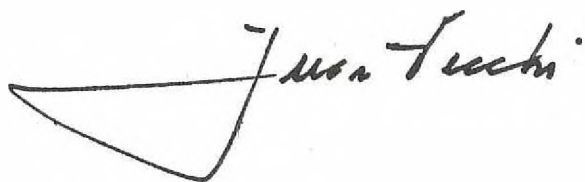
Conclusion.

I bring this letter to an end on the feast of the Annunciation, two years after the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*. Community life aims at being a reflection of the life of the Trinity, as far as that is possible for man: a relationship of love which generates the unity in which distinc-

tions are founded, summed up and expressed. It appears as a sign and exemplary realization of ecclesial communion. Through the multiple graces it brings with it, through the support it gives to the confreres, through the benefits found within it and the asceticism it calls for, it is a path which leads us to a purified and authentic love.

Of this love Mary shows forth the three greatest manifestations known to humanity, and we express them in the three titles: Virgin, Spouse and Mother. Such is her relationship with God; such the dimensions which make her an image of the Church. We are sure, in line with Don Bosco's words, that she is part of our community as she was with Jesus' disciples at Cana and in the Cenacle. To contemplate her and invoke her will help us in our communion.

This is my hope and prayer for each community and every confrere that, with Mary's help, we may express all the richness of the communion which is the fruit of Christ's death and resurrection.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Juan Tucki". The signature is written in a cursive style, with a large, sweeping initial "J" that extends downwards and to the left, forming a triangular shape. The name "Juan Tucki" follows the initial, with "Juan" and "Tucki" written in a fluid, connected script.

2.1 REVISION OF THE “*RATIO*” REQUESTED BY THE GC24 Contribution of the Provinces

Fr Giuseppe NICOLUSSI
Councillor for Formation

This communication refers to the “revision of the *Ratio*”. We are looking for a contribution from every province to carry out the task prescribed by the General Chapter (GC24, 147). It is not merely a matter of assisting with the formulation of a document. The revision of the *Ratio* is meant to be a sign of renewed fidelity to our vocation in searching for the way to hand on the salesian project of life to the new generations and to live it at the various stages of life and in different settings.

1. The task assigned by the GC24 and by the planning program.

The GC 24 determined that a revision of the *Ratio* should be carried out: “The Councillor General for Formation will instigate a revision of the *Ratio* in line with the directives of the GC24” (GC24, 147). We should say at once that when we speak of the *Ratio* we are referring to the “*Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco*” (FSDB) and also to the booklet “*Criteria and Norms for Salesian Vocation Discernment*” (CN) which provides an official commentary on chapter 7 of the *Ratio*.

The General Council has included this point in the **planning program for the six year period**, indicating the task and the path to follow in carrying it out: “Revise the *Ratio* as requested by GC24 adapting formation to new situations and

differing contexts. Promote a process of familiarization with FSDB, of assessment of its implementation, of suggestions for its modification (paying special attention to *Vita Consecrata* and the challenges of inculturation), involving those responsible at the different levels.”

According to the planning program, the revision of the book will take place in the more fundamental context of the assessment and adaptation of formation practice. In addition, the revision is seen not as the work of a small team, but as the result of extensive collaboration.

2. Responding to the directives of “*Vita Consecrata*”

We read in the Apostolic Exhortation:

“The Synod Fathers earnestly ask all Institutes of consecrated life and Societies of apostolic life **to draw up as soon as possible a *Ratio institutionis***, that is, a formation program inspired by their particular charism, presenting clearly and in all its stages the course to be followed in order to assimilate fully the spirituality of the respective Institute.

The *Ratio* responds to a pressing need today. On the one hand it shows how to pass on the Institute’s spirit so that it will be lived in its integrity by *future generations*, in different cultures and geographical regions; on the other hand, it explains to consecrated persons how to live that spirit in *the different stages of life* on the way to full maturity of faith in Christ.

While it is true that the renewal of the consecrated life depends primarily on formation, it is equally certain that this training is, in turn, linked to **the ability to establish a method** characterized by spiritual and pedagogical wisdom, which will gradually lead those wishing to consecrate themselves to put on the mind of Christ the Lord.” (VC 68)

Ongoing formation “is an intrinsic requirement of religious consecration (...) Consequently, it will be very important for every Institute to provide, **as part of its *Ratio institutionis*, a precise and systematic description of its plan of continuing formation.** The chief purpose of this plan is to provide all consecrated persons with a program which encompasses their whole life.” (VC 69)

3. All involved in the revision process.

At the beginning of January the Rector Major with the General Council approved the **arrangements for the revision** of the *Ratio*, along the following lines:

- a revision with the current *Ratio and Criteria and Norms (1985)* as its starting point, open to those updates which the assessment of the current situation and reflection suggest to be necessary and appropriate;
- an assessment which is carried out in a collaborative manner at all levels.

On the 24th September last year a letter (prot. 97/1713) was sent to all Provincials with two simple aids, which were intended to clarify the purpose and the scope of the task laid down by GC24 and the planning program. Each Province is now being explicitly asked for its **contribution to the revision of the “Ratio – Criteria and Norms.”** We know that in some Provinces and Regions the process of revision and the preparation of contributions has already begun.

It is important that the Province takes every advantage of this **special opportunity for assessment, reflection and comparison;** of the opportunity for ongoing formation and the training of formation personnel.

It will depend on the Provincials in particular to decide **the manner** in which the provincial council, the provincial anima-

tion teams (and in the first place the provincial formation commission), the rectors, the initial formation communities (the staff and confreres in formation), study centres, other groups (SDB and non-SDB) **can all become involved**. The provincial delegate for formation, and the provincial formation commission will naturally have a special role to play.

It would be useful to encourage and to organize **involvement at interprovincial level** (and within the provincial conference and/or the region), making use of the coordinating teams, and bringing in confreres with special expertise in some particular areas.

4. Organization of the work

To organize the revision process in the most productive manner, it would be well to **pay attention to the following points**:

4.1 *Bear in mind the nature the scope and the characteristics of a Ratio that is for a worldwide congregation.*

The *Regulations* put it this way: "At world level the practical guide for formation will be the salesian 'Ratio fundamentalis Institutionis et Studiorum', and at provincial level a directory approved by the Rector Major with the consent of his Council.

The '*Ratio*' sets out in an organic and instructive way the ensemble of principles and norms concerning formation which are found in the Constitutions, General Regulations and other documents of the Church and of the Congregation.

The provincial directory applies the principles and norms of salesian formation to the concrete local situations" (R 87; cf. C. 100-101; VC 68-69; GC21 258-260).

In this context it would be useful *to re-read the introduction and the first chapter of the FSDB* and the *two aids* sent last year: "Revision of the *Ratio*, GC24 147" and "Revision of the

Ratio, aids for reflection.” In them there is an account of the way the current text was arrived at, emphasizing the nature, characteristics and different kinds of *Ratio*. It is clear that the *Ratio* is not meant to be an encyclopedia of formation, nor a treatise on formation pedagogy: nor is it even a manual for formation personnel nor a collection of aids on various aspects of formation.

4.2 *Start from the current Ratio* “Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco” and “Criteria and Norms” 1985 edition.

This is the basic foundation on which the revision rests. It is important to remember that FSDB is concerned with both ongoing and initial formation.

4.3 *Take into account the phases mentioned and the suggested questions* in the two aids sent last year. In them it is recommended to bear in mind **four stages** which reply to some **key questions**. They are:

a. *First stage: knowledge of the current Ratio and the Criteria and Norms.*

Study of the current text, both as regards its basic structure and guidelines, and as regards norms.

Question: in the various parts of the *Ratio* and of the *CN* what aspects are more valid and up to date; which ones raise questions and require further development?

b. *Second stage: comparison between the Ratio-CN and the formation situation in the province.*

Assess the formation situation in the province; comparison between the FSDB, the Provincial Directory and the formation plans.

Question: In what aspects does the FSDB require us to re-order our formation practice?

c. *Third stage: coming to terms with and deeper study of the new demands of formation.*

Question: What new demands for formation are emerging

from the youth situation and culture, from the situation of salesian life, from formation experience, from the criterion of quality, from Church and Congregation guidelines etc.?

d. *Fourth stage: suggestions for the revision of FSDB-CN.*

Question: in what aspects do “formation practice” and the “new demands” require the revision of the *Ratio-CN*? Why? How?

5. Formulation of contributions

5.1 Which contributions?

It should be remembered that “revision” covers: aspects to emphasize more strongly; aspects to change (omit, correct, clarify); points that are unsatisfactory, inadequate, or obsolete; new ones to be added etc.

5.2 Refer to the text of FSDB and CN.

It would be useful to point out the reference in the current text, mentioning to which part, chapter or number reference is being made and indicating the aspect of formation to review.

5.3 Specific contributions with reasons provided.

Give the reasons, i.e. say why any revision is being proposed, and when possible suggest a modified text. In any case it would be well to avoid generalizations which are of little help to those who have to complete the task of collating and editing the contributions.

5.4 “Technical clarifications”

Prepare the contributions separately, or in such a way that they can be easily separated.

Use one of the following languages: English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish,

As far as possible, follow the model sent to the provinces.

5.5 *Timing and method of submitting contributions: by the end of 1998.*

Send in all contributions from the province together, and address them to: The Councillor/ the Department for Formation, the Generalate, Rome.

If possible send in the contribution by e-mail or on a disk.

The revision of the *Ratio* is a practical expression of that investment in formation and of the search for quality that the Rector Major has several times proposed as a priority during this six-year period. The contribution of the provinces indicates in a practical manner our communion in Don Bosco's charism and the commitment to live the one salesian vocation through a formation that is both one in its essential content and diversified in its concrete expressions. (C. 100).

2.2 RECOGNITION OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE SALESIAN FAMILY

*As reported in the Chronicle of the General Council (cf. n.4.2 of this issue of the Acts), in the last plenary session the Council at the request of the Rector Major carried out a verification of the **criteria for membership of the Salesian Family**, endorsing the validity of the guidelines of 1982 (reported in ASC 304) and formulating some “**norms of application**” to be kept in mind, in view of the development of the Salesian Family which has taken place in the intervening period and the reflections which have accompanied the development.*

We print below both the original guidelines given in 1982 (ACS 304, pp.61-65), and the new “norms of application”.

I. Guidelines adopted by the Superior Council for acceptance into the Salesian Family

The Salesian Family and Its gifts

Belonging to the Salesian Family is not primarily a juridical or organizational matter: it consists in the fact that groups by *virtue of their vocation* participate in the charism of Don Bosco, i.e., in his spirit and mission. These groups were either directly founded by Don Bosco (such as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Co-operators) or they refer back to him indirectly in having been raised up by the Holy Spirit within the “Salesian happening” through the mediation of some Salesian and helped by certain Salesian environments or groups – as happened with the *Don Bosco Volunteers*, who had their origins in the work of Don Rinaldi and his apostolate among a number of women Co-operators and the pupils and past pupils of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.¹

¹ 1 Const. SDB 1, 5; SGC 151, 168; Const.DBV 1. 5

The elements common to the various groups can be reduced basically to being called to the same saving mission of Don Bosco, and implementing it according to his spirit, through different vocations and in different apostolic areas and initiatives.²

Since the SGC several thoughtful contributions have been received regarding the elements of the genuine Salesian vocation: from Rector Majors *Fr. Ricceri* in 1973,³ *Fr. Viganò* in 1981,⁴ and authoritative representatives of the various groups recognized by the SGC⁵ as belonging to the Salesian Family. With these contributions in mind the elements could be listed as follows:

Salesian vocation, i.e. being called to share in the gift of God, the charism granted to Don Bosco and his family, in some important aspect of the human and supernatural experience typical of Don Bosco. The group must show signs of being moved by the Holy Spirit and look to Don Bosco as guide and model; it must aim at implementing his charism in some way or other. This is easier to discern if the Founder is a Salesian, a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians or some other member of the Salesian Family.

Participation in the salesian mission to the young and the masses. This means that the Institute includes within its scope all or some of the elements of the overall Salesian mission: evangelization and catechesis; integral development of the young, especially the poor and abandoned; the furthering of Christian culture among peoples, especially through the mass media and missionary work.

Sharing in the salesian spirit and the educative and pastoral method that is based on pastoral charity, family spirit, op-

² SGC 161; Const. SDB 5; Reg. SDB 30.

³ ASC 252, 1973, p. 3 ff.

⁴ Fr. Egidio Viganò: 8th Salesian Spirituality Week (Women and the Salesian Charism: LDC 1981, p. 257 ff.

⁵ v. Quaderni del Dicastero per la Famiglia Salesiana, n. 2.

timism, simple and vital prayer, esteem for the sacraments and devotion to Mary.⁶

Adoption of the *pastoral criteria* and the promotion of educational and apostolic presence and action inspired by Don Bosco's preventive system.

Evangelical life according to the salesian spirit inasmuch as the Institute proposes to its members a gospel ideal in conformity with the evangelical counsels, with vows, promises or other ways of commitment, lived according to the life-style and salesian holiness of which Don Bosco and the other Saints of the Salesian Family are practical models.

Active salesian solidarity. Each group maintains its specific distinctiveness and autonomy, but it will cultivate a spirit of communion that will enrich the Salesian Family. This means each group will:

- genuinely incorporate itself with the different groups of the Salesian Family and live out its typical bonds of solidarity and collaboration;
- recognize the Rector Major, Don Bosco's successor, as the father and centre of unity of the Family, and hence that the Salesian Congregation has the special task of spiritual animation inherited from Don Bosco.⁷

All these common elements are necessarily basic to an intense apostolic communion and fellowship between the various groups of baptized who share them. In Don Bosco's time it was possible to have a strict union with organizational and juridical links. Today we express our fidelity to his will by seeking other ways of communion adapted to the special characteristics of each group.⁸

⁶ Const. SDB 40-49.

⁷ Const. SDB 129; Reg. SC 13; SGC 173.

⁸ Don Bosco: Introduction to Co-operators' Regulations; Salesian Bulletin, January 1578 pp.1-3; Project for discussion in GC 1, 1877; MMS of Don Bosco; v. SGC 153-154; Const FMA 1885 ch. II 1,2,4,6 7 etc.; SGC 174-176.

Recognition of membership of the Salesian Family

The 20th General Chapter recognized as belonging to the Salesian Family in the strict sense, by virtue of their vocation, the *Salesians*, the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, the *Co-operators* and the *Don Bosco Volunteers*. It left the way open for the acceptance of other groups instituted after the death of Don Bosco up to the present time, or groups that could arise in the future. It did not indicate the way this membership should be recognized.⁹

The SGC recognized the Past-pupils as belonging to the Salesian Family by virtue of their Salesian education. It also allowed the possibility of membership of the Salesian Family in the wide sense to those for whom we work and those within the vast circle of salesian action in the Church.¹⁰

The following directives are exclusively for those groups who wish to be recognized as belonging officially to the Salesian Family in line with its vocational reality. And as partaking in a communion and a charism that naturally call for some sign and structure uniting them around the Rector Major, the successor of Don Bosco, Founder and first animator of the Salesian Family.

During the GC21 the Rector Major stated that membership of the Salesian Family in the strict sense could be given only to properly constituted groups, and that it was clear that no group was properly constituted unless approved by the Rector Major and his Council, and unless it had a history that would convince the competent official organs that such constitution should be given.¹¹

It is a matter therefore of clarifying the conditions and indicating the procedure whereby the Rector Major may formally recognize a group as belonging to the Salesian Family by foun-

⁹ SGC 154-156; Const. SDB 5; Reg. SDB 31

¹⁰ SGC 157,191; Const. SDB 5; Reg. SDB 31

¹¹ GC 21 516.

dation or through the possession of the necessary historical and charismatic elements

Official recognition is given by the Rector Major and his Council when a group freely requests it and when it is clear that the group's life and apostolate are in substantial agreement with the common aims of the Salesian Family, and when such aims are clearly set out in the official documents of the same constituted group.

An Institute that has clearly expressed in its Constitutions the common values of the salesian vocation, and can show that these are not only in its documents but actually practised in its history and life, may express its desire and motivation to the Rector Major and request official acceptance into the Salesian Family.

Since membership of the Salesian Family involves the commitment of all the members of the Institute, the request is to be made by the supreme authorities of the Institute and confirmed by its Assembly or General Chapter in view of the ensuing duties and rights.

The Rector Major will have the request and its motives examined by the Department for the Salesian Family. If its decision is positive he will ask the opinion of the other groups of the Salesian Family and also seek the opinion of his Council. If after these examinations he judges that there are sufficient reasons for granting the request he will inform the interested group and all the other Salesian Family groups of the decision.

The Rector Major's recognition of a group does not take away its autonomy, but it requires that the group include the declaration in some official document (preferably in the Constitutions) so that the fact be known and accepted by all its members.

Fraternal relations in the Salesian Family

As a consequence of official recognition, the group shall regard the Rector Major, Don Bosco's successor, as the father and centre of unity of all the Salesian Family, and accept those

guidelines and directives regarding the fidelity of each group to the salesian values common to all.

Membership implies a special duty of spiritual and apostolic solidarity with all the other groups of the Salesian Family; this includes knowing and helping one another, zeal for vocations, communication, and being present at significant events in the life of each group on the part of all the others as a way of building up ecclesial communion in the salesian style.¹²

To foster this communion by dialogue, liaison, participation and common initiatives so as to implement the salesian mission and presence in the Church and social activity, it will be useful, with the agreement of all, to set up simple structures (such as Salesian Family pastoral councils) for arranging gatherings to foster fellowship, study and prayer; these will make for an exchange of spiritual riches and collaboration and help create a more lively sense of the identity of each.

The Congregation has inherited from Don Bosco particular responsibilities for salesian animation and pastoral service among the various groups of the Salesian Family in the interests of unity and fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco with full respect for the specific vocation of each group. This is the purpose of the Department for the Salesian Family.¹³

The Congregation will be available for this work at world, provincial and local levels, and will give special importance to the training of salesian animators for the members of the groups and those to whom their apostolic work is directed. In their turn the groups will consider the pastoral service of salesian priests and other Salesian Family groups as a true help to their fidelity to the charism of Don Bosco and the family spirit.¹⁴

The Salesians, without prejudice to their community and religious life, will willingly open their houses and works to wel-

¹² SGC 165, 189.

¹³ SGC 174-176, 189.

¹⁴ SGC 173; GC 21 79. 402-403, 588; cf. also GC21 p.312 ff.

come and animate the members of the various groups according to the requirements of their life and apostolate; indeed all the groups will do likewise in a spirit of fellowship.

In particular the Congregation will give the various groups the use of its facilities and systems regarding formation, history, studies, development of spirituality and the salesian mission, inviting all to collaborate.

Don Bosco used to say that "extraordinary good could come from the reading of the Salesian Bulletin, i.e., the closest bonds of unity and oneness of heart".¹⁵ Thus the Department for the Salesian Family invites the various groups to participate through their talented members in the activities of the media and the dissemination of salesian information.

II. Norms for the application of the guidelines adopted in 1982, established by the Rector Major with his Council 9 January 1998.

The above indications remain valid in respect of their content and motivations.

To render them clear and practical, it has seemed well to the Rector Major and his Council, in their meeting of 9 January 1998, to make explicit the following points:

- (a) to confirm the consistency of salesian experience, a Group shall not seek recognition from the Rector Major until at least ten years after its ecclesial recognition in accordance with Canon Law;
- (b) salesian consistency implies:
 - 1. lived experience of the salesian vocation, in addition to the statement in the official documents;
 - 2. awareness of the original elements of salesian vocation, which enrich the other Groups of the Salesian Family;

¹⁵ MB 13, 286.

3. tendency towards numerical growth of the Group;
 4. spreading in various dioceses and countries;
 5. internal organizing capacity, i.e. autonomous life and activities, even though in communion with the other component groups of the Salesian Family;
- (c) attention will be given to the composition of the Groups, so that they be not constituted from members belonging to other Groups already recognized as components of the Salesian Family.

We recognize that the Groups represent the richness of Don Bosco's Salesian Family and a gift to the Church.

4.1 Chronicle of the Rector Major

The following is a summary of the activities of the Rector Major in the period January-March, in addition to the normal activities at Rome.

6 January. St Peter's Basilica, Rome. Episcopal ordination of Mgr. Franco Della Valle by Pope John Paul II. Festivities followed at the Generalate in honour of the new Bishop.

16-18 January. Fr Vecchi took part in the Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family, during which he gave a commentary on the Strenna (cf. n.5.1 of these Acts).

25 January. At the Pio XI Institute in Rome he gave a conference on the Strenna to the Roman Salesian Family.

30 January – 1 February. In Piedmont for the annual festivities of Don Bosco and other celebrations.

30 January. **Fossano**. Inauguration of a new laboratory dedicated to Bro. Mario Di Giovanni, who died 15 years ago, dedicating his life to the professional training of the young. The Rector Major unveiled a bronze bust in his memory.

At Fossano on the same day he was given honorary citizenship by the mayor of the city at a reception at which were present also the Bishop, and the President of the Province of Cuneo. All three spoke of the importance and the decisive impact of salesian work in the area. In his address of thanks, Fr Vecchi gave a brief outline of the history of the work at Fossano, and emphasized some problems concerning the young and their education at the present day.

31 January. **Feast of St John Bosco**. In the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. The Rector Major presided at a Eucharist for the pupils of the Salesians and FMA of Valdocco. The Basilica was full to the doors and many Salesians concelebrated.

In the homily he emphasized one of Don Bosco's characteristics: his ability to *speak to the young in a way which caused them to listen to him with enthusiasm*. *What would he say today to youngsters about their life, their feelings and interests, their difficulties and plans?* Fr Vecchi thought *he would encourage them*

to give proper value to their lives; he would offer them the same program he gave his own boys: health, study and holiness, and he invited some of them to stay with him and dedicate themselves to the good of their companions.

At the Eucharist at which he presided in the evening, the Rector Major emphasized that *Don Bosco was a person who knew how to accept the promptings of the Spirit and profit by them.* He concluded by declaring that *the feast of Don Bosco is an invitation to holiness and it was to be hoped that in every branch of the Salesian Family saints would arise, canonized or not, who would be for our world a sign of God's blessing, models to be imitated and an impetus to a constant and efficacious work of education.*

At the festive lunch the confreres were joined by Cardinal Saldarini of Turin and the Bishop of Mondovì, both of whom had presided at Masses in the Basilica earlier in the day.

During the day Fr Vecchi also visited the sick confreres at the Cottolengo, the Valdocco infirmary, and the "Andrew Beltrami" house at Valsalice.

1 February. The Rector Major visited the Institute of **Borgomanero**, which is celebrating 90

years of salesian work and where the scholastic complex now includes the middle school, the classical liceo and a European liceo with a juridical and economic slant. The past-pupils direct a cultural circle, and there is also a cooperative.

After greeting the authorities the Rector Major presided at a Mass in honour of Don Bosco, and in the homily presented Don Bosco as *Father and Teacher*, emphasizing some simple rules he put into practice: *watch and understand, listen first and then speak, weigh things up and then make positive suggestions.*

Lunch with the Salesians and guests was followed by a visit to **Omegna** to the tomb of Ven. Andrew Beltrami. He also visited the parish church where his mortal remains are preserved, and the house which has some relics of him.

Fr Vecchi then went back to Turin and on the same evening returned to Rome.

5 - 19 February. The Rector Major made a very important visit to Africa. The main purpose was the inauguration of two new Vice-provinces, those of Tropical Equatorial Africa (ATE) and French-speaking West Africa, erected during the recent plenary

session of the General Council (cf. 4.2 of these Acts).

The celebrations for the inauguration of the Vice-provinces, with the installing of the respective Superiors, took place at Yaoundé (Cameroon) for ATE and at Lomé (Togo) for AFO. The ceremonies were graced by the Provincials or their representatives of nearly all the founding Provinces.

The presence of the provincials provided an opportunity for the signing at the same time of an agreement with the mother provinces for the support of the new vice-provinces with personnel (Salesians and lay volunteers) and financial means for a certain number of years, so that the separation could be tranquil and progressive.

Fr Vecchi extended his journey to visit other salesian works in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Benin, Togo and Mali.

The events and the presence of the Rector Major gave rise everywhere to manifestations of joy and fellowship which can be easily imagined. Among these was the typical African welcoming ceremony, repeated in every place visited, with small but sometimes significant modifications. It may be of interest to record some of these ceremonies.

The representative of the village

chief welcomes the guest, and then pours water on the ground in three directions; sometimes the water is mixed with cassava flour or something else, a sign of life and as an act of respect to the Ancestors or Forbears who are the custodians of the land and of life. He then invites the guest, as a sign of peace and goodwill, to step over the line marked out by the water, and to enter the village. The village chief drinks and offers the guest a drink from the same cup, and finally a dancing troupe of boys and girls accompanies the guest to the village centre between two lines of festive villagers.

The eucharistic celebrations were characteristic too. The churches were not sufficient to hold the huge crowds that assembled and the surrounding courtyard had to be used, or church and surrounding area combined; offertory processions were accompanied by expressive and symbolic dances; the choral singing, an indispensable element in African Christian communities, was very well prepared.

This visit was characterized also by the continual presence of salesian means of social communication: the director of the French Salesian Bulletin (*Père Inisan*) accompanied the Rector

Major for almost the whole journey, taking photographs, conducting interviews and writing reports: the local Salesians themselves had commissioned Fr Gabriel Larreta to make a videotape of the various stages of the journey for the Spanish Salesian Bulletin and documentation for the new vice-provinces. Fr Vecchi himself gave various interviews to local and national Radio and TV companies.

The following are brief items concerning other stages of the journey.

5 February. The journey began from **Cameroon** where Fr Vecchi arrived in the evening. It was the first visit of a Rector Major to this country and he was met by the Regional for Africa and Madagascar (Fr Antonio Rodriguez Tallón), the Superior of the new Vice-province (Fr Miguel Olaverri) and several Salesians who accompanied him to the Cité des Jeunes de Yaoundé, where he was warmly greeted by the confreres and people.

6 February. After a rapid visit to the premises of the Salesian Centre, Fr Vecchi went to the Catholic University, where he met the Rector and other teachers, and then went on to visit the Archbishop of Yaoundé. After this he was taken

to Leboudi where a yearly course of formation for Brother is taking place in the "Maison provisoire pour stage des coadjuteurs". This is a new experience, an annual course at present but it is hoped to extend it to two years. Noting that the house is dedicated to a coadjutor, Bro. Joseph Rossi, the Rector Major drew attention to the fact that the Congregation has had two of its coadjutors declared Venerable: Simon Srugi and Artemides Zatti, who have shown by their lives what should be the qualities and endowments of the salesian brother: moral and religious solidity; love for the young, the ability to educate, and joyful community life.

6 February, afternoon. In the chapel of the Cité des Jeunes, the official act of inauguration took place of the new ATE Vice-province, and the installation of the Superior. Fr Vecchi congratulated the Superior and all the ATE confreres, and recalled the principles which guided Don Bosco in the foundation of the first communities: *to foster the mission and sustain brotherhood*, principles which are still valid today. After the inauguration the Rector Major met with the Rectors and confreres, conversing with them about the local community, and re-

calling some of the characteristics of community given in recent General Chapters: *school, sign, environment of faith, preferential and fundamental place for ongoing formation, animating nucleus*. A fundamental obligation for the new Vice-province is that of having local communities which function, and which respond to the Chapter appeals and the challenges of the mission.

7 February. Fr Vecchi went to Ebolowa, where the Salesians have a parish, a primary school with 2,200 pupils and the Don Bosco Formation Centre. The latter, which has come into being with Canadian, French and German cooperation, has already begun to function. At present it has 80 boarders who are training as carpenters; its full capacity will eventually rise to 120. The Rector Major visited the premises and spoke with the youngsters.

He then celebrated the Eucharist in honour of St John Bosco in the parish church of Our Lady of Fatima.

In the afternoon he visited the Bishop, took part in a spectacle of songs, dances and other presentations given in his honour, and in the evening returned to Yaoundé.

Sunday 8 February. Before a

large crowd of people Fr Vecchi celebrated Holy Mass with the typical local choreography in the playground of the Cité des Jeunes.

In the afternoon, accompanied by Fr Olaverri and other Salesians, he blessed the site of the new provincial house, and then visited the Cathedral and the FMA community named "Cité Marie Dominique" in an area within the salesian parish.

From Cameroon, by way of Douala, the Rector Major, accompanied by Fr Olaverri and the Provincial of Madrid, reached the second country of his African journey: **Equatorial Guinea**, where the Salesians have three foundations: at Malabo, a parish and youth centre; at Bata, a trade formation centre for tailoring, carpentry and electrical work; and at Mikomeseng, a parish.

9 February. Fr Vecchi reached Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea in the morning and, after greeting the confreres in our parish of Elá Nguema, went to visit the two FMA Centres: "Maria Auxiliadora" and "Vaiso Ipola" ("Young woman, arise!"), and then had a meeting with the Archbishop.

Subsequently he visited the diocesan seminary at Banapá,

which is entrusted to the care of the Salesians, and after lunch at the seminary returned to Elá Nguema for a meeting with the confreres; he presided at the Eucharistic celebration and attended an entertainment of songs and dances put on by the youngsters in the youth centre.

10 February. Fr Vecchi reached Bata, where he visited the "Centro de Promoción Juvenil María Auxiliadora", a work which includes a parish, oratory and youth centre, and also a training centre for carpentry with about 120 pupils, and an agricultural establishment a few kilometers away. After greeting the Archbishop and calling at the Cathedral and major seminary (built by our confrere Fr Anselmo Pérez who is the administrator of the diocese), the Rector Major visited the agricultural site in the Ecobenan region, and later the community of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart next to the salesian house.

Here he had a meeting with the confreres of Bata and Mikomeseng, and spoke to them of the Congregation as he sees it from his various journeys (and particularly the recent journey to Cuba); he emphasized the tasks assigned by the GC24, and especially that of *working to form lay people so*

that they can give the maximum of their possibilities, and can be called to join us in the educative community and the Salesian Family. A concelebrated Mass with the Salesian Family and a large number of parishioners crowned the visit.

After Equatorial Guinea it was the turn of **Benin**, where the Salesians have four houses: at Cotonou, a centre of formation, a parish and an oratory; at Porto Novo, a parish and a refuge for street-lads; at Kandi, the parish; and at Parakou the parish and a centre for trades.

11 February. Fr Vecchi arrived in the evening at Cotonou. Waiting for him at the airport were Fr Lluís Oliveras, Superior of the AFO Vice-province, to which the Benin houses belong, confreres from the various houses, and some FMA.

In our parish of St Anthony of Padua, where they had supper, they were able to enjoy an evening of family fellowship. In the *Good night*, the Rector Major emphasized the significance of the events which had led to the creation of the two new Vice-provinces: he condensed them in three words: *past, present, future. Past: a great work of extension had been carried*

out; Present: the present launches a challenge to the ability of the communities; Future: we must deepen our roots, become 'African', become inculturated, i.e. become immersed in the social texture of the local people and succeed in proclaiming to them the message of the Gospel with simplicity but efficaciously, in line with the life and mentality of these people.

12 February. Fr Vecchi was taken to Porto Novo, where he first saw the interesting work which the Salesians have opened in the Ayimlonfide quarter, the "Foyer Don Bosco" for the care of street-children, with a literacy program and the possibility of learning a trade. After visiting the Bishop, he went on to the salesian parish of St Francis Xavier, where he was received with the typical ceremonies which the people of Africa reserve for guests of honour.

Returning to Cotonou in the afternoon, the Rector Major inaugurated the new "Don Bosco Centre", which includes meeting rooms, workshops for carpentry and electrical technology, a large assembly hall, rooms for teachers and offices, playing fields and other localities, built with the help of "Cives mundi", a non-governmental organization of Navarre, Spain.

An intense day of activity in

Benin concluded with an entertainment prepared by the boys of the Centre and the girls of the FMA, followed by a concelebrated Mass in the parish church, at which some 2,500 people managed to pack themselves in.

Togo was the fourth African country visited by Fr Vecchi. The Salesians have five foundations there. He visited Lomé-Gbodjome, with a parish, oratory and seven mission stations; Lomé-"Maison Don Bosco", with the postnovitiate and oratory; the parish of Mary Help of Christians, the CAMA training centre and the "Foyer Dominic Savio". There are two other works at Kara and Cinkassé with a parish, youth centre, centre for social advancement, and chaplaincies.

13 February. The Rector Major reached Lomé in the morning and went immediately to visit the community at Gbodjome. The population there is of the Budu race and prevalently animist. He was received with great enthusiasm. Speaking to the novices he emphasized the importance of the novitiate year for their formation, and *pointed out some of the fundamental stages they had to pass through: developing a deeper knowledge of Don Bosco, the sense*

of belonging to the Congregation, missionary enthusiasm, the growth of their interior life. Then followed the celebration of the Eucharist in honour of Bl. Philip Rinaldi, to whom the novitiate is dedicated.

In the afternoon he went to the "Maison Don Bosco" in the city of Lomé, which is the combined postnovitiate for the two Vice-provinces AFO and ATE. There are at present 19 postnovices of our own, but for studies they are joined by those of other Institutes: Combonians, Franciscans, and Divine Word Missionaries. There are 57 students in all.

In the evening Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the young confreres. The theme of what he said to them was the answer to the question: *What kind of Salesian will it take to develop the salesian charism in Africa?* He highlighted some indispensable characteristics: *The Salesian must be a person who is mature from a human standpoint, with a great spiritual and Christian depth following after Don Bosco, with a sound professional and intellectual preparation, a progressive knowledge and experience of salesian pastoral work, and the ability to dedicate himself to it completely.*

14 February. The Rector Major presided at the concelebration in the presence of the Rectors of the communities in Benin and Togo, the novices, postnovices, and the FMA of the communities of Lomé and Kara with the FMA Provincial.

At 9.30 a.m. the official inauguration took place of the new Vice-province of French-speaking West Africa, dedicated to Our Lady of Peace, with the installation of the new Superior. After the reading of the Gospel and the Constitutions, Fr Vecchi spoke of the importance attaching to the figure of the Provincial in the animation of a Province, and emphasized some characteristic aspects, inherent in the priestly role of representing before God the provincial and local communities, and making it plain that our mission is of a pastoral nature and linked with the priesthood of Christ.

After the official inauguration Fr Vecchi met informally with the confreres; in the afternoon he had a meeting with the Council of the Vice-province, and in the evening took part in festivities organized in his honour in the playground of the parish.

15 February, Sunday. He presided at the celebration of the Eucharist in the parish church and joined the whole parish community in a

morning of festivities. In the afternoon he visited the Mary Domenica Mazzarello Centre of the FMA, where he conversed with the FMA, the Cooperators and the DBVs of the Vice-province.

16 February. The Rector Major visited the Mary Help of Christians Centre – CAMA — which depends on the parish community but is adjacent to the “Maison Don Bosco”. The Centre accommodates about 180 external pupils, boys and girls, who follow courses in electricity, general mechanics, air-conditioning, carpentry and dress-making. It also has a “Foyer”, dedicated to Dominic Savio, which receives young men between 18 and 20 years who are abandoned and in great difficulty.

Going back to the “Maison Don Bosco”, Fr Vecchi had a meeting with the formation personnel of the novitiate and postnovitiate. After lunch in the novitiate, he went to pay homage to Our Lady in the sanctuary of Togoville.

17 February. After a final meeting with all the students of the postnovitiate, the Rector Major left for the airport and flew to **Mali**, on the fifth and final stage of his journey in Africa. At the airport of Bamako he was met by

the Apostolic Nuncio, the Bishop of San and other ecclesiastical and civil dignitaries, some of whom had come for the funeral of the Archbishop of Bamako who had just died.

18 February. Fr Vecchi visited the salesian “Père Michel” Centre, where 350 pupils, some of them girls, are taking training courses in automobile mechanics, agricultural machinery, metal work and electricity. The Centre also caters for 80 boarders. Some new premises were inaugurated on the occasion of the visit.

Various representatives of the government and the diocese were present at the inauguration. All of them spoke briefly, emphasizing different aspects of education, emphasizing the importance of the work done by the Salesians at Bamako, and thanking the Rector Major for his presence. Fr Vecchi expressed his gratitude for the reception he had been given and for the esteem expressed for the salesian work, and blessed the new premises, some of them still under construction.

He had a meeting with the teachers of the Centre and spoke to them of the need for collaboration for a fruitful work of education. In the evening he had a conversation with the six confreres of

the Vice-province engaged in practical training, three clerics and three brothers.

19 February. Fr Vecchi, with the Regional and the Superior of the Vice-province, went to visit the agricultural institute, which occupies some 40 hectares at Moribabougou on a tributary of the River Niger some 18 km. from Bamako. It has about 80 pupils, and is equipped for visitors to stay overnight.

Returning to the Père Michel Centre the Rector Major met with confreres from the different countries of the Vice-province: Mali, Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. He reminded them of some of the primary demands of the process on which they were engaged: *the consolidation of communities; the formation of Salesians, catechists, collaborators and animators; the strengthening of the phases of formation, and the extension of works and activities.*

In the afternoon, after a visit to the Sansfil area (a centre of telegraphic communication, animated by the Salesians), he had a meeting with nine persons who are preparing to make the promise as Salesian Cooperators. Fr Vecchi gave a final *Good night* in which he thanked everyone for

the work they were doing and for the great reception they had given him; he summed up the themes he had developed during his stay in Africa, urging them to *continue in their love for Don Bosco and the young, to maintain the sense of Congregation, solidity in formation and in human and spiritual brotherhood.* He reminded them that *the setting for the realization of the salesian project is the educative community and the Salesian Family.*

After supper the confreres accompanied Fr Vecchi to the airport, as he left for Rome.

From 27 February to 1 March the Rector Major was in the St Mark Province of Venice.

27 February. At Venice he inaugurated the academic year of the *Higher International School of the Sciences of Formation (SISF)*, promoted by the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the UPS, the Salesian Province of St Mark, and the CNOS-FAP Federation of Venice. With particular attention to Venice and the cultural area of Alpeadria, its purpose is the higher preparation of formation personnel in the areas of psycho-pedagogy, social studies, guidance and teaching.

In addition to the Rector Major

and the Rector Magnificus of the UPS, the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice was present together with a large number of prominent personalities and members of the public.

Many of the illustrious guests addressed the assembly. In reply Fr Vecchi thanked them for their words of appreciation of the Salesians, and spoke of the *present-day commitment of the Salesian Congregation to formation, which gives effect to the intuitions and realizations of St John Bosco for the benefit of the young and of adults who are concerned in their education.*

28 February. The Rector Major was at Trieste to take part in the celebrations for the centenary of salesian work in that city. The events included a meeting with the Bishop, a reception by the Mayor and other civic authorities in the Town Hall, festivities at the oratory and the official commemoration in the theatre with the Bishop, the Mayor and other dignitaries, Salesians, FMA, other members of the Salesian Family and friends.

1 March, Sunday. Fr Vecchi was present at Chiarbola, Trieste, for the 20th Youth Festival of the East Venice Province, jointly organized by the SDB and FMA. The Bish-

op of Trieste was also present with several other local personalities. In his remarks expressing his admiration for what he had seen and heard, the Rector Major recalled that there is no lack of settings for salesian work at the present day: *poverty, suffering and the need for education exist everywhere, and there is room for every kind of generosity. He emphasized that if it is true that there are needs close at hand, we must also look at the whole world and especially those regions where they are widespread and extreme; where there is greater need, greater love must be expressed.*

Before lunch there was a Eucharistic celebration and in the afternoon, the festivities continued in the Oratory, where there was also a meeting of the Salesian Family.

In the evening the Rector Major returned to Rome.

7 March, Saturday. Fr Vecchi visited the community of Ortona (Chieti), known in Italian as "Soggiorno Proposta", on the occasion of the presentation of a survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the UPS on the community's twelve years of activity.

The community was founded by Fr Luigi Giovannoni for the sal-

vaging of young drug-addicts. It operates in various premises which house some fifty youngsters in all. There is a section which makes a preliminary assessment of newcomers before their full admission, to see whether the program can be of help to them.

There were some 500 persons at the meeting, including the local Bishop, the Provincial and the Mayor, with other civil and military authorities. An account of the work done by the institute was presented by Prof. Renato Frisanco, himself a past-pupil, who said that 400 young people had frequented the institute in the first ten years of its work.

The Rector Major, speaking at the end of the report, developed the theme: *the new reality of youthful distress*.

In the evening he returned to Rome.

4.2 Chronicle of the General Council

The plenary winter session of the General Council, the fourth of the present period, took place from 9 December 1997 to 9 January 1998.

The length of time was less than usual because of the Rector Major being a member of the Synod of Bishops for America in November, but was intensive in respect of the work done and the matters dealt with; there were 20 plenary sessions, apart from group work and interpersonal encounters. Most of the material concerned matters sent in by the Provinces: appointment of provincial councillors and approval of Rectors, the opening and erection of houses etc. (7 new houses were opened and there were 14 canonical erections and 4 canonical closures), matters concerning individual confreres, and practices of a financial and administrative nature.

Much attention was obviously given to themes concerning the government and animation of the provinces, and to the study of items of a more general character concerning the Congregation as a whole. The main argument dealt with are listed below.

Appointment of Provincials

Numerous were the Provinces or Vice-provinces for which new Superiors were appointed during the session, after the usual careful analysis in each case of the results of the consultation carried out, followed by a discernment among

the principal names emerging, and the voting by the full Council.

The following (in alphabetical order) were appointed during the session: Patrick Buzon, for the province of the Southern Philippines; Raimundo Ricardo Sobrinho da Costa, for the province of Recife, Brazil; Franciszek Krason, for the province of Breslau, Poland; Balaswamy Medabalimi, for the province of Hyderabad, India; Jean-Paul Julio Nau, for the vice-province of Haiti; Francis Preston, for the province of Great Britain; Philip Kitnichi Somchai, for the province of Thailand; Font João Sucarrats, for the province of Manaus, Brazil; Jerzy Worek, for the province of Pila, Poland.

Also appointed were the two Superiors of the new Vice-provinces erected in Africa: Miguel Angel Olaverri, for the vice-province of Tropical Equatorial Africa and Lluís Maria Oliveras, for the vice-province of French-speaking West Africa.

Reports on Extraordinary Visitations

The reports on the extraordinary visitations of provinces, presented by the respective Visitors form one of the most important items of the work of the General Council, in the animation of the

Congregation in its various local circumscriptions. The study of the report provides an occasion for a reflection in common on each province, a consideration of the points made by the Visitor and the offering of further suggestions for the action of government.

During this session, reports were made on the visitations of the following provinces: Recife, Brazil; the two Mexican provinces; the Vice-province of East Africa; the Vice-province of Sardinia, and the special Circumscription of Eastern Europe.

Information provided by individual Councillors

As in the other sessions, the Councillors heading the individual departments (formation, youth pastoral work, salesian family and social communication, missions, finances), together with the Rector Major and Vicar General, gave a concise account of their own activities – personally and at departmental level – in the service of the animation of the provinces and of the Congregation at world level. The Councillor for Africa and Madagascar also provided a report on the activities carried out in the animation of salesian Africa.

These informative reports enabled the Council to home in on certain aspects and decide on particular themes to be submitted to more specific reflection.

Erection of two new Vice-provinces in Africa

Referring back to the first consent already expressed in the plenary session of July 1997 (cf. AGC 361, p.78), the Rector Major with his Council has formally erected two new Salesian Vice-provinces in Africa:

- the Vice-province of *French-speaking West Africa* (AFO) with "Our Lady of Peace" as its titular, with headquarters at Abidjan (Ivory Coast) and comprising salesian work in the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal and Togo;
- the Vice-province of *Tropical Equatorial Africa* (ATE) with "Our Lady of Africa" as its titular, with headquarters at Yaoundé (Cameroon) and comprising salesian work in the following countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.

With further reference to

Africa, the Rector Major with his Council – having in mind the development of salesian work as was noted also in the recent visitation – has erected as a *Province* the existing "St John Bosco" Vice-province of East Africa, with headquarters at Nairobi (Kenya).

The decrees of erection of the Province and two Vice-provinces are reported in this issue of the Acts at nn. 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4.

Redefinition of the boundaries of the Italian Provinces of Ancona and Milan.

With reference to the study made by the General Council in September 1997 on the effectiveness of the Salesian Congregation in Italy and the eventual reclamation of certain works, and keeping in mind also the results of a study made by the Salesian Provincial Conference of Italy (CISI), the Rector Major and his Council have examined in particular the situation of the salesian works in the Romagna area and, after consulting the provincial councils and confreres concerned, have decided that the houses of the Romagna area and of the Republic of San Marino, at present dependent on the "Our Lady of Lourdes" Adriatic Province with

headquarters in Ancona, shall be united to the "St Charles Borromeo" Province with headquarters in Milan, from 1 September 1998. The houses specifically concerned are those of Faenza, Forlì, Ravenna, Rimini and San Merino.

The Revision of the "Ratio".

The General Council, at the instance of the Councillor for Formation, has reflected on the revision of the Ratio, a task for this six-year period given to it by the GC24 (cf. GC24,147). Certain criteria have been adopted concerning the type of revision needed and how the process should be arranged so as to ensure the involvement required in the first phase of the work.

In the section "Guidelines and policies" of this issue of the Acts there is an intervention by the Councillor for Formation with regard to this obligation of the "revision of the Ratio", indicating the contribution asked for from the Provinces (cf. n. 2.1).

Criteria for membership of the Salesian Family

The recognition of groups as members of the Salesian Family is the responsibility of the Rector Major as the successor of Don

Bosco and centre of unity of the Family. In the process of discernment leading to recognition it is the Rector Major's custom to involve his Council. For this reason, since 1982 the Rector Major with his Council have set out some principal criteria for the recognition of such membership; they can be found in AGC 304.

Now, keeping in mind the progress made in the Salesian Family (not least in the number of groups recognized) and the reflections of recent years, the Rector Major decided to submit the above-mentioned criteria to a verification by the General Council.

From the verification emerged the substantial confirmation of the same criteria, but some norms of application have been added to specify how the criteria are to be applied from certain practical standpoints.

At n. 2.2 of this issue of the Acts will be found the criteria already indicated in AGC 304, together with the norms which have now been added.

Joint meeting of the SDB and FMA General Councils.

In the afternoon of 22 December at the SDB Generalate, the periodic joint meeting took place

of the SDB and FMA General Councils, to reflect together on a theme of common interest: *The Jubilee of the Year 2000 in the Salesian Family*, and in particular on the responsibilities of the two Congregations regarding its preparation and realization. Starting from an earlier reflection and from proposals emerging in the two Councils and presented by the Vicars General, the theme was first developed in three working groups and then in the combined assembly.

Two main points were considered: 1. Common guidelines for

the process of preparation for the Jubilee. 2. Eventual suggestions of common initiatives for the Salesian Family. Some interesting guidelines and proposals emerged. As always the meeting was sustained by prayer together and made cheerful by the joy of the approaching Christmas celebrations.

Concluding the plenary session on 9 January 1998, the Rector Major presented a stock-taking with regard to what had been done and what remained to be done with respect to the six-year program.

5.1 Days of Spirituality of the Salesian Family (20th meeting)

The 20th edition of this significant spiritual appointment took place at the *Salesianum* in Rome from 16 to 18 January 1998, organized and prepared by the Vicar General. Twelve groups of the Family were represented by some 170 participants, mainly from Europe. As in the previous year, those present had available a copy of all the reports and addresses already translated into the principal languages.

The theme was centred on the Strenna for 1988: *Together with the young, let us rediscover the presence of the Spirit in the Church and in the world*, and involved a reflection on the *spirituality inspired by the salesian charism*, in the light of the similar reflection to which the Church is committed in this second of the three years of preparation for the Jubilee of the year 2000, i.e. the reflection on the Holy Spirit.

The meeting was opened in the afternoon of Friday 16 January, with a lengthy report by Prof. D. Maurilio Guasco, Lecturer in the History of Contemporary Political Thought in the State University of Turin. He divided it into two

parts: the first on The Spirit in the Church and the world of the present day, and the second more specifically on Methods for a sapiential reading of reality.

Of great interest the following morning was the series of interventions by representatives of the groups of the Salesian Family, who presented an explanation of the charisma of each group in the light of the Spirit: Fr Morand Wirth SDB read an intervention by Mgr. Pierre Pican, Salesian Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, who was prevented by illness from being present in person. Other contributions were from Mother Antonia Colombo, Superior General of the FMA; Prof. Roberto Lorenzini, Coordinator General of the Salesian Cooperators; Miss Gianna Martinelli, Major Superior of the DBV; Mother Carmelina Mosca, Superior General of the Salesian Oblates of the Sacred Heart; Bro. Antonio Suescun, a Salesian Coadjutor from Spain; and Mr. Peter Shimwell, a volunteer from Great Britain.

The theme was analyzed at greater depth on Saturday afternoon with three interventions relating to our educative and pastoral mission. Fr Octavio Balderas SDB (Mexico) presented a report entitled: *For a pedagogy in the*

Spirit, and the same theme was further developed by Sr Renata Bozzetto, of the FMA community of Subiaco. Subsequently Fr Cyril D'Souza SDB (India) spoke on *Communicating the Spirit to followers of other religions*.

The reports presented in the assembly were followed by questions and comments from those present, and were then the object of group work in two phases: the first, late on Saturday morning, was directed especially to the communication of experiences (in the Salesian Family, the Salesian Youth Movement, and the educative community); the second phase, longer and more demanding, took place in the afternoon of the same day, with a presentation by Fr Antonio Martinelli dedicated to a rereading of the *Common Identity Card* from the standpoint of hope (one of the aspects emphasized in the *Strenna*).

On the Sunday, after the Eucharist (at which the Rector Major presided) and the systematic presentation of the group work, Fr Vecchi concluded the meeting with his valued *commentary on the Strenna* in which, after indicating the "key to a knowledge of the Spirit" (Jesus Christ) and the "places for the rediscovery of the Spirit" (the Church, with the

word of God, its mission and communion, personal life-plan, human history, and the world or cosmos), he located the rediscovery of the Spirit in the horizon of hope, and suggested some practical lines for "living and working with confidence for the education of individuals and groups of young people and adults", with specific reference to the application of the gifts of the Spirit to our pedagogical mission.

As always, the period of the meeting was characterized, in addition to the spiritual aspect, by moments of prayer and fellowship.

5.2 Canonical erection of the Salesian Vice-province "Our Lady of Peace" of French-speaking West Africa.

Prot. N. 002/98

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

— after considering the development of the salesian works in the countries of French-speaking West Africa and specifically in the States of Benin, Burkina Fa-

- so, Ivory Coast, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Senegal and Togo;
- having taken note of the fact that for purposes of more efficacious animation, on 1 May 1992 a Delegate was appointed for the Provincials of the works in the above-named States;
 - having heard the opinions of the Provincials concerned and examined the results of a consultation carried out among the confreres working in the States mentioned;
 - on the basis of art.156 of the Constitutions,
 - with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 5 January 1998, in conformity with Const.132 §1,1 and Const.156;

CANONICALLY ERECTS

by means of this present Decree, the new Salesian Vice-province of French-speaking West Africa, with the title of "Our Lady of Peace", with headquarters at Abidjan-Koumassi (Ivory Coast) in the house "St Francis of Assisi", and made up of the following canonically erected houses in the various States:

- In *Benin*:
COTONOU "St. Anthony of Padua"

KANDY "Our Lady of Mt. Carmel"

PARAKOU "Mary Help of Christians"

PORTO NOVO "St. Francis Xavier"

- In *Ivory Coast*:

ABIDJAN-Koumassi "St. Francis of Assisi"

DUÉKOUÉ "St. Teresa of the Child Jesus"

KORHOGO "St. John Bosco"

- In *Guinea-Conakry*:

CONAKRY "St. Joseph"

KAN KAN - Dabadougou "St. John Bosco"

- In *Mali*:

BAMAKO "St. Joseph"

SIKASSO "Mary Help of Christians"

TOUBA "St. John Bosco"

- In *Senegal*:

ST. LOUIS "Our Lady of Lourdes"

TAMBACOUNDA "Queen of the Universe"

THIÈS "Mary Help of Christians"

- In *Togo*:

CINKASSÉ "Mary Help of Christians"

KARA "San Giovanni Bosco"

LOMÉ-Gbodjome-Novitiate "Bl. Philip Rinaldi"

LOMÉ-Postnovitiate "St. John Bosco"

LOMÉ-Parish "Mary Help of Christians"

And also the salesian work, not yet canonically erected, at BOBO-Dioulasso, in *Burkina Faso*.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice-province are all those confreres, who at the date of the canonical erection live and work in the Houses and salesian works listed above.
2. Members also are confreres in formation coming from any of the countries included in the Vice-province, even though they be in formation communities elsewhere.
3. The relationships of the Vice-province with the Provinces of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on 31 January 1998.

Rome, 5 January 1998.

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.3 Canonical erection of the Salesian Vice-province "Our Lady of Africa" of Tropical Equatorial Africa

Prot. n. 003/98

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

- after considering the development of the salesian works in the countries of Tropical Equatorial Africa, and specifically in the States of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon;
- having taken note of the fact that for purposes of more efficacious animation, on 15 May 1993 a Delegate was appointed for the Provincials of the works in the above-named States;
- having heard the opinions of the Provincials concerned and examined the results of a consultation carried out among the confreres working in the States mentioned;
- on the basis of art.156 of the Constitutions,
- with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 5 January 1998, in conformi-

ty with Const.132 §1,1 and Const.156;

CANONICALLY ERECTS

by means of this present Decree, the new Salesian Vice-province of Tropical Equatorial Africa, with the title of "Our Lady of Africa", with headquarters at Yaoundé (Cameroon) in the house "St John Bosco", and made up of the following canonically erected houses in the various States:

- In *Cameroon*:
EBOLOWA "Our Lady of Fatima"
YAOUNDE "St. John Bosco"
- In the *Central African Republic*:
BANGUI "St. John Bosco"
- In *Ciad*:
SARH "Bl. Josephine Bakita"
- In *Congo (Brazzaville)*:
BRAZZAVILLE "St. John Bosco"
BRAZZAVILLE "St. Charles Lwanga"
POINTE-NOIRE "St. Peter"
- In *Equatorial Guinea*:
BATA "Mary Help of Christians"
MALABO-Elá Nguema "Our Lady of Bisila"
MIKOMESENG "Our Lady of Africa"
- In *Gabon*:
LIBREVILLE "St. John Bosco"
OYEM "St. Dominic Savio"

PORT-GENTIL "St. Barbara"

And also the salesian work, not yet canonically erected, at MALABO-Banapá, in *Equatorial Guinea*.

The following decisions have been made:

1. Members of the Vice-province are all those confreres, who at the date of the canonical erection live and work in the Houses and salesian works listed above.
2. Members also are confreres in formation coming from any of the countries included in the Vice-province, even though they be in formation communities elsewhere.
3. The relationships of the Vice-province with the Provinces of origin will be regulated by an appropriate Agreement, approved by the Rector Major.

The present Decree will come into force on 31 January 1998.

Rome, 5 January 1998.

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.4 Canonical erection of the Salesian Province "St John Bosco" of East Africa

Prot. n. 004/98

The undersigned,

Fr Juan E. VECCHI,

Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco,

- after considering the development of the members and salesian works in the countries of the Vice-province of East Africa, constituted on 19 January 1888;
- having taken note of the fact that the conditions described in art.157 of the Constitutions have now been reached for promoting the salesian life and mission, with the autonomy that belongs to a Province according to the Constitutions;
- with the consent of the General Council given in its meeting of 5 January 1998, in conformity with Const.132 §1,1 and Const.156;

by means of this present Decree,

**CANONICALLY ERECTS
AS A PROVINCE**

The existing Vice-province of East Africa, with all the confreres and houses in the States of Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The following decisions have been made:

1. The new Province will keep the title of "St. John Bosco" with headquarters in Nairobi - Upper Hill Road, in the house "Mary Help of Christians".
2. The present Superior of the Vice-province, Fr Stephen Chemmalakuzhy, with the consent of the General Council, is appointed *Provincial* and remains in office until the end of the six-year mandate received a Superior of the Vice-province.
3. The present Decree will come into force on 31 January 1998.

Rome, 5 January 1998.

Fr. Juan E. VECCHI
Rector Major

Fr. Francesco MARACCANI
Secretary General

5.5 Letter of the Councillor for Formation concerning the provincial plan for the qualification of personnel.

We print the letter sent by the Councillor General for Formation to Provincials and their Councils, requesting the submission of the "provincial plan for the qualification of confreres", on the basis of the Rector Major's indication in his circular letter "For you I study".

Prot. 98/0073

To: The Provincials
and their Councils

**Subject: Request for the
"Provincial Plan for the qual-
ification of confreres"**

Dear Father Provincial,

The letter of the Rector Major "For you I study" on the "satisfactory preparation of the confreres and the quality of our educative work" (AGC 361) contains a **specific task for each province: "the elaboration and realization of a provincial plan for the qualification of personnel"** (AGC 361, p.33).

It is a task in harmony with the

planning program for this six-year period, in which there is strong encouragement for a strengthening and a renewed commitment to culture by the confreres, for study and a professional approach; for an increase in the number of qualified Salesians in the typical areas of educative and pastoral mission; asking the provinces for a program for the qualification of personnel, verifying it periodically (AGC 351, special number).

The **Rector Major clearly indicates** the importance and the practical requirements of this task. We mention **some statements from his letter.**

- In this period the qualification of personnel must constitute a **priority governmental commitment** and ought to be implemented by action at provincial level which is programmed and constant (AGC 361, p.33).

- We must wager on this priority investment and translate it into some concrete commitments, accepting the consequent limitations which it seems must follow. **A conscious choice is being imposed** on the Congregation and Provinces (ib. p.20). It is necessary to make this a special time, to make definite options, to es-

tablish priorities, to look to the future (ib. p.24).

- It is not enough to administer well the resources we have inherited, we must also be careful to produce them, multiply them and develop them for the future (ib. p.24). The qualification of people, the consolidation of centres and teams, the fostering of a certain cultural sensitivity in the Province, cannot be the result of brief periods, restricted by the deadline of a six-year period or by limited calculations. **Continued governmental action and long-term vision** are indispensable. A Provincial who launches a plan for the qualification of personnel knows already that he will not reap the benefits during his term of office.(ib. p.25)

- Certainly **it is not a question of easy choices**, since it is not easy to translate into governmental action the salesian balance between the requirements of the mission, scarcity of personnel, and the pressing need for high quality. For the Rector Major too it has been a **difficult choice** to make, one which has been arrived at after suffering and prayer. "I know the difficulties many of you are grappling with each year as you try to fill the posts of work and,

with you, I feel the reduced number of new vocations. We must, however, not only solve the crisis but sow for the future" (ib. 36).

- To be kept in mind is the **variety of situations** in the Provinces regarding vocations, the condition of the communities and teams, the qualification of personnel, the challenges of the mission and the complexity of the works etc. In each case, "**the maximum exploitation of human resources** is an obligation" (ib. p.25).

- But it is not sufficient to look at the Province: we are **co-responsible for the salesian mission beyond the boundaries of our own Province**. Co-responsibility for the mission has grown and will continue to grow even more. "A wise overall vision enables provision to be made for local requirements, while at the same time giving consideration to the contribution to be given to initiatives which extend beyond provincial horizons and express the salesian mission at regional, national and international level" (ib. p.25).

- As regards the qualification of personnel there are already a number of initiatives under way and some provinces are already

working to a plan with generosity and courage. But it is necessary to propose to everyone a **more decisive and organized provincial plan** which should be translated into practical measures such as those specifically mentioned by the Rector Major (ib. pp.34-35). All this presupposes the **elaboration and realization of a provincial plan for the qualification and re-qualification of personnel**, verified year by year, and a wise administration of resources (ib. p.35).

The Rector Major asks the Provincials and their Councils to draw up a **provincial plan for the qualification of the confreres and to send it in by the end of November 1998**, before the beginning of the full winter session of the General Council .

“The request for a program of qualification will prompt a moment of fraternal communication to become aware of the very many resources we have still to exploit, and to help us to develop all the gifts the Lord sends to our beloved Congregation” (ib. p.36). Following this request, there will be a survey of the qualifications of the confreres to be carried out by

the General Secretariat of the Congregation.

Some information regarding the presentation of the “provincial plan for qualification” requested by the Rector Major is enclosed.

In the name of the Rector Major I thank you in anticipation for the care you will take in responding to this request.

With fraternal greetings and a remembrance in my prayers,

Rome, 15 January 1998.

Fr Giuseppe NICOLUSSI
General Councillor
for Formation

5.6 New Provincials

The following are brief biographical notes on the new Provincials, appointed by the Rector Major with his Council in the plenary session of December 1997 – January 1998.

1. Fr Patrick BUZON, provincial of Cebu, Southern Philippines.

Fr Patrick BUZON succeeds Fr Peter Zago in the guidance of the Southern Philippines Province with headquarters at Cebu. He was born on 14 March 1950 a Ce-

bu City, and made his first profession 29 June at Canlubang. He studied philosophy and pedagogy at Canlubang in the post-novitiate and after practical training followed the course of theology in the studentate of Parañaque, Metro Manila. He was ordained priest on 8 December 1976. He completed his studies with the Licentiate in Educational Sciences.

After a period of intense educative and apostolic work in the house of Lawa An, Talisay, he was appointed Rector there in 1987, but the following year was transferred, again as Rector, to the "Boys' Town" of Cebu, and at the same time became a provincial councillor. From 1992 he had been Vice-provincial. In recent years he was Rector once again at Lawa An, then of the provincial house at Cebu-Talamban and finally at Cebu-Boys' Town again. In 1996 he was a delegate of the province to the GC24.

2. *Fr Raimundo Ricardo Sobrinho da COSTA, Provincial of Recife, Brazil.*

To guide the North-Eastern Province of Brazil with headquarters at Recife, after the appointment of Fr Valerio Breda as a bishop, has been appointed his

Vice-provincial, *Fr Raimundo Ricardo Sobrinho da COSTA.*

He was born at Lavras (Ceará, Brazil) 12 December 1932 and made his first profession on 31 January 1956 at the end of the novitiate at Pindamonhangaba. He had been a pupil at the salesian school of Cajazeiras, Paraíba. After practical training in the Recife Province he studied theology at São Paulo, where he was ordained priest on 1 August 1965.

In 1969 he became Rector of the house of formation of Jaboatão-Colônia e from 1972 to 1975 was Director of novices in the same house. In 1976 he became Rector at Jaboatão-Cidade and in 1979 a provincial councillor; from 1983 to 1989 he was Vice-provincial. Another year as Director of novices (1989-90) he became Vice-provincial once again, and from 1990-93 was also Rector of the postnovitiate at Recife-Bongi.

3. *Fr Franciszek KRASON, Provincial of Breslau (Poland).*

Fr Franciszek KRASON, the new Provincial, succeeds *Fr Stanislaw Semik*.

Born at Góra-Pszczyna (Katowice) 6 July 1955, he made his first profession on 17 August 1975 at

Kopiec. After the study of philosophy and practical training he studied theology in the studentate of Cracow, his province of origin, and was ordained priest on 19 June 1982.

After ordination he completed his studies at the UPS in Rome (1985-89) and obtained the Licentiate in Theology. He then taught at the studentate of Cracow and from 1989 to 1994 was also Rector of the postnovitiate. He became a provincial councillor in 1992 and Vice-provincial in 1994. In 1996 he was a delegate at the GC24.

4. *Fr Balaswamy MEDABALIMI, Provincial of Hyderabad (India).*

Fr Balaswamy MEDABALIMI succeeds *Fr Benjamin Puthota* in the guidance of the Province of Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, in India.

He was born at Pannur, in the province of Madras, 7 March 1947 and entered the novitiate at Yercaud, where he made his first profession on 17 June 1965. He studied theology at the interprovincial studentate of Bangalore and was ordained priest at his native Pannur on 22 December 1975.

After ordination he was imme-

diately engaged in educative and pastoral work and in 1982 became Rector of the house of Guntur. From 1985 to 1987 he was at Rome at the UPS, where he completed his studies in spirituality. Returning to India he became a provincial councillor and once again Rector at Guntur. In 1992 he was appointed Vice-provincial, and in 1994 also Rector of the provincial house.

5. *Fr Jean-Paul Julio NAU, Superior of the Vice-province of Haiti.*

Fr Jean-Paul Julio NAU succeeds *Fr Jacques Mésidor* as Superior of the Vice-province of Haiti.

Born on 24 June 1946 at Pé-tion-Ville, in the diocese of Port-au-Prince, he made his first profession in the novitiate of San Antonio de los Altos (Venezuela) and after philosophy and practical training studied theology at Santo Domingo, and was ordained priest at Port-au-Prince on 18 June 1977.

He obtained the Licentiate in Pedagogy from the UPS in Rome, and was an educator and animator in various houses of Haiti, as well as at Santo Domingo, María Auxiliadora (1985-1989). From

1996 he was Rector of the house of Pétion-Ville.

6. *Fr Miguel Angel OLAVERRI, Superior of the Vice-province of Tropical Equatorial Africa.*

Fr Miguel Angel OLAVERRI is the first Superior of the Vice-province "Our Lady of Africa" in Tropical Equatorial Africa, appointed by the Rector Major and his Council on the erection of the Vice-province.

He was born at Pamplona (Navarre, Spain) 9 May 1948, and has been a Salesian since 16 August 1966, when he made his first profession at the novitiate of Godelleta. He was ordained priest at Barcelona on 5 June 1976.

After completing his civil studies with the Licentiate in Letters, he became an educator and animator in various houses. In 1977 he left for Africa and was assigned to the house of Brazzaville "St. Charles Lwanga", in the Congo Republic. From 1993 he was provincial delegate for the salesian works in Tropical Equatorial Africa, now erected as a Vice-province. He took part in the GC24 as a delegate of the Paris Province.

7. *Fr Lluís Maria OLIVERAS, Superior of the Vice-province of French-speaking West Africa.*

Fr Lluís Maria OLIVERAS is the first Superior of the Vice-province of "Our Lady of Peace" of French-speaking West Africa. He was appointed by the Rector Major and his Council, at the time the Vice-province was erected.

Born on 30 March 1939 at Barcelona (Spain), he made his first profession on 16 August 1956 in the novitiate of Arbós. After philosophy and practical training he followed the theology course at the studentate of Barcelona, where he was ordained priest on 19 March 1965.

After ordination he was soon given roles of responsibility. He was Rector successively in the houses of Andorra La Vella (1969-1972) and of Barcelona-Don Bosco (1974-1977). In 1977 he was appointed Vice-provincial of the Province of Barcelona.

Leaving for Africa in the context of 'Project Africa' he was Rector of the house of Korhogo, in Ivory Coast from 1983 to 1991. From 1992 he was provincial delegate for the salesian works in French-speaking West Africa, now erected as a Vice-province. He was present at the GC24 as an observer.

8. *Fr Francis PRESTON,*
Provincial of Great Britain.

To guide the Province of Great Britain in succession to Fr Michael Cunningham has been appointed Fr *Francis PRESTON*.

He was born at Oxford, England, 8 October 1944, and professed as a Salesian on 8 September 1964 in the novitiate of Burwash. He was ordained priest on 5 July 1975 at Oxford, after theological studies at Maynooth in Ireland.

He was Rector of the house of Bollington from 1983 to 1989, and Director of novices in the inter-provincial novitiate of Dublin from 1989 to 1995. In 1995 he was appointed Rector of Battersea "Sacred Heart", London. In 1997, still as Rector, he was transferred with the whole "Sacred Heart" community to the house of Battersea-London Bl. Philip Rinaldi.

9. *Fr Philip Kitnichi SOMCHAI,*
Provincial of Thailand.

Fr *Philip SOMCHAI Kitnichi* succeeds Fr Joseph Prathan Sridarunsil as Provincial of Thailand.

Born at Bangkok on 29 July 1941, he made his novitiate in the

house of Hua Hin, where he also made his first profession on 25 March 1963. After the study of philosophy and pedagogy, and practical training, he was sent to Cremisan in the Holy Land for theology. He was ordained priest at Jerusalem on 19 April 1973.

Returning to Thailand he was engaged in educative and pastoral work. In 1981 he was appointed Rector of the house of Hua Hin and subsequently in 1988 of that of Bandon. In 1992 he was transferred, again as Rector, to the big "Sararit" college of Banpong and in 1994 became a provincial councillor. He was the delegate of the Province to the GC24, and in 1995 became Rector at Haad Yai.

10. *Fr João SUCARRATS*
FONT, Provincial of Manaus
(Brazil).

Fr *João SUCARRATS FONT* is the new Provincial of the Amazonian Province of Brazil, with headquarters in Manaus. He succeeds Fr Franco Dalla Valle, who has become a Bishop. Born at Tarassa, in the province of Barcelona (Spain), on 21 August 1944, João Sucarrats made his first profession in the novitiate of Arbós on 26 August 1960. He left for the missions in Brazil imme-

diately after his perpetual profession, and studied theology first at São Paulo, and then at Bogotá. He was ordained priest at Belém do Pará, in the Manaus Province on 3 April 1971.

He was given many roles of responsibility, especially in the field of formation. He was Rector at Ananindeua for three years (1978-1981), and then parish priest at Manaus-Alvorada. In 1986 he became Vice-provincial for six years, and then in 1989 became Rector of the Centre of Formation at Manaus, where he continued to work after becoming provincial secretary in 1994 and a provincial councillor in 1997. In 1996 he was appointed Director of novices in the novitiate of Manaus-Aleixo.

11. *Fr Jerzy WOREK, Provincial of PILA (Poland).*

The successor to Fr Wladyslaw Kolyszko is Fr *Jerzy WOREK*.

He was born at Łódź, Poland, on 20 August 1949 and made his first profession at Kutno-Wozniaków on 16 August 1969. He was ordained priest at Lad where he had studied theology. He holds the Licentiates in Theology and in Educational Sciences. He has worked as a teacher in the field of educa-

tion, and in that of pastoral work. He was Rector of the house of Lomianki from 1985 to 1988 and then of that of Rumia "Sanct' Adalberto" (1988-1991). In 1991 he became Rector of the work at Rumia "Maria Help of Christians", where the postnovitiate is situated. Since 1988 he has been a provincial councillor.

5.7 New Salesian Bishop

Mgr. Elías Samuel BOLANOS, Bishop of ZACATECOLUCA (El Salvador)

On 28 February 1998 the *Osservatore Romano* published the news of the appointment of *Fr Elías Samuel BOLANOS* as Bishop of the Diocese of ZACATECOLUCA, in the state of El Salvador.

Elías Bolaños was born at Santa Ana, El Salvador, on 15 February 1951 and has been a Salesian since 10 January 1970, when he made his first profession at San Salvador, after his novitiate at Planes de Renderos. Previously he had been a pupil at the salesian school in his native city.

He studied philosophy and pedagogy, and later theology, in the salesian studentate of Guatemala,

and was ordained priest at Santa Ana on 27 October 1979.

After ordination he was engaged for some years in educative and pastoral work, and was then sent to the UPS in Rome, where he completed his studies and gained the Licentiate in Educational Sciences (1986).

Returning to his province, he spent three years at the postnovitiate of Guatemala, and in 1989

was appointed Rector of the Vocational Centre of Santa Tecla (El Salvador), from where in 1992 he went on to direct the technical and professional work in the "Ricaldone" Centre of San Salvador. From January 1994 he had been Rector of the "Ciudad de los Niños" in Santa Ana, where the news reached him of his appointment as a Bishop.

5.8 SDB Statistics at 31 December 1997

Isp.	Tot. 1996	Professi temporanei				Professi perpetui				Tot. Professi	Novizi	Tot. 1997
		L	S	D	P	L	S	D	P			
AFC	224	13	49	0	0	33	11	0	113	219	21	240
AFE	145	4	34	0	0	19	6	0	76	139	11	150
AFM	66	5	3	0	0	8	0	0	53	69	0	69
ANT	176	4	41	0	0	15	8	0	103	171	10	181
ABA	172	2	3	0	0	13	7	0	131	156	1	157
ABB	141	2	10	0	0	15	7	0	103	137	3	140
ACO	151	1	20	0	0	12	12	0	101	146	5	151
ALP	110	9	12	0	0	10	4	0	72	107	2	109
ARO	143	5	19	0	0	15	6	0	90	135	7	142
AUL	129	3	11	0	0	21	4	0	84	123	3	126
AUS	127	0	7	0	0	12	5	1	95	120	1	121
BEN	232	1	9	0	0	23	4	0	182	219	2	221
BES	100	4	4	0	0	10	2	0	79	99	1	100
BOL	170	11	48	0	0	13	4	0	80	156	7	163
BBH	158	4	13	0	0	24	4	0	105	150	4	154
BCG	150	5	9	0	0	23	8	0	95	140	6	146
BMA	132	3	20	0	0	17	8	0	70	118	6	124
BPA	111	0	18	0	0	9	4	0	80	111	5	116
BRE	93	2	17	0	0	13	1	0	58	91	8	99
BSP	224	2	30	0	0	31	11	0	143	217	11	228
CAM	257	17	27	0	0	27	7	0	158	236	7	243
CAN	41	0	1	0	0	5	2	0	30	38	0	38
CEP	200	6	22	0	0	9	13	1	148	199	0	199
CIL	252	6	33	0	0	19	21	0	163	242	5	247
CJN	134	0	4	0	0	36	2	1	89	132	4	136
COB	170	4	16	0	0	26	4	0	111	161	4	165
COM	162	4	28	0	0	18	7	0	99	156	8	164
CRO	86	1	7	0	0	5	3	0	67	83	0	83
ECU	242	5	30	0	0	23	9	0	160	227	8	235
EST	135	0	53	0	1	2	3	0	65	124	14	138
FIN	201	7	34	0	0	18	8	0	131	198	3	201
FIS	206	9	87	0	0	17	8	1	82	204	21	225
FLY	150	0	4	0	0	30	4	0	109	147	0	147
FPA	224	1	8	0	0	29	2	0	162	202	3	205
GBR	136	1	4	0	0	14	0	0	109	128	2	130
GEK	178	5	12	0	0	36	5	0	116	174	4	178
GEM	273	6	6	0	0	62	7	0	191	272	3	275
GIA	153	2	24	0	0	20	6	0	97	149	0	149
HAI	67	4	23	0	0	1	6	0	27	61	5	66
INB	262	4	52	0	0	18	27	0	144	246	11	257
INC*	348	6	59	0	0	20	8	0	143	236	15	251
IND	207	4	53	0	0	6	3	0	122	198	17	215
ING	334	4	86	0	0	26	28	0	173	317	27	344
INH	149	4	50	0	0	4	9	0	72	139	15	154
INK	278	6	79	0	0	7	22	0	143	257	18	275
INM	450	10	131	0	0	28	41	0	228	438	20	458
INN*	0	0	32	0	0	15	7	0	50	104	10	114
IRL	117	3	3	0	0	7	3	0	94	110	1	111
IAD	162	0	18	0	0	28	2	0	116	164	1	165
ICP	810	9	43	0	0	205	7	1	521	786	7	793
ILE	452	8	51	0	0	61	8	0	310	438	6	444
ILT	208	3	15	0	0	31	5	1	153	208	6	214

Isp.	Tot. 1996	Professi temporanei				Professi perpetui				Tot.		Tot. 1997
		L	S	D	P	L	S	D	P	Professi	Novizi	
IME	309	1	18	0	0	40	7	0	234	300	9	309
IRO	309	0	7	0	0	66	3	2	216	294	2	296
ISA	72	1	2	0	0	5	1	0	60	69	0	69
ISI	306	1	9	0	0	28	3	1	259	301	2	303
IVE	283	3	32	0	0	48	8	1	189	281	5	286
IVO	226	2	7	0	0	46	4	0	160	219	0	219
KOR	93	8	28	0	0	13	4	0	37	90	3	93
MDG	66	1	17	0	0	7	5	0	34	64	6	70
MEG	229	6	50	0	0	10	13	0	136	215	18	233
MEM	200	3	46	0	0	14	11	0	109	183	22	205
MOR	172	6	25	0	1	23	7	0	101	163	4	167
OLA	79	0	3	0	0	21	0	1	53	78	0	78
PAR	101	4	17	0	0	6	8	0	65	100	8	108
PER	197	8	49	0	0	12	14	0	103	186	8	194
PLE	365	6	98	0	0	17	14	0	213	348	22	370
PLN	331	4	69	0	0	11	20	0	208	312	16	328
PLO	240	2	27	0	0	3	11	0	192	235	6	241
PLS	253	2	34	0	0	10	21	0	174	241	15	256
POR	197	3	18	0	0	46	12	1	113	193	5	198
SLK	251	6	76	0	1	12	13	0	128	236	14	250
SLO	145	2	11	0	0	11	10	0	106	140	0	140
SBA	238	0	9	0	0	40	7	1	172	229	3	232
SBI	255	2	17	0	1	54	21	0	150	245	3	248
SCO	149	4	24	0	0	7	2	2	107	146	7	153
SLE	252	5	9	0	1	71	7	0	151	244	1	245
SMA	409	3	27	0	0	100	19	0	239	388	3	391
SSE	190	4	24	0	0	26	9	0	121	184	0	184
SVA	205	4	13	0	0	32	8	0	138	195	8	203
SUE	214	2	9	0	0	42	2	0	154	209	3	212
SUO	116	5	15	0	0	23	1	0	77	121	2	123
THA	103	3	12	0	0	14	0	0	66	95	0	95
UNG	75	4	14	0	1	4	0	0	44	67	5	72
URU	137	1	18	0	0	7	7	0	97	130	3	133
VEN	252	7	40	0	1	18	7	1	168	242	14	256
VIE	143	11	40	0	0	15	30	0	45	141	24	165
ZMB	84	0	18	0	0	5	5	0	38	64	1	65
UPS	128	0	0	0	0	13	0	0	120	133	1	134
RMG	73	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	68	83	0	83
Tot.	17.425	343	2.412	0	7	2.127	717	16	11.139	16.761	602	17.363
Vesc.	96									97		97
Tot.	17.521	343	2.412	0	7	2.127	717	16	11.139	16.858	602	17.460

Nota: INN (*) è Ispettorica nuova del 1997, staccata da INC (**)

5.8 Our dead confreres (1998 - 1st 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.
P AGÜERO José María	Barcelona	09-01-98	75	SBA
P ALLENDE ENCALADA Pedro	Santiago de Chile	17-01-98	90	CIL
P ARAMAYO ZALLES Alberto	La Paz	02-02-98	91	BOL
L ARBANEY Renzo	Colle Don Bosco	13-02-98	67	ICP
P BACZKOWSKI Zbigniew	Kraków	28-02-98	83	PLS
P BALBO Gérard	Caen	28-03-98	66	FPA
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P BARTKOWSKI Boleslaw	Lublin	25-03-98	62	PLS
P BONSIGNORE Salvatore	Catania	26-01-98	85	ISI
L BERTRAND Jean	Toulon	16-03-98	88	FLY
L BRZOSKO Bogusław	Lutomiersk	22-02-98	76	PLE
L CAMMAROTA Nicola	Roma	24-03-98	88	IRO
L CANTONI Guido	Torino	05-02-98	75	ICP
P CAPPELLETTI Pompeo	Arborea (OR)	12-02-98	86	ISA
P CHARPANATH Joseph	Mannuthy	06-12-97	78	INK
P CHIARANTI Ugo	Chieri	12-03-98	63	ICP
P COLLINS James	Oakland, CA.	07-03-98	85	SUO
P DEFILIPPI Aldo	Torino	16-03-98	87	ICP
P D'HOSE Odon	Lubumbashi	22-12-97	74	AFC
P DIAMANTI Alessandro	Roma	11-03-98	77	IRO
P DIAZ RIVAS Ambrosio	Campello	13-01-98	86	SVA
<i>Fu Ispettore per sei anni</i>				
P DRAISCI Salvatore	Cerignola (FG)	29-01-98	71	IME
L GARCÍA JIMÉNEZ Juan Francisco	Santo Domingo	27-01-98	66	ANT
L GASPARINI Augusto	Bologna	08-02-98	92	ILE
L GIACOMINI Giuseppe	Campo Grande	19-02-98	93	BCG
P GOMES Álvaro dos Santos	Lisboa	15-03-98	70	POR
L GREGUŠ Ignác	Bánovce nad Bebravou	08-11-97	76	SLK
L GUIDI Gaetano	Roma	24-01-98	85	RMG
L JAUREGUI EPELDE Teófilo	Bilbao	23-02-98	71	SBI
P KOMAR Józef	Wrocław	17-01-98	83	PLO
L LAMBERTO Lorenzo	Torino	24-02-98	77	ICP
P LAVATELLI Mario	Casale Monferrato (AL)	21-02-98	76	ICP
P LIEVANO José Manuel	Santafé de Bogotá	23-02-98	90	COB
P LORENZATTI Vittorio	Lombriasco	04-02-98	84	ICP
P LUQUIN ARRASTIA José Antonio	Cartagena (Murcia)	15-03-98	60	SVA
P MARCHIONNI Mario	Muzzano (Bt)	24-02-98	64	ICP
L MARTIN Henri	La Crau	02-02-97	89	FLY
P MASSON Manuel	Córdoba (Argentina)	31-12-97	78	ACO

NAME	PLACE	DATE	AGE	PROV.
P MELIÁN Omar	Paso de la Horqueta	06-03-98	68	URU
P MEZZACASA Fiorenzo	Buenos Aires	21-03-98	70	ABA
P MINONZIO Alfonso	Arese (MI)	20-02-98	77	ILE
P O'DRISCOLL James	Kerry	15-03-98	84	IRL
P OLOS Štefan	Lubochna	26-02-98	80	SLK
P PACIARONI Aristides	Venado Tuerto	11-03-98	82	ABA
P PAGLIARI Andrea	Brescia	09-01-98	83	ILE
P PENÍN Salvador	Vigo	05-01-98	73	SLE
L PERON Augusto	Bomboiza	01-01-98	93	ECU
P RIBOTTA Francis	San Pedro (California)	24-02-98	79	SUO
P ROBINO Henri	Saint-Brieuc	31-03-98	84	FPA
P RODRIGUEZ Angel Alfredo	Los Teques	26-03-98	25	VEN
P ROSSO Giuseppe	Colle Don Bosco	17-02-98	73	ICP
P RUBBO Bortolo Paolo	Venezia-Mestre	24-03-98	75	IVE
P SANTOS SANCHEZ Ricardo	Valsalabroso (Salamanca)	16-02-98	65	SSE
P SARMIENTO José Antonio	Santafé de Bogotá	23-02-98	65	COB
P SCHLOOZ Frank	Madras-Ayanavaram	20-03-98	85	INM
P TEUFEL Hermann	Graz	18-01-98	59	AUS
P VARRÀ Gregorio	Bari	06-01-98	48	IME
P VERHAEGHE Jozef	Hoboken	27-03-98	87	BEN
P VITALI Giuseppe	Banpong	25-03-98	89	THA
P VYORAL Alois	New Rochelle, N.Y.	27-01-98	77	SUE